Education of Children with Special Needs in Ethiopia: Analysis of the Rhetoric of 'Education For All' and the Reality on the Ground

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Abstract: The Ethiopian Government appears to show commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and 'Education For All' (EFA) by ratifying different international conventions and enshrining them in its various domestic laws, policies, strategies, and programs. However, the reality on the ground indicates that there is limited progress towards implementing these legal instruments when it comes to the education of children with special needs. This study compares the rhetoric of "education for all" and the ground reality. The methods employed included, first and foremost, consultation of relevant legal framework (FDRE Constitution), policy (FDRE Education and Training Policy), program (ESDPs), national directive (GTP) and strategy documents (SNE strategy). Then, secondary data were employed from statistical publications of Ministry of Education mainly from 2008/9-2012/13. More importantly, almost all accessible local empirical investigations and student dissertations on the education of children with special needs or inclusive education in Ethiopia from the inception till 2014/15 were also reviewed. The 'Curriculum Relation Model' of inclusive education was used to analyze and synthesize literature and data. The major observation from the analysis indicates that the education of children with special needs was alarmingly low. The analysis revealed that the proper realization of inclusion for children with special needs is less likely even in the time to come. Hence, it was underscored, on the one hand, that there is a need to tame ambitions to the principle of 'education for some' rather than 'education for all', through 'any available educational modality' (may not necessarily be pure inclusive approach type) and, on the other hand, reverse the top-down inclusive approach (passed from international and national call, slogan, and approach) to a bottom-up initiative of a more innovative, culturally sensitive, cost-effective, and community resource-based inclusive model school, which can successively be refined, and then gradually scale up lessons.

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Introduction

The Ethiopian government has registered a prodigious stride in improving educational access in the last couple of decades. The gross enrollment rate (GER) for primary education, for example, has improved from 51% (6,462,503 children) nearly 15 years ago (EMIS, 2000) to about 95.3% (i.e. 17,430,294 children) in more recent years (EMIS, 2013). Although these figures are obviously satisfying in themselves, they can only promise 'education for all' if all groups of children are fairly represented irrespective of disability status and other special needs as the very phrase 'education for all' genuinely entails. Usually, national figures such as these ones seem to disregard people with special needs because these people are not visible in many ways. Hence, the issue of education of children with special needs requires closer scrutiny against existing laws, policies and strategies, on the one hand, and actual provisions for their needs, on the other hand.

Of course, the education of children with special needs has been influenced by different philosophies, conceptions and paradigms of "disability" itself. For example, prior to the 1970s, academic interest in disability discourse was limited almost exclusively to the medical, individualist view of disability (Barton, 1993) that also came to be known as the 'personal tragedy model' (Carson, 2009); as it regards the difficulties people with impairments experience to result from the way in which their bodies are shaped and experienced. This model presupposes that disability is a lack of competence in an individual's body, mind and behavior. It is a factor within the individual and, hence, solutions consist of changing the individual. Most laws and policies were then embedded in this biomedical model of disability to correct flaws within the child (ACPF, 2011). The medical model had been in some ways reflected in international policy documents pertaining to disability and services to persons with disabilities as well (e.g., Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons in 1975).

In the same way that the disability discourse has shaped policy provisions, it has also led to the creation of special programs, schools and services that are believed to serve children with special needs. Special schools mushroomed in different countries to cater for children who needed to be put in a separate place for a different kind of care because children with special needs were believed to contain a different body. This was the first measure taken to respond to the needs of the children and, therefore, needs to be appreciated. It was, however, with a number of limitations and challenges. First and foremost, it was based on a philosophy that understands the nature, causes, and effects of disability in a uni-dimensional, deficit-oriented, and deterministic manner, and, hence had very limited practical utility (Thomas & Feiler, 1988). Second, many researchers felt that individuals and disabilities in this approach were isolated from the real settings they existed, interacted and functioned and were rather put into a new but artificial context for examination and treatment; on the one hand, and for special programs in segregated, isolated and yet very expensive and less accessible special schools to serve their educational needs, on the other hand. Third, the majority of persons with disabilities have been sidelined from social, educational and economic activities. For example, in the World Declaration of Education For All, the education of persons with disabilities has been put on condition of availability of resources rather than as a right to education (UNESCO, 1990). Fourth, the education of children even having access to special schools was worrisome. In Ethiopia, for example, special schools are generally overcrowded, urban-based and ill-equipped with insufficient human and material resources (Tirussew, 2006; World Vision, 2007).

This special educational provision, though inadequate in many ways, has brought a gradual societal awareness and opened a way for voicing discontents over its inadequacy. For example, persons with disabilities challenged the stigmatizing and limiting nature of the segregated education ensuing from the individual-deficit model, and gave voice to issues of equality of access and educational opportunity.

This opened a way for integration to gradually take a center stage. Political pressure from disability and parental advocacy groups also began to change society's values and ultimately brought legislative changes to reform education. In the same way, educators increasingly explored ways of supporting previously segregated groups so that they could find a place in mainstream schools. Researchers still attempted to highlight the fact that the special school system was selecting children disproportionately from socially disadvantaged groups (Mercer, 1970; Tomlinson, 1981).

Gathering momentum from these different sources, such critiques gradually turned into full-blown political debates among human right activists and organizations in the last decade of the 20th C; thus, the education of children with disabilities once again witnessing a paradigm shift from the individualized, medical-oriented special education to a social disability-based special needs or inclusive education model. The social approach to disability makes an identification and analysis of the social, political and economic conditions that restrict the life opportunities of those suffering from impairment (Butler and Bowlby, 1997).

This newly emerging paradigm is premised on Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948), the World Declaration on "Education for All" (UNESCO, 1990), the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (1975) to all services, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) with special needs for social, educational integration, and such other recent derivatives as the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (1993), the World Education Forum (2000), and the Salamanca Framework for Action (1994) which unequivocally endorsed inclusion as the best mode of educational delivery for children with disabilities. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Spain in 1994, and was reaffirmed at the World Education Forum in 2002.

At the core of inclusive education is, therefore, the fundamental human right to 'Education for All'; the need to identifying and solving barriers within the education system (attitudes, practices, policies and strategies, environment, curricular contents and methods, and resources), not barriers within the child (Lewis, 2009), and the overall orientation towards promoting opportunities for all children to participate and be treated equally within mainstream settings (UNESCO, 2003). Hence, unlike special education that focuses on providing services for individual child, inclusive education focuses on the change of the whole system of the school environment to the need of the individual child (UNESCO, 2006). More recently, inclusive education is even thought as an approach that seeks to address 'barriers to learning and participation', and provide 'resources to support learning and participation' for all kinds of children with special needs (Ainscow et al., 2006; Csie, 2002; Popping and Maloney, 2005) rather than merely focusing on a single factor, such as disability in isolation as this isolation has the potential to lead to faulty assumptions (Csie, 2002) because many of these factors interact or act in combination and can ultimately result in marginalization or exclusion. Focusing on a single factor, such as disability in isolation, has the potential to lead to faulty assumptions (Popping and Maloney, 2005).

It is described at the same time as the most important and controversial issue regarding the education of children with disabilities and special educational needs (SEN) (Hornby, 2012), and a highly contestable educational system (Armstrong et al., 2011). This is mainly because the creation of inclusive schools is no simple process as it implies huge changes that might generate resistance and fears, which can undermine the process of change (Hornby, 2012). The fundamental principle of the inclusive school is that all children should learn together, wherever possible, regardless of any difficulties or differences they may have. Inclusive schools must recognize and respond to the diverse needs of their students, accommodating both different styles and rates of learning and ensuring quality education to all through appropriate curricula, organizational arrangements, teaching

strategies, resource use and partnerships with their communities. There should be a continuum of support and services to match the continuum of special needs education encountered in every school (Armstrong et al., 2011). Although the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO, 1990) has vividly indicated that children with special needs must have access to regular schools, almost two decades have passed without meaningful inclusion of these children in many parts of the globe. One would imagine how challenging such practices can be in contexts such as the Ethiopian context where the social, political and academic discourses are only beginning to make sense, (human, material and financial) resources are extremely low, and the culture is as yet stereotypy (Tirussew, 1999; Abate, 2010) in many ways.

The purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine the *rhetoric and practices* of education for children with special needs. It specifically attempts to analyze the:

- socio-cultural contexts of disability in Ethiopia in general and children with special needs in particular;
- legal and policy contexts (and intentions) of education of children with special needs;
- educational provisions, achievements, intentions and concerns for these children; and
- strategies for improving educational provisions in the time to come.

Approaches and Methods

Approach: This study is framed based on the changed and broader understandings of disability called 'the social approach to disability' (Butler & Bowlby, 1997, p. 412), 'the bio-psychosocial model' (World Health Organization, 2002), and "the Curriculum Relation Model" (Johnsen, 2001, pp: 255-304).

According to the bio-psychosocial model, disability is the result of interactions between the person's health condition (disease, disorders and injuries), environmental factors (social attitudes, architectural characteristics, social structures, etc.) and personal factors (gender, age, coping styles, social background, education, etc. (World Health Organization, 2002). Systematizing this understanding in more operational terms, the 'Curriculum Relation Model' (Johnsen, 2001) underscores that schools are inclusive to the extent that they are working towards full participation, commitment and equality through respect for differences in learning styles, variations in methods, open and flexible curricula and welcoming each and every child (Johnsen, 2001; Fiji, 2006). First published in 1994, and successively revised there after (Johnsen, 2001, pp: 255-304), this model specifically stipulates eight frame factors that continuously interact with one another eventually giving structure to the status and prospectus of inclusive education for children with special needs (see Fig. 1): the pupil's background and learning profile, frame factors that dictate the practice, intentions of education, curricular contents, strategies employed, methods and organization, assessments model conducted to secure data to feed back the practice, communication patterns and care. The model holds that in as much as exclusion of children with special needs from mainstream educational establishments, provisions, and practices are systemic, systematic, and interacting, undoing exclusion and making the education of children meaningful requires deconstructing status quo (policy and legal provisions, strategies and approaches, as well as beliefs and practices), and reframing the entire discourse along the eight interacting components specified in Fig. 1.

This model then presupposes (1) that disabling conditions are more widely spread, varied, and complex than what was conceived in the medical model (Ainscow, 1994; 1994),(2), that disability has meaning in a social context and relationships and functions (Savolainen, 1995), (3) that difficulties encountered by children in their general development are likely to arise more from being disadvantaged in opportunities than bodily impairments per se (Ainscow, 1994), and (4) that children's

difficulties at school are, in the same way, largely results of inappropriate curriculum content, organization, teaching methods etc. (Johnsen, 2001). Accordingly, the study ventures on unraveling (or examining theory and practice, intentions and actions, or rhetoric and reality) the profile of education of children with special needs in Ethiopia in line with these eight interacting elements of the Model.

Methods: This study is based on review of documents and secondary data drawn from local sources recorded over the last couple of decades. It included the consultation of relevant legal documents (FDRE Constitution), policy (FDRE Education and Training Policy), program (ESDP documents), national directive (GTP) and strategy (SNE strategy) documents. Secondary data were collected from statistical publications (educational abstracts of the last five years - from 2008/9 - 2012/13). Finally, the study reviewed relevant data mainly drawn from local empirical investigations conducted by international (JICA and IDCJ, 2012; Jennings, et al., 2011) and national organizations (ACPF, 2011), almost all accessible empirical research and student dissertations on the education of children with special needs/ inclusive education in Ethiopia from the beginning till 2014/15. Hence, to the knowledge of the authors of this article, the study provides a compilation of research conducted in the field in Ethiopia thus far.
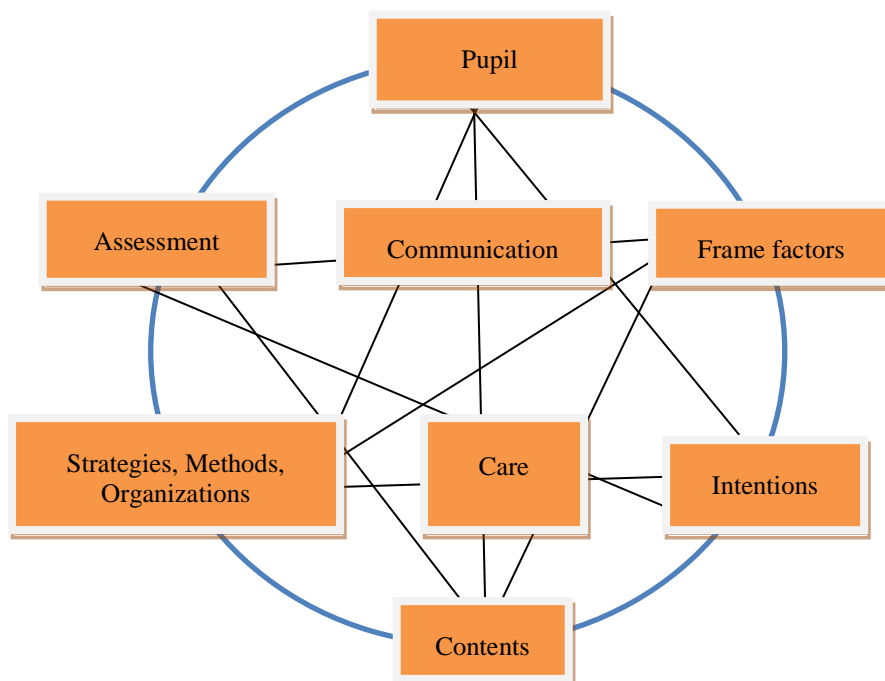
Figure 1: A Curriculum Relation Mode (Johnsen, 2001, p.260)

Analysis

This section presents analysis of contexts, practices (nature, provisions, limiting factors and strengths) and prospects of education of children with special needs/disabilities in Ethiopia. An attempt is made to highlight what is in place and what is really missing in line with the basic themes of the Curriculum Relation Model.

Socio-cultural contexts of disabilities in Ethiopia

Persons with disabilities in Ethiopia: disability in hiding

A serious concern in Ethiopia is that the extent and situation of persons with disability are not well known (Alemayehu, 2004) even today. Data pertaining to the incidence, prevalence, and situation of persons with disabilities were once described to be "at best fragmentary and incomplete and at worst even misleading" (Tirussew, 2001, p.1). The 2007 census estimated that the prevalence of disability in Ethiopia was slightly higher than 800 thousand showing that the prevalence was1.09 % (CSA, 2008). This figure was much lesser than the 1994 census by about 100,000 in the thirteen years' interval. On the other hand, a more focused baseline survey of persons with disabilities, perhaps the first of its kind, reveals that people with disabilities in Ethiopia constitute a prevalence rate of 2.95 % (Tirussew et al., 1995). No formal census of persons with disabilities has been done since then.

All the estimates so far are widely believed to significantly underestimate the correct number of disability in Ethiopia. While, on the one hand, such estimates are likely to exclude homeless people (an estimated one-in-three street children have a disability), the social stigma and ignorance are, on the other hand, to prevent, more often than not, people with disabilities and their families from self-identifying (Mont, 2007). This problem of underreporting disability is said to be common in developing countries where awareness about disability is generally lower. Mont has made an interesting illustration of this phenomenon by contrasting the prevalence rate of disability in such countries as Kenya, Ethiopia, Mali and Botswana (where disability was reported to be below 4 %) with countries like New Zealand, USA and Canada (where disability was rather reported to be above 15 % (Mont, 2007). Specific to Ethiopia, evidence from the World Report on Disability jointly issued by the World Bank and World Health Organization (World Bank and WHO, 2011), estimated that about 15

million children, adults and elderly persons are likely to be with disabilities in Ethiopia, representing 17.6 per cent of the population. The fact that disability estimates are underreported in the African context in general and in Ethiopia in particular could be justified mainly in terms of absence or limited documentation, lack of identification and assessment, differences in definition, lack of understanding and awareness about disability, attitude and the like.

