



Education in rural Ethiopia (2010-13): aspiration and uncertainty WIDE Discussion Brief No. 5 of 10ⁱ

Key messages from the WIDE evidence

- A **cultural conversion** has taken place in rural Ethiopia vis-à-vis education. Progress in the WIDE communities since 1995 is a testimony to this (with e.g. a community with no girl at school in 1995 counting several female university graduates in 2010), and to **Government commitment to prioritising education**.
- But **this conversion is at risk**. In 1995 there was uncertainty about the value of education for farming lives. In 2003 education was aspired to, as a pathway to a better life. In 2010-13 **high aspirations**, mainly **geared towards academic success**, coexisted with the **return of uncertainty**. Education is said to be of poor quality, with **many somewhat educated rural youth failing at exams and left with no further education and poor job prospects**.
- **Valorising non-academic professions** is key to address this and achieve Government rural job creation and industrial policy objectives. Options for consideration include:
 - **strengthening formal TVET quality** – as planned in ESDP5/GTPII with special attention to sufficiently resourcing TVETs;
 - **considerably expanding and deliberately prioritising non-formal/informal TVET**;
 - **addressing public perceptions**, through e.g. media campaigns, and including a range of practical skill options in the primary and secondary school curriculum.
- **Inclusive growth, a key Government objective, demands inclusive education**. In most communities the bottleneck has shifted from primary to post-primary education. However, **access and achievements are unequal** - significantly lower in agro-pastoralist and some of the remote communities. The **quality of primary education is perceived as low**. **Remote, smaller or new schools fare worse** (e.g. re buildings and qualified teachers).
- Access and achievements are also **deeply unequal within communities**. Starting at pre-primary and primary levels and worse at higher levels, **poor/vulnerable children/youth** find it **hard/ impossible to afford education**. **Many** attend school irregularly, often due to **combining or alternating school and work**.
- **Rural Ethiopia is immensely diverse and increasingly differentiated**. **Achieving inclusive access to education** requires going beyond 'one-size-fits-all' approaches to offer a **range of options that can be flexibly adapted** to local contexts and individual circumstances. Options for consideration include:
 - **Providing more focused and comprehensive support to disadvantaged areas/schools** – such as larger grants to disadvantaged schools, hardship compensation for teachers in agro-pastoralist or remote schools, school feeding/incentive programmes in seriously food insecure areas and/or for hard-to-reach populations;

- **Scholarship schemes** throughout education levels, including for poor bright youth eligible for government post-secondary education but not affording indirect costs;
- **Exempting poor/vulnerable** children or their families **of all forms of school-level contribution and compensating schools** through e.g. larger grants as just suggested;
- **Making education more flexible** is indispensable for inclusion. Ensuring access to a **wider range of schooling/training modalities** and **bridges** between them would better accommodate the diverse education-and-work trajectories found in rural Ethiopia. Options to consider include:
 - **Maintaining provision of shift education** where it is the community's preference and **of (quality) Alternative Basic Education** where it benefits groups of children/youth;
 - Encouraging schools to **adapt the school calendar** to seasonal/weekly community patterns such as harvests and market schedules;
 - Further **expanding evening classes at all levels**, and easing the transitions between evening and day courses;
 - **Modularising courses and easing regulations** to allow 'drop-out-and-in' trajectories;
 - Sponsoring/expanding **distance education**.
- Several of these provisions are already part of GoE policy (e.g. MoE 'blue book')ⁱⁱ. However, local education managers may need further support to implement them. Government may also want to draw on international evidence to ensure synergies between measures aimed to enhance quality and to raise flexibilityⁱⁱⁱ.
- **Girls' education** makes progress, challenging customary social norms and practices in encouraging ways. However, this too is **uneven** among communities. A host of **gender-specific challenges** (domestic chores, lack of sanitation at school, early marriage, parents' fear of early pregnancy) constrains girls' **participation in higher grades**.
- **Enhancing young women's chances to further pursue** education calls for measures beyond enhancing school girl-friendliness and combatting early marriage – notably ensuring that
 - Young women are **better protected against unwanted pregnancies** through providing systematic, adequate, age- and culturally sensitive **sexual health advice** to both female and male students;
 - And also that when they occur, marriage and pregnancy are not final barriers, through providing **specific guidance** to schools and communities to the effect **of re-admitting young married women and unmarried mothers**, making it clear that this is policy.
- **Role models** such as professional women working in the community encourage girls/young women and their parents. **Affirmative action giving priority to women for local government-paid positions** would enhance the effectiveness of measures promoting girls' education.

Introduction

“The primary resource for accomplishing social change is the education of young people, and these must be granted some positions of responsibility in society if their education is not to be in vain and if society is to advance” (Donald Levine, 1961).

Government commitment to education is evidence that it agrees with Levine’s proposition. This brief explores changes in opportunities, achievements, attitudes to and expectations from education in twenty rural communities in Ethiopia, between 1995 when they were first studied by the WIDE research and 2010-13 (see *DB01:introduction*), as a basis for suggestions with the aim of further strengthening the role of education in Government objective of transformation of Ethiopia.

Between aspiration and uncertainty – Education, but for what...

WIDE research documents a trajectory of **exceptional change in perceptions of education in rural Ethiopia over the past two decades**.

Perceptions in 1995 were mixed. Literacy and numeracy were said to be important; in half of the communities education was said to broaden one’s knowledge and thinking. But its usefulness in daily life as a farmer or a farmer’s wife was contested. In three communities it was feared that educated people would move away from farming. In three others some people were outright opposed to education (said to lead to ‘deterioration of agricultural activities’ by an influential farmer in Dinki; separating children from their family in Shumsheha; and disturbing identity and the traditional way of life in Adele Keke). The picture was bleak for girls. Education was seen as possibly useful for non-farm activities although in some places it was noted that there was no such thing.

There was a **shift towards higher expectations in 2003** in relation to both individual aspirations (including of moving away from farm life) and the community’s development. However, **serious concerns** related to high costs and relevance were raised in six communities, respectively. E.g. in Geblen (East Tigray), some people noted that post-Grade 10 education was affordable only for rich people, *“taking us back to the Imperial system”*. Whereas for respondents from Oda Haro (West Shewa), students learned neither farming skills nor what was needed to get a government job so that the hoped-for support from educated children was a myth.

In 2010-13 there was tremendous (albeit uneven) **progress in access to and achievements** in education and underpinning this, a **cultural conversion vis-à-vis the value of education**. Government awareness-raising, UPE campaign efforts, expanded service provision and broader modernisation trends had made education firmly part and interacting with other elements of the **local modern repertoire** (e.g. ‘modern parents’ educating daughters as well as sons; educated youth said to be more receptive to ‘modern ideas’ such as marriage by choice, sanitation, birth deliveries at health institutions etc.).

However, **this conversion was at risk**. **Unemployment** of youth educated to and above primary level, already perceived as an issue in four communities in 1995 and in six in 2003, was a big concern in 2010-13. In fifteen of the communities, across all four Regions and ranging from quite remote (e.g. Geblen) to peri-urban (e.g. Turufe near Shashemene, Adele Keke near Haramaya), many people were worried about the **large number of somewhat educated rural youth** (Gr8 leavers discouraged after failing at exam, Gr10 leavers failing to score enough to join a government institution, dropouts at various levels) **left with no further education option and poor employment prospects**.

There was a **range of perceptions**. In a number of socioeconomically diverse communities commitment to education was high but perceived low quality was seen to lead to failure and

joblessness. Thus for many, the reality did not match their expectations, so that **aspiration coexisted with uncertainty**. These included economically striving Girar/Gurage (“*there would be professors, doctors and degree holders from the community*” but it was a “*disaster for the community*” when educated youth did not get jobs), Somodo/Jimma and Oda Haro/West Shewa, as well as drought-prone Harresaw and Geblen in East Tigray and Aze Deboa/Kembata (where as “*since two years there is no access to jobs for many graduates in the area, what can be expected from the young generation, except leaving the country to look for jobs?*”).