Unlike other contexts, disabilities in Africa is basically traced a lot more to poverty (poor nutrition and restricted access to basic services) than to other disabling factors (ACPF, 2011). Hence, the state of persons with disabilities in Ethiopia is even more severe due to the presence of diversified pre-, peri-and post-natal disabling factors (like infectious diseases, difficulties contingent to delivery, under-nutrition, malnutrition, harmful cultural practices, lack of proper child care and management, civil war and periodic drought and famine and the absence of early primary and secondary preventive actions (JICA, 2002).

In as much as persons with disabilities are not visible statistically, they appear to face a range of barriers that largely render them to be excluded from the mainstream society and experience severe difficulties in accessing community resources as equal members of society in Ethiopia (ENDAN, 2010), limited employment opportunities, lack of proper provisions and conducive environment during education (Tirussew et al., 2013), negative stereotypes which often condition how people treat and respond to the disabled. Women with disabilities are victims of physical, sexual, and psychological violence where the perpetrators are family members, neighbors, and strangers. They undergo through a number of challenges because of their disabilities, are at risk of threats, suffer from STD, unwanted pregnancy, social discrimination and marginalization …Violence against women with disabilities has deep structural roots whose definitive solution calls for ongoing effort from society as a whole (Biher, 2009),

Socio-cultural contexts of children with special needs: Vulnerable groups

The prevalence and situation of children with special needs is even least understood in Ethiopia. It is, however, believed that there could possibly be a higher rate of incidence given that the range of disabling factors is diverse and multidimensional in poor nations. Given WHO's 10 % prevalence estimate of disability in a population, it can be said that out of the estimated 47,146,457 million children aged 6 to 18 years (CSA, 2008), nearly 4.5 to 5 million children are expected to be with disabilities of one kind or another in Ethiopia. Along this line, one can easily imagine how vulnerable these children could be in Ethiopia today as persons with disabilities, as children growing up in Ethiopia and as distinct groups of children with disabilities coming from a background prone to vulnerability.

Vulnerability as a child in Ethiopia: Being a child and with disability in Ethiopia doubles the challenges. Children with disabilities share problems of other Ethiopian children by virtue of their age. Evidences indicate that public awareness about child rights in Ethiopia is low (Befekadu & Tsegay, 1997), child abuse is not considered as a problem (Befekadu & Tsegay, 1997), and hence serious child right violations are widely practiced at home (Balcha, 1998; Belay et al., 2001; Belay & Dessalegn, 1999), in schools (Ayalew, 1996; Daniel & Gobena, 1998) and even in police stations in Addis Ababa (Befekadu and Tsegay, 1997).

Regional disparities: As Ethiopia is a nation with diversity, the different regions in Ethiopia are not on equal footing in infrastructural development and educational provisions. Accordingly, children with disabilities from emerging regions seem to be more vulnerable for ill-treatment and rejection than those from other regions (e.g. see EMIS, 2013). Looking at the 2013 Education Statistics Abstract, we would say that children from Afar, Somali, Gambella, and Benishanguel-Gumuz are with the lowest level of enrollment compared to other

regions (particularly Oromia, Amhara, SNNP, and Tigray). In Gambella region, for example, no children with hearing or visual impairment were found attending school.

Urban–rural divide: Urban children are better off in accessing education. A vast majority of people with disabilities live in rural areas where access to basic services is limited (World Bank and WHO, 2011). In terms of access to services and education, children with special needs in major urban areas have better opportunities of attending special schools, alternative basic education or ABE centers and primary schools. Access to education for children with special needs in rural areas is very difficult. For example, in a research visit to schools in Amhara region, it was learned that out of 98 primary schools, 6 high schools, 58 ABEs and 1 preparatory schools visited, no children with special needs were found and that there were no special classes for such children (JICA, 2002). According to data obtained from the social assessment survey (Jennings, et al., 2011), for those students with visual impairment from rural areas that wish to study in urban centers, renting accommodation can be difficult as land owners do not want them as tenants for fear of accidents, sanitation and financial capacity, to mention some. Because of such discrimination, coupled with high cost of rent, some do not even have residential quarters (mainly living on the street or church compounds); let alone to attend school.

Low economic background: Children with disabilities are, in most cases, from lower SES. The social assessment survey confirmed that the majority of children with disabilities, failing to have access to education, are from "economically poor" families (Jennings, et al., 2011).

Gender: Female children are more overburdened than their male counterparts. Being female coupled with disability might worsen the life of these children. Female children with disabilities might not be sent to schools. The education statistics abstracts show that the statistics of girls' enrollment is consistently lower than boys (see Education abstract up to 2013). Furthermore, in some parts of the country, girls with

disabilities, particularly with hearing and speech impairments, remain in rural areas and help their families with domestic chores and farming activities. Men may not marry such girls, though they may be taken as mistresses in situations where wives fail to conceive (Jennings, et al., 2011).

Generally, children with special needs who are: females, from emerging regions, lower SES, and/ or rural families are generally the most marginalized groups in Ethiopia.

Legal and policy contexts (and intentions): Rhetoric of "schools for all"

The Constitution: Ethiopia has already signed the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), its African version, the "African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child" (1999) and a number of other international declarations protecting and promoting the survival and development of children including their education. It has also shown its commitment to these conventions by enshrining these conventions in its different laws (including in the Constitution).

Ethiopia's Constitution states that all international agreements (including the Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, (1993), and the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education, 1994), "are an integral part of the law of the land". It upholds "those rights of citizens to equal access to publicly funded services and the support that shall be given to accommodate the needs of people with disabilities".

Even if Educational Law or Act has not been in place (JICA Ethiopia office), the Ethiopian Constitution (1994), supplanting this law, underscores, in tune with international declarations and conventions, that education is a human right issue and as such establishes the universal right to education. The Constitution also establishes the right to equal access to publicly funded social services, urges all Ethiopians to have access to public health and education (Article 90),

and emphasizes the need to allocate available resources and provide rehabilitative assistance to children with disabilities and other disadvantaged groups (Article 41 (4)); and national standards and basic policy criteria for education shall be established and implemented (Article 51 (3)

Policy perspective: As an instrument for effecting the Constitution, the Ethiopian Education and Training Policy (MoE, 1994) underscores the implementation and development towards inclusive education, 'education for all'. It stipulates, as one of its general objectives, the expansion of basic education and training for all, the development of physical and mental potential and problem-solving capacity of individuals including those with special needs, in accordance with their potential needs (MoE, 1994, p.4). In more specific terms, one of its objectives is "to enable both the handicapped and the gifted learn in accordance with their potential and needs" (p.5). It states that special education and training will be provided for people with special needs. Teacher training for special education will be provided in regular   teacher training programmers. Special attention will be given in the preparation and utilization of support input for special education.

Strategy for inclusive education: To reduce the existing gap and to actualize 'education for all', the Ministry of Education designed a strategy for special needs education in 2006 regarding the provision of the service within the existing structure and in the framework of inclusive education. The strategy aimed at ensuring both access and quality of education for all children, including pupils with special education needs. According to the Special Needs Education program strategy document, the responsibility for providing primary education for all school age children, including pupils with special educational needs, rested with *woreda* (the lowest administrative structure in Ethiopia's Federal Government system) education offices (MoE, 2007). This strategy indicates that inclusive education requires identifying barriers that hinder learning and/or participation and reducing or

removing these barriers in early education in particular and in schools, technical and vocational training, higher education, teacher education, and education management in general.