At the other end were communities in which **commitment was still uncertain and expectations from education at a nascent stage**, most notably in remote Luqa/Tsemai, Dinki/North Shewa and Korodegaga/lowland Arssi. Other communities were somewhere in between but in most, concerns related to low quality, failure and unemployment were rising.

In addition, there was **uncertainty with regard to the worthiness of attending TVET**. In 2010 TVET was considered as an option but access was a challenge in several of the communities. In 2011/12 and 2013 there were serious concerns about low quality and/or limited relevance (insufficiently trained tutors, lack of machines/tools, limited practice work, narrow range of options) and TVET graduates failing to secure jobs. More generally, with a few exceptions like a young woman from a rich family in Somodo, parents and youth’s aspirations were geared towards university and **TVET was distinctly a second best**. In 2013 the Certificate of Competence system introduced an additional challenge which reportedly many failed to tackle, and was quite strongly resented in e.g. Oda Haro.

Addressing the ‘education for what’ question

Valorising non-academic professions and lives is critical to achieve the economic transformation envisaged in the second Growth and Transformation Plan and in particular, Government rural job creation and industrial policy objectives. This calls for providing ways through which these many rural young people just mentioned could **continue some form of education**.

The fifth Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP5, 2015/16-2019/20) foresees the establishment of at least one TVET in every wereda. However, TVET will only be considered worthwhile if quality and relevance are seen to improve. Moreover, at the moment non-formal/informal TVET provision mostly relies on non-government actors, scarcely present (in WIDE weredas) or (private colleges) too expensive for many. Government TVETs are supposed to develop non-formal options but they rarely do – as they already struggle with the formal TVET streams. This suggests that:

- **Equipping TVET institutions adequately** is a prerequisite for them to become able to raise more own revenues (as foreseen in the TVET strategy) and in turn, offer quality training.
- **Considerably strengthening non-formal/ informal TVET** would open up much needed options for both pre-Gr 10 leavers and Gr10 leavers scoring too low for formal post-Gr10 training. Government could take a strong lead through
 - Deliberately **prioritising non-formal options in public TVETs**
 - Strengthening **links between TVET training provision and rural youth job creation initiatives** - for instance through local schemes that would offer a combination of literacy/ numeracy, technical and business skill training and practical work experience for activities identified locally as having potential in the local context.
- Establishing local **labour market resource centres** with information on regional/ national labour demand would assist TVET graduates to find work.

The lukewarm interest in TVET found in the WIDE communities resonates with the ESDP5 diagnostic that *the far-reaching reforms of the TVET system over the past years have not been explained properly to the public*. Strengthening quality and relevance so that TVET graduates have a greater chance to get a job will contribute to gradually change perceptions and attitudes. But Government could also consider **addressing public perceptions more directly**, e.g. through:

- **Greater focus on life skills in the primary and secondary school curriculum and teaching/ learning process.** Re-balancing the system away from its current almost exclusive academic focus would help shaping up children and parents' expectations in a less one-sided manner.
- Media campaigns **raising the profile of formal and informal/non-formal TVET studies and of the kinds of job that these lead to.** Not everyone should be a university or a formal TVET graduate, and indeed the changes in rural living standards which WIDE found (*DB03:inequality, DB09:success*) mean that skilled technicians capable of repairing water pumps, grain mills, mobile phones, electric connections etc. should become increasingly valued.

Access in 2010-13 – Much increased but unevenly among communities

In 2010-13 **preschool** provision as a recent government policy was **gradually increasing** through various modalities. In twelve communities (studied in 2011/12 and 2013) there was interest although enrolment was still small. There was no provision at all in eight communities. In peri-urban communities (e.g. Girar, Sirba) a few richer households were sending children to private preschools.