Education Sector Development Programs (ESDP): Line ministries of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia have embarked on drafting successive sectoral programs through which the policy items can be implemented. Such programs are to be worked out for five successive years to be accordingly updated for twenty years. Thus, the Federal Ministry of Education developed the first five years Education Sector Development Program (for 1997/98- 2001/02) in 1997 (ESDP I). Three such programs were developed and phased out and currently ESDP-IV is in place. It was developed in 2010 as a five-year plan (2010/11-2014/2015) following the ESDP-III. The first two Education Sector Development Programs did not pay much attention to the education of children with disabilities. This was changed with ESDP III which gave due consideration to the expansion of educational opportunities for children with special needs in order to achieve the EFA goals. In fact, ESDP IV has given even wider coverage stipulating basic components of focus, strategies, and intended targets (see details under strengths and opportunities).

Education Sector Development Program IV (ESDP-IV) generally stipulates that there is a limited understanding of the concept of disability, negative attitude towards persons with disabilities and a hardened resistance to change as the major barriers impeding special needs and inclusive education. One would generally say that although there are some attitudinal changes over the last few years, such changes are so piecemeal, sporadic and inconsistent that they would hardly deconstruct the bigger disability discourse that has a strong hold in Ethiopia over the turn of centuries.

National Development Plans: The five year (2010/11 – 2014/15) National Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) of Ethiopia (MoFED, 2010) was formulated to accelerate economic growth, and the Plan for Accelerated and Sustained Development to End Poverty (PASDEP) (2005/06 – 2009/10). By sustaining the economic growth and reform, the Government targeted to achieve the MDG targets by 2015 and its longer term vision of building a middle income country by 2020-2023 (MOFED, 2010). Its goal is to produce democratic, efficient and effective, knowledgeable, inspired and creative citizens who contribute to the realization of Ethiopia's vision of being a middle income economy (MOFED, 2010). Regarding the education sector, expanding and ensuring the qualities of education and achieving MDGs in the social sector is one of the main objectives of the GTP which was in fact aligned with the Education Sector Development Program IV.

As the priority issues of education strategies, the GTP states the initiative of providing fair and accessible quality formal education is to be continued and consolidated. The current gender disparity will be eliminated by the end of the plan period. The education strategy for children with disabilities will be fully implemented to meet the needs of this group. Also, an important priority will be given to improve and ensure the quality and efficiency of education at all levels. To realize this priority, the General Education Quality Improvement Package 7 (hereinafter, GEQIP) will be fully implemented. The impact of GEQIP in improving student achievement will be verified through regular monitoring and evaluation, and through the National Learning Assessment (hereinafter, NLA) conducted every three years (MOFED, 2010).

In general, favorable policy and legal environments are in place for fully adopting inclusive education in Ethiopia (Hiwot, 2011). Nevertheless, there is a need for the examination of the reality on the ground from the point of view of its suitability for the execution of the policy.

Education of children with special needs: Reality of schools

In this section, by way of analyzing how limited progress is made in making practical use of the existing human rights instruments including domestic laws and policies discussed (ACPF, 2011), it is imperative to discuss the nature of education of children with special needs along with the profile of pupils (enrollment figures, limiting factors, and psychosocial experiences), and educational provisions based on a close consultation of documents and research carried out in the area.

A glimpse at the nature of education of children with special needs

In Ethiopia, the education of children with special needs has a long history of being rooted into the traditional religious education of the Orthodox Church. In a situation where children with disabilities have limited options in life (which was true in Ethiopia mainly in the past), traditional church education accommodated these children. There were and are many professors (*Liq*) with disabilities at the different levels of church education (Demeke, 2007, p. 174). This provision was, however, very limited and only accessible for the male blind and physically disabled residing in places very close to priest schools. However, formal education for such children started with the emergence of missionary-supported special schools in the country that provided education, food and accommodation, educational materials and related other provisions. However, these schools were very costly and couldn't expand as required. Hence, the number of children with special needs enrolled in such schools remained almost negligible compared to the number of children who needed such services. For example, only 35,000 children received education until 2008 (reported by Ministry of Education Officials at Inclusive Education workshop April, 2009). With a few small pilot projects, the majority of the children with disabilities were in separate special education schools often run by private organizations or NGOs. There are simply not enough resources

to establish enough separate special education school initiatives to reach out the 1.6 million children who were out of school (II, 2009).

With the realization of the difficulties associated with these schools, on the one hand, and with a growing understanding of the need for improving educational access to a greater majority of the children with special needs, there gradually appeared an approach whereby the special and regular schools can somehow be combined in a manner to launch special classes but located within the regular schools. Like the special schools, this approach puts children with similar needs in the same group and, alike the integrated approach, these children are to be included in the regular schools.

A more recent approach to the education of children with disabilities that increasingly made its appearance in the stock of educational vocabulary in Ethiopia is inclusive education. This is an approach of addressing the learning needs of all children in regular school, with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization, exclusion and isolation. The inclusive education movement initially focused primarily on people with disabilities and learning difficulties. Gradually, however, the concept of inclusive education in Ethiopia appears broadened at least conceptually, legally, and policy-wise to an education system that attempts to meet the needs of all learners regardless of economic status, gender, ethnic backgrounds, language, learning difficulties and impairments (MoE, 2007).

Enrollment of pupils with special needs

A notable area of child rights violation for children with special needs is the lack of participation in schooling. According to ACPF (2011), the economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights of such children are grossly neglected. However, of these areas of neglect, educational neglect stands out conspicuous. According to Mugawe (cited in ACPF, 2011), perhaps next to war and famine, the failure to provide education

for all children can be considered as an unforgivable scandal of the current sociopolitical order. This scenario of failure is particularly grave among persons with special needs.

Available literature and education statistics annual abstracts in Ethiopia seem to suggest that little attention is given to the education of children with special needs, and that such children are amongst the most marginalized in all regions, and are deprived of their rights. According to the Ministry of Education, fewer than 3% of children with disabilities have access to primary education, and access to schooling decreases rapidly as children move up the education ladder (MoE, 2010). According to UNESCO (2007), of about 30 million school-aged children in this country, less than 1 per cent of children with special needs have access to education. UNICEF also estimates that 98% of the children with disabilities in Ethiopia have no way to get to school or job training. For example, a survey in one specific community in Addis Ababa, Kechene community, also revealed that about 80% of children with disabilities involved in the survey were out of school (Shimelis, 2002). Out of Addis Ababa, Tefera (2006) assessed the implementation of policies on special needs education in SNNPR and found that access and coverage in the region was a negligible 0.2 % between 2001 to 2004 and 0.3 % in 2005. Although, there is paucity of more recent data, it is possible that these statistical figures might change in later years (see e.g. Table 1).

In fact, the enrollment of children with disabilities has shown a steady incline over the last five years as it can be seen in Table 1. The enrollment size that was 36,782 in 2008 was found almost doubling itself nearly after five years in 2013. This accounts for almost less than a percent of the school-aged children getting access to education. The lower proportion of females as well as the gender gap has also persisted over these five years period (41.25% in 2008 and 42.56%). The table still shows that the proportion of children with special needs reduces as we go up the educational ladder in the five years period; possibly suggesting, among others, attrition down the road.

Table 1: Enrolment of Children with Special Educational Needs for five years

Academic	Primary School			Junior Secondary school (Grades 9-10)			Secondary school			Overall total
Year	(Grades 1-8)						(Grades 11-12)			
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
2008/9	19,561	13,739	33,300	1,915	1,212	3,127	234	121	355	36,782
2009/10	24,142	17,367	41,509	2,091	1,345	3,436	346	128	474	45,419
2010/11	32,072	23,420	55,492	2,817	1,726	4,543	516	238	754	60,789
2011/12	24,825	18,307	43,132	2,410	1,629	4,039	527	250	777	47,948
2012/13	39,293	29,111	68,404	2,954	2,025	4,979	3,889	2,662	6,551	79,934

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics abstracts 2001-2005 E.C. (2008-2013)

Table 2 specifically presents enrollment data for 2013 segregated by disability type. While physical disability takes the highest figure, proportional number of children with intellectual and hearing impairment takes the next highest number followed by visual impairment taking nearly half of the proportion.

Table 2: Enrollment of children with disabilities in the year 2013

Disability type	Primary School (Grades 1-8)			Junior Secondary School (Grades 9-10)			Secondary School (Grades 11-12)			Overall
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T	
Blind	5,020	3,678	8,698	387	198	585	572	300	872	10,155
Physical	10,8646	7768	18,632	1490	1,096	2,586	1,870	1,367	3,237	24,455
Deaf	8,686	6,783	15,469	427	273	700	549	358	907	17,706
Intellectually	10,247	7608	17,855	307	164	471	385	277	662	18,988
Other	4,476	3274	7,750	343	294	637	513	360	873	9,260
Total	39,293	2911111	68,404	2,954	2,025	4,979	3,889	2,662	6,551	80,564*

Source: Education statistics annual abstract, 2005 E.C.

Provisions and challenges of special needs/ inclusive education

General concerns of inclusion: Experiences in other countries already very much into practicing inclusive education indicate a number of challenges that Ethiopia would face. According to Oswald and Forlin (2016), the challenges include teacher apathy, curriculum rigidity, parental prejudices, shortage of staffing and limited resources. Corman (2014) mentioned challenges like inadequate learning support in the classroom and ineffective education support teams in schools, low morale among teachers, lack of effective strategies to address both learner diversity and disciplinary problems, lack of democratic leadership, parental involvement and community relationships, bullying by peers, and communication difficulties. Solia & Keller (2015) also identified other sources of challenges in inclusive education including the characteristics of teachers, classroom environment, school climate, cooperation, and support from people with competence, attitudes and resources. In fact, Tirussew (1999) was the pioneer to highlight that these listed problems would definitely encounter the Ethiopian practice and, hence, there has to be proper preparations to cope with them. Perhaps as equally important, if not more, as the enrollment of children is that of changing the whole system of the school environment so that it can accommodate the needs of those who managed to enroll in schools. We may need to examine how receptive the school environment is once it welcomes children with special needs: physical layouts, classroom conditions, resources, and a number of related other factors.

Attitudinal problems: Children with disabilities are ridiculed, or they are perceived to be practicing witchcraft and sorcery (Belay et al., 2004), and most teachers reject the inclusion of students with disabilities into their schools (Etenesh, 2000; Gezahegn & Yinebeb, 2010). There are negative attitudes within society including school managers and teachers (Tirussew & Alemayehu, 2007), teachers' and students' negative attitudes towards the inclusion of blind students (Abate, 2010;

Abebe, 2001; Desalegn, 2007; Gezahegn & Yinebebe, 2010). Parents of children with intellectual disability retained negative attitude towards inclusion (Mekdes, 2007). Negative attitude towards students with disabilities were also evident even in the Addis Ababa University community (Tirussew et al., 2013; Dawit, 2014). Teachers' negative attitudes could be because of resource limitations and inappropriate classroom conditions (Asrat, 2013), and lack of training that affects self-esteem (Demisew, 2014). Some studies appear to indicate positive attitudes among teachers (Asrat, 2013; Dagnachew, 2010), teachers and visually impaired students (Kassie, 2013), as well as the school community, partners and other stakeholders (Mohammedhayat, 2013). It was, however, found out that these teachers lacked knowledge of inclusion (Dagnachew, 2010), positive attitudes significantly varied by qualification, training and experience of teaching children with special needs (Kassie, 2013). It also failed to inform classroom practices of teaching in inclusive settings by addressing the needs of children with special needs (Dagnachew, 2010; Kassie, 2013). It didn't impact on the execution of inclusive education because of school facilities and overall school performance (Mohammedhayat, 2013). A third observation noted regarding this positive attitude scenario was a kind of 'I am okay, you are not' type of understanding. That is, while research participating teachers and woreda officials believed that they support the notion of special needs/inclusive education policies and strategy and would like to implement it, they, however, believed that there is a need for change in the attitudes of other teachers, peers, leaders, parents/caregivers and the community to provide sufficient assistance for children with special needs (Demisew, 2014). This generally means that there still is a need for a lot of work to bring about a genuine change in attitude that promotes proper inclusion of children in the educational practice.

Contents, organizations and methods: lack of follow-up and enforcing bodies on the part of government and lack of coordination between the different stakeholders have limited the progress of inclusive education in Ethiopia (Tirussew & Alemayehu, 2007). Teachers' limited knowledge to accommodate and teach children with special needs

(Demisew, 2014), lack of training among teachers, low self-efficacy in teaching children with special needs, and inability to handle differences among students ((Demisew, 2014)) were problems noted. Regular classroom teachers teaching in the inclusive setting found it difficult to accommodate students with special educational needs, and they compelled the children to adapt to the classroom instead of modifying their classroom teaching to the needs of the students (Asrat, 2013). There were rigid curricula and inappropriate teaching strategies (ACPF, 2011), rigid lesson plans and teaching methods that were less responsive to children's special needs (Belay, 2007), and characterized by one-way and teacher-dominated classroom methods (Desalegn, 2006). Pupils did not get the proper and meaningful access to subject matter content (ACPF, 2011).

The classes were large and they were not convenient for individualized teaching (Asrat, 2013). Data from the statistical abstract may show the reality in which inclusive classrooms are likely to be offered. As summarized on Table 3, the average class size for 2013 was about 54 and the pupil-teacher ratio was also very big (i.e. 49:4).

Table 3: Some facts of primary education in Ethiopia for 2012/13 academic year

Variable	Year 2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Enrollment	15,549,524	15,792,103	16,718,111	16,989,784	17,430,294
Gross enrollment ratio	94.4%	93.4%	96.4%	95.4%	95.3%
Pupil-section ratio	59.0	57.0	57.0	54.5	53.7
Pupil-teacher ratio	54.0	51.0	51.0	50.0	49.4

Sources: *Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013.*

Care: Studies indicated that there was parental difficulty procuring information about the nature and prognosis of the disabilities afflicting their children; besides there was little access to emotional or financial support networks (Chernet, 2007). Persons with disabilities being

oriented more to believing in what they lack rather than in the assets they have (Alemayehu, 2004) was the result of negative or inappropriate care and support. Children with special needs were of course exposed to all kinds of non-receptive, discouraging, disapproving and discriminating (familial, community, and school) experiences affecting their self-views (Alemayehu, 2004) relationship. These children believe that their disability is posing real problems in their learning; what they hate about school is "being labeled," "discrimination", "insult", and bad words", and many do not have positive attitudes towards themselves (Belay et al., 2004). Guidance and counseling services were unavailable (Desalegn, 2007) to support the children cope with problems ensuing from inappropriate interaction, care, and support.

Many parents of children with special needs, mainly those with hard of hearing, do not understand well what their hearing impaired children try to say to them and this lack of knowledge about hearing impairment seems to have negative impact on the emotional, social as well as schooling achievement. Children who are not able to participate in meaningful interactions with their families are unlikely to experience educational encouragement from parents and benefit from integrated placements with large groups of hearing children, (Tilahun 2002). Deaf students are forced to limited social interaction and communication because parents, teachers and hearing peers do not know how to use sign (deaf) language; because of these limitations, children with impaired hearing feel aggressive, easily disappointed, unloved and unwanted, perform poorly in their education result in dissatisfaction with their school work in the inclusive educational settings (Wondwossen, 2014). Hence, educational leaders at all levels, particularly school management bodies, should strive to create friendly relationship between and among children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, teachers, administrative personnel and supportive staffs by raising the awareness of the school community (MoE,2012, p.15).

Assessments: Assessments are made before they start class to screen out children with disabilities, during class to monitor their learning, and after class to screen them out for therapeutic placement and rehabilitation. Hence, there is a need for valid and reliable (formal and informal) assessment tools as well as professionals with expertise to conduct assessment and diagnosis for these three important purposes assessment tools **(**Demisew, 2014; Belay et al., 2004). However, many teachers indicate that there are no special assessment procedures for children with disabilities for identification, assessment and intervention purpose; continuous assessment of a summative type (usually every month) was the only one conducted in the classrooms (Belay et al., 2004; Anto, 2004). There are in the Ethiopian education system either no processes engaged in identification of children with special needs or inadequate assessment procedures, if any (ESDP IV; UNESCO, 2007).

Physical conditions: Students with disabilities face many barriers in education because of, among others, physical inaccessibility, inaccessible library and classroom building, disability-related barriers in teaching and learning process including examination (64%), getting information (53.3%), and assignments (Dawit, 2014). Inaccessibility of buildings and classrooms, lack of elevators, and car parking modes acting as barriers are common physical constraints (Tirussew et al., 2013). Hence, many educational settings in Ethiopia are not conducive and friendly enough to accommodate students with disabilities (MoE, 2012). The school environments in most of the schools with special and inclusive classes are not convenient and comfortable for children with intellectual disability (Hiwot, 2011). There are inaccessible physical environments including school compound, classrooms, buildings, pathways etc. (Tirussew & Alemayehu, 2007). Physical layout of schools is poses constraints on the participation of children with physical disabilities (Jennings, et al., 2011; Asrat, 2013; Belay et al., 2004). Physical arrangement of the classroom environment is not conducive (such as seating arrangements, noise level and space and sense of order of the classroom environment) for an inclusive education practice (Dessalegn, 2007). Schools compounds fail to suit

to the special needs of blind students like seating positions, classroom furniture arrangements (Anto, 2004; Desalegn, 2007).

Resources: almost all reviewed research investigations have indicated the gravity of resource limitations for educating children with special needs:

- Significant barriers limit full participation of students with disabilities, such as lack of adaptive educational materials and facilities, lack of trained trainers, and systematic exclusion of students with disabilities (Abebe, Pirttimaa & Saloviita, 2015);
- Lack of budget and learning materials allocation, and commitment (Demisew, 2014);
- Inadequate resources for learning: text books and reference materials not available in braille, no adequate slate and styles, lack of hearing aid, inadequate books, reading materials, tape/voice recorders, scanners (Tirussew et al. 2013);
- Students with disabilities face financial limitation (69.9%), uncooperative faculty member's (49.1%) (Dawit, 2014);
- Facilities such as adapted toilet, adapted seats in library, adequate space for wheel chairs, ramps, signage, water supply, play grounds etc. are inaccessible to these children (MoE, 2012);
- Special and inclusive classes either unavailable or when they do they are not equipped with relevant learning materials and teaching aids pertaining to the special needs of children with intellectual disability (Hiwot, 2011);
- Class size, inadequate resources, lack of adapted curriculum and lack of adequate training are the factors limiting the success of inclusion (Gezanhegn & Yinebeb, 2010; Abate, 2010; Tesfaye, 2007);
- The few services currently rendered are mostly sponsored by NGOs and visibly limited rather to urban areas and places where there is relatively better accessibility (SADPD, 2010);

- Shortage of resources (trained human power, instructional materials, facilities, equipment etc. (Anto, 2004; Tirussew & Alemayehu, 2007);
- Children not going to school because their parents cannot afford transportation and related costs, they do not have wheelchairs and crutches; most school going children with disabilities cannot afford a decent meal, and suck 'gelatin' (a very cheap candy-like mixture of frozen ice and sugar prepared under unsanitary conditions) or eat a slice of sugar cane for lunch. Similarly, in some schools, because of lack of sufficient money to cover personal expenses, some visually impaired pupils were reported to have occasionally left campus to beg for alms (ACPF 2011);
- Public and school infrastructure inaccessible for persons with disabilities in the majority of the cases (ACPF, 2011);
- Special schools and special classes are understaffed, under-resourced and also have a shortage of instructional materials (ESDP IV);
- Schools' lack budget to plan and execute programs for children with disabilities (Jennings, et al., 2011);
- Adequate support system not yet in place (e.g. resource centers, technology) for students with special education (ESDP IV), existing special classes are understaffed and have inadequate instructional materials (ESDP IV);
- Educational settings such as, the buildings, the library collections, facilities, services, recreational centers, organizational hierarchy, curriculum the teachers, in fact, everything is built and organized for normal students to the point of excluding students with disabilities (Simon, 2003);
- Lack of relevant facilities and materials; the simplest teaching materials that could have been produced locally (such as maps, charts, and other illustrative devices) are not available in many school environments (Etenesh, 2000);
- Serious shortage of educational materials and equipment; no materials in braille, no special education materials and equipment

like talking books, recorder books or auditory aids; blind students learn the same contents with sighted students except for the exempted courses (Desalegn, 2007).

Related others: In the social assessment survey (Jennings, et al., 2011), a focus group discussion with teachers (SNE) generally raised a number of challenges that schools face in delivering inclusive education for children with disabilities:

- Limited technical support from the Special Needs Units in Regional Education Bureaus;
- Lack of systematic coordination between the state and non-state actors;
- Low priority given to special needs education (SNE) by school authorities and reallocation of SNE facilities for other purposes (e.g. special needs rooms allocated as a kindergarten);
- Lack of clear plan/policy on whether children with intellectual disabilities should graduate from special classes and/or integration into mainstream education.

There are no personnel as well as schools or colleges providing training in special needs education particularly in some emerging regions of the country like Gambella, Afar and Somali. Moreover, higher education and teacher training institutes providing courses and programs in special needs education and psychology offer theoretical training, not practical in nature. However, teachers in inclusive schools are not only requiring orientation and awareness about the learners, but also need specific skills such as braille writing and reading, mobility, communication, sign language and the like to work with children with special needs, to facilitate inclusion of all needs at schools.

Generally, although there are some positive signs for inclusive education (Tirussew, 2006) and some teachers had positive attitude towards children with disabilities and believed in the importance of spending resources in educating them (Belay et al., 2004; Asrat, 2013; Dagnachew, 2010; Kassie, 2013; Mohammedhayat, 2013), it is hard to say that inclusion exists in Ethiopia; it is rather an emerging concept with all the challenges and opportunities (Tirussew, 2006). Schools in Addis Ababa having special and inclusive classes are not available and physically accessible for children with disabilities; as a result, a great majority of children are out of reach of education (Hiwot, 2011). According to Tirussew (2006), there is, however, every reason to believe that successful program of inclusive education can of course be implemented in Ethiopia. Now, nearly a decade after such optimism, we are asking if inclusion would at all be feasible in the Ethiopian setting as the practice of inclusive teaching is found to be in its infant stage (Kassie, 2013). This implies that it is not being properly managed due to various constraints as compared to the requirements of inclusive education (Kassie, 2013).

The tomorrow: Opportunities and promises to "Schools for Some"

In a country like Ethiopia, where limited resource and human power are bottlenecks, it may not come to our surprise if almost all the investigations converge to articulating the severity of resource limitations surprisingly for a negligible enrollment level compared to the greater majority looking for the service. What would have happened to the resources if, for example, all children with special needs had joined the schools, as promised in the legal documents upholding 'education for all'? What is "comforting" is, however, only few children have been going to school so far. Even the 2015 academic year is almost gone yet leaving over 90 percent of children with special needs out of schools as usual. It appears as if that while we are crying over 'education for all' our schools are in reality 'schools for nil' when it comes to the education of children with special needs ('nil' mainly because of the negligible level of enrollment as well as provisions of needs for those

enrolled). In contrast to the two extreme positions, 'education for nil' and 'education for all', Ethiopia's tomorrow of education for children with special needs/ disabilities can safely be envisaged by striking a balance for the golden average, "*schools for some*". This can be seen by connecting the past (achievements), with the present (opportunities), and the future (intentions).

Education for all: achievements and opportunities

Conceptually, there has been a bit of shift in understanding the education of children with disabilities from the narrow special education focus to the wider special needs education/ inclusive education so as to address the needs of all the learners. Legally, the Ethiopian Government has shown commitment to the Millennium Development (MDG) and 'education for all' (EFA) goals as indicated in the legal and policy framework. It has also expressed its intention to use inclusive education as a key to sustaining economic development in the five years' growth and transformation plan (GTP), developed a strategy for special needs education, incorporated it into the ongoing sector development programs (ESDP III and IV), and extended it to regional and local action plans to minimize the budget barriers in the implementation of the strategy. The General Education Quality Improvement Program (GEQIP) has also given attention to these issues and incorporated it in its teacher development component. In addition, special needs education is mainstreamed across all teacher education institutions in the country. Different universities and colleges have started new teacher education programs on special needs education. Currently five teacher education and four higher education institutions have opened programs to train special needs and inclusive education professionals at different levels (Diploma, BA, MA and PhD). In addition, sign language and deaf culture is being given as a subject at a BA level in Addis Ababa University.

According to basic education sector analysis report prepared by Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and International Development Center of Japan (IDCJ, 2012), since the Government incorporated special needs education in the ESDP III, a strategy for special needs education was developed; new teacher education programs on special needs education were started; and curricula was modified for children with special needs and manuals were prepared on disability specific curriculum.

UNESCO (2007) has also documents the following important achievements:

- The new ongoing curriculum framework development is considering learners' diversity;
- Textbooks are transcribed in braille to ensure access to learning for blind children;
- Sign language is taken as medium of instruction to ensure access to learning for deaf children;
- All issues of inclusive education are included in both pre- service and in-service teachers and educational leaders training and education programs at all levels - undergraduate, graduate and post graduate levels;
- Programs related to strengthening special needs education Pre-Service and In-Service Teacher Training and provision of special needs education materials to TEIs and cluster resource centers are also being implemented;
- Nowadays, inclusion is one of the teachers' big issues of discussion in their continuous professional development program at cluster centers;

- Issues of inclusion are becoming one of the main factors in teachers' professional competencies;
- Special needs education centers in towns help to promote awareness of and opportunities for parents/ communities and children with special needs in rural areas.

Experience so far also shows that the issue of education of children with special needs/disabilities is more of an NGO involvement; with very little community backing. NGOs play an important role in service provision both in terms of technical support and service provision. They are also active in coordinating services for children with disabilities. However, the limitation is that their coverage is small and services are largely urban based.

Education for all: Intentions

Having assessed the implementation of Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) III, the Ministry of Education has designed ESDP IV. This program has given, unlike the other three programs, considerable attention to improving the status of special needs/ inclusive education in Ethiopia. It envisions performing three core activities in this regard: improving enrollment, teachers' professionalism, and institutional capacity of schools. In the same way, the key outcome targets are as follows:

- Primary school enrolment of students with special educational needs will increase from 47,461 in 2009/10 to 1,739,000 in 2014/15;
- Secondary school enrolment of students with special educational needs will increase from 3,910 in 2009/10 to 8,586 in 2014/15;
- Higher education enrolment of students with special educational needs will increase from 389 in 2009/10 to 946 in 2014/15;
- All Teacher Education Institutes and Colleges of Teacher Education will be provided with special needs /inclusive education training component by 2014/15;
- The proportion of teachers trained for teaching children with special educational needs will increase by 25% in 2014/15;

- The percentage of schools with appropriate facilities for special needs/inclusive education will increase by 25% in 2014/15;
- The nine resource centers will be increased to 500 by 2014/15;
- The intention, in order to achieve EFA in 2015, is to enroll all children with special educational needs in primary school. Their number in 2007 is estimated at 10% of the total estimated enrolment in that year;
- Develop an educational assessment and screening tools specific to children with special educational needs;
- Increase community awareness about special needs education using various channels of mass media, and to modify the curriculum.

Schools for some: the golden average

A huge reform agenda which our culture and economy cannot support is 'education for all'. As discussed above, achievements so far have been limited, opportunities rather inadequate, and the intentions are ambitious and require taming compared to what remains to be done in regard to the education children with special needs. Hence, we need to revisit the whole set up within the framework of existing realities in Ethiopia; seeking for a move not from the existing nearly 'nil' to nearly 'all' but rather to 'some'- just to settle for a golden average. This can be taken as a move towards a golden average whereby a reasonable number of children with special needs, if not all, could have access to a reasonable quality of services. If addressing both quality and quantity at the same time may not be pragmatic again, then focus should be on quality rather than quantity. If you take care of quality, then quantity will take care of itself, not vice versa. Start simple, learn from the ground, and move step by step.

Discussion

"Schools for all", "schools for nil", "schools for some"

Some researchers believe that the solution for any school mishaps today lies on the use of inclusive education of one kind or another. It is also felt that inclusive education has a number of roles to play in the Ethiopian setting; though it may not be considered as an antidote to all problems. On top of improving educational access for children with disabilities, it obviously provides opportunities for learners to function in their social setting, get rooted in their collectivist system, cherish the collectivist life, meet norms and expectations and thereby experience healthy psychosocial development. Inclusive education is, then, a method of creating communities, schools, and societies free from discrimination. Because inclusive education by nature includes the participation of all children and focuses specifically on the inclusion of marginalized children, it is the best way to ensure 'education for all' children (Vietnam Education Team, 2007). In a country like Ethiopia where child right violations are rampant, inclusive practices can also set exemplary practice in teaching the society about child rights.

The analysis conducted so far has shown, however, that the frame factors (contexts) of inclusive education appear to play conflicting roles in the education of children with disabilities. While the formal context promises to promote educational access and sets out legal and policy framework to this end, the informal set up is so much of a deterrent than a catalyst scaffolding the long way to "education for all". The envisaged 'education for all' that is enshrined in the legislative and policy issues in Ethiopia is imposed externally rather than coming up from within unlike in western countries. A move towards inclusive education in the western nations has made significant strides. The objective and subjective realities were in favor of inclusive practices during it introduction. Communities, practitioners, researchers and activists appreciated the concerns, sufficiently gave their thoughts on the way forward, seriously debated on the issue through media, and

joined by political parties that may bid election with these ideas, gave them legislative and policy framework and finally tabled them for parliamentary approval. The moment these ideas obtained a legal backing, they were put into effect in no time.

Although there is no question about the importance of 'education for all' in Ethiopia, the way it is conceived appears to take a top-down approach and would definitely require long years from now before it makes sense informing the educational practice. Measures taken so far are definitely critical to the inclusive practice. Conspicuous tasks to be performed regarding the inclusive education system for children with disabilities in Ethiopia would include, among others, making education of children with special needs at the center stage in the five years national growth and transformation plan, committing oneself to MDG and EFA goals formally instituting 'education for all' in the legal and policy frameworks of the country, developing tools for implementation (strategies and programs), and some efforts at incorporating of the issue of inclusive education in different concurrent programs, strategies, and activities at different levels (pre-primary, primary, secondary, and tertiary) of education.

However, the question is if the talk about 'education for all' takes nearly a span of two decades before it gets the right shape on paper, then how much would it take to restructure the school set up so that it is characteristically inclusive? After all, inclusive education requires the educational environment to be adjusted to meet the needs of all learners regardless of poverty, gender, ethnic background, language, disabilities and impairment (UNESCO 2000), through inclusive practices in learning, cultures and communities and reducing exclusion within and from education (UNESCO 2001), and changing/modifying the contents, approaches, structures and strategies with a common vision to cover all children of the appropriate age range and a conviction that it is the responsibility of the regular system to educate all children (UNESCO, 2006).

We may need to check what is on the ground before speculating on the future of inclusion in Ethiopia.

As already presented in the analysis section, the enrollment figure of children with disabilities is alarmingly small possibly because of the informal (beliefs and values) contexts (in the families and communities) that structure the past and present life conditions of the children with disabilities. There are lots of misconceptions about disability in the families and communities that keep children away from schools. Some of these children may manage to escape from dark to light by joining schools. But, according to a social assessment survey conducted a few of years ago (Jennings, et al., 2011), the main social blockages to accessing education for children with disabilities include lack of readiness and support by schools (finance, teaching, materials and facilities as well as human support) and services (Jennings, et al., 2011). The door of the school may be open but the compound/environment is not receptive in many cases. The physical layouts do not support mobility of children with visual impairments; children with physical disabilities face tough time walking through the usually bumpy way to classrooms, or children with hearing problems are expected to get into classroom listening to the ringing school bell. One can imagine why so many children are actually left behind from the educational system that seems to make an erroneous assumption that there is only one 'typical', 'normal' child in the school working in the science laboratories, sport fields, art classes etc.

Curriculum materials, books, and classroom set up do not send any signal that there are children in the classroom who think differently, read and write in ways other than paper-and-pencil, hear with seeing than with ears, and speak without tongues… sitting arrangements fail to allow adequate/ appropriate child-teacher and child-child interactions and support, teaching strategies dominantly lecture-based, individualized teaching not in picture at all, rigid lessons plans used across the board. This is mainly because the required resources are not in place and the main actors (teachers and administrators) are not

sufficiently trained except for attending some orientation programs or short-term trainings. Even the teacher training institutions are not well equipped with resources and experts that help in preparing qualified special educators with skills to facilitate the education of children with disabilities.

Teachers had negative attitude towards the inclusion of children with special needs and they did not welcome them in many cases. Even worse, regular teachers discriminated not only children with special needs but also special needs education teachers. In annexed special units, special needs education teachers were found feeling alienated because regular teachers considered them as having special needs/disabilities themselves (cited in Belay et al., 2004). Although some teachers are with a helping and supporting hand, the attitudes of peers are not encouraging to an extent that it affects the psychological make-up of the children with disabilities. Children with disabilities experience discrimination even by their own siblings (source). There is a lack of awareness among teachers that so many young children with special needs enrolled often repeat and dropout, if they do not receive sufficient support (cited in ESDP-III).

Thus, one wonders whether the schools in Ethiopia are for all. Undeniably, they are not at least for those with special needs of one kind or another. In fact, all children are expected to adjust to the school rather than the school adjusting to the needs of the learners. Schools and teachers find it difficult to accommodate students with special needs, and instead compel them to adapt to the school, classroom, and peers. If schools are not addressing the learners, then it is like 'Schools for Nil' because they do not target meeting the needs of any specific group. The traditional curriculum contents, teaching-learning process, and schooling that has depended to a large extent on normative child development and the so-called typical child philosophy is an abstract, unrealistic, and non-existent in this dynamic, diverse, and pluralistic world of the postmodern era. The classroom has to be adaptive rather than prescriptive. If it fails to meet the students, then

students fail to meet it. The results are school dropouts, attrition, and failure (Lewis 2009); wastage of resources in all the cases. It still sends a bad message for those looking forward to joining schools; that "education is not for you!" It is not uncommon to hear children with special needs complain the unsuitability of the school system for their unique needs.

In fact, it can be noted from ESDP IV that the Ministry of Education is aware of the problems above. In fact, the special needs education section of ESDP IV was designed to address the above problems that were evident in the ESDP III phase. The special needs education section of this ESDP IV envisages focusing on improving enrollment (47,461 to 1,739,000), teachers' professionalism (by 25%), and institutional capacity of schools in addressing the academic and social needs of children with special needs (by 25%) all from 2009/10 to 2014/15. Looking into accomplishments on the ground so far and the few months remaining ahead one can easily tell how unrealistic these targets are as the principle of 'education for all' itself. This is but an indication that 'education for all' is seeking to unfold itself in a context that is entangled with challenges of different colors. Particularly evident in present day Ethiopia is the fact that the quality of the regular education in itself is under siege. The access, equity and relevance of primary education, which were in a state of infancy barely 20 years ago, have shown remarkable changes over the last years, reflecting a genuine commitment to transform a traditionally elitist system to one that provides for all. Yet schooling indicators are still poor, and below regional averages (Ethiopia ranked 27th out of 28 countries) in terms of the African EFA development index (UNESCO, 2010).

What should then be the future of education of children with disabilities? It is of paramount importance to diversify the modalities for reaching out these children with the prime need to connect them to some kind of education. One approach can be the inclusive education modality that is envisaged to happen in the ESDP IV. Special schools, special classes in regular schools, special needs education through

alternative basic education programs can be conducted complementing the inclusive school practices. Other more innovative modalities can be worked out along these modalities. A case in point is the experience of Bahir Dar of having division of labor among regular schools in hosting children with disabilities because it may not be feasible for a single school to accommodate highly diverse student population (Jennings, et al., 2011).

Given that there is hardly a single school in Ethiopia today practicing inclusive education in the real sense of it[*], there appears to be a need to set out a model inclusive school as a demonstration site for others to learn from in very practical terms. Such a school needs to put in place inclusive practices that are more innovative, culturally sensitive, cost-effective, and community-resource based. Gradually refining experiences in from such school, then it can be scaled up to regionally (at least setting one model in each school).

Last, there has to be a mechanism to attract children to schools, remain in schools for a meaningful period of time, and make important progress in the process withstanding the various challenges in the process. For example, ensuring employment for this group once they get basic education will reverse all the oddities that are culturally connected with disabilities to force parents hide their children at home.

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[*] *An exception could be Dil Betigil Primary school in Addis Ababa. As it was reported in the Ethiopian Special Needs Education Professionals Association's Six[th] Annual Conference, the school has achieved a lot and it is a flagship in realizing inclusive education at least in Addis Ababa. It has been reported that the achievements registered in this specific school has been led by the principal of the school out of his willingness and passion in making his school accessible to all children with the help of other stakeholders. For instance, the principal of the school has forged contacts with different donors and NGOs and made the school compound accessible to wheelchair user students and blind students. Teacher and hearing students, for example, learned sign language to help children hearing impairment and included deaf students in the school. It appears that willing school leaders, teachers and students can create a difference and many children with special needs can be included in the regular schools. Dil Betgile has been visited by several schools and it is now serving as a center of excellence for experience sharing and a model for inclusive education practice.*

Conclusions

There are legal, policy, and program provisions supporting 'education for all' in Ethiopia. However, socio-cultural, economic and practical problems appear to limit the provision of special needs/ inclusive education in Ethiopia. Hence, enrollment of children with special needs is alarmingly low in Ethiopia. The quality of educational services provided to those enrolled is still worrisome; possibly making them rather vulnerable to lots of problems. Weighed against this experience, 'education of children for all' is only a policy rhetoric in sharp contrast to the reality on the ground that seems to portray nearly an 'education for nil' because of negligible level of enrollment, on the one hand, and the invisibility of those enrolled, on the other hand. Experience and research in the field fail to provide evidences about existence of inclusion in the proper sense. Inclusive education of children with special needs may not even happen in the time ahead unless inclusive practices are envisaged within the framework of the Ethiopian reality.

Implications

Improving GER rate alone would hardly ensure "Education for all" in Ethiopia for 97% of children with disabilities are still out of school. Inclusive education as it is envisaged today is unlikely to ensure the needs of children because it is resource intensive in a resource scarce country. A top-down approach to universal educational inclusion for children with disabilities is likely to be unrealistic, alien, prescriptive, instructive, less relevant, and less innovative. In fact, there is a need to tame ambition from 'education for all' to 'education to some', employ all available modalities of educating children with special needs, start up a local model school for inclusion that is less resource-intensive, culturally sensitive, capitalizes more on community resources than donations, and gradually scale up these practices; and employ a bottom up approach. This school can also become a center of training trainers, research, and innovation of local technologies for educating these children.

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