Differences in provision of and access to primary education in 1995 continued to influence the levels reached in **2010-13**. Some communities had caught up from low access very fast, others not (e.g. Geblen compared to Korodegaga); and there still were seven communities without a full cycle primary school. Primary enrolment had steeply risen in at least eight diverse communities: Gara Godo, Dooma and Aze Deboa (predominantly protestant and initially better served); Adado (protestant); Shumsheha, Kormargefia and Adele Keke (peri-urban); and Geblen in Tigray. Where it had existed **Alternative Basic Education (ABE) had been phased out** (with little explicit rationale) except in the agro-pastoralist Luqa and Gelcha although even there its future was uncertain.

Provision of and access to **general secondary education** had **generally improved** – but there were still only five communities in which students could attend Grades 9 and 10 within or very near the community. In communities underserved in 1995 progress had been **uneven so that attending secondary school was still hard work for many students** (particularly from poor households and girls), due to a combination of distance and cost factors and security fears for girls. General secondary enrolment was still very small in the two agro-pastoralist communities.

Similarly, from markedly different baselines in 1995 the progress in relation to **post-Gr10 options** had been uneven. By 2010-13 attending preparatory education (Gr11-12) required moving away from one's family in all but three communities; and in seven wereda there was no government TVET institution. So at one end, there were **relatively large numbers of post-Gr10 educated people in a number of communities**; at the other end, post-Gr10 enrolment was **still very small in remote Dinki and Korodegaga in 2010, and Luqa in 2011/12**.

Overall, in most communities the bottleneck in terms of **service provision and access** had shifted from somewhere in the course of primary education in 1995, to access to Grade 9, with further difficulties in access to post-general secondary education. **Peri-urban communities were at an advantage** and whilst some remote communities had done well, access to secondary and higher

education had remained most constrained in three of the most remote ones. Fast progress was found in all Regions. The **two agro-pastoralist communities showed low achievements** although Gelcha, less remote and encircled by the modern economic world, fared better than Luqa.

External support to schools (by donors, NGOs and faith-based organisations) was **patchy**, in terms of geographical reach and type of support. The most frequent types focused on infrastructure and poor/vulnerable children but the former was usually punctual and in several instances the latter had not been sustained. Neither the support provided nor the way it was phased out seemed to be predictable or managed in coordination with the wereda authorities. There was **no support at all in five of the remote communities**. School feeding, found e.g. in Harresaw (East Tigray), and incentive programmes such as the provision of cooking oil to girls in Luqa/Tsemai, were said to be effective but were vulnerable to donor funding cuts - as had indeed been the case in Harresaw.

Education quality in 2010-13 – A concern, and also uneven

A range of **'lacks' or shortages in primary schools** were highlighted in all communities, associated to **substandard quality** of education (notably compared to urban schools) and in turn, **poor job prospects** for the youth. In a few communities English learning was a specific concern. In at least five communities, automatic promotion had been stopped or was not fully implemented: it was thought that students passed without the required knowledge and failed at a later stage. The self-contained policy was also disliked – as unfair for children who had a bad teacher. In all schools (except Do'oma/Gamo) **children attended only a half-day**: they could in this way combine work and school, which was explicitly **said to be indispensable** in some sites and was a widespread reality across all.

In relation to **infrastructure**, older schools fared better although financing maintenance was often a struggle. **School access to water** was still problematic in nine communities. **Shortage of teachers** (noted in eleven cases) was usually less of an issue in peri-urban or better connected communities though even in these it often affected the smaller, more remote schools. Issues associated with teachers were widespread and ranged from insufficient qualifications to heavy workload, poor motivation, and absenteeism or being late at school – including in peri-urban communities where teachers would stay in town and not in the community. Other issues revolved around access to learning/teaching materials, in-service teacher training and class sizes.

Overall, the data indicated that for all quality-related factors **schools were unevenly affected**, with **smaller, newer or more remote schools usually faring less well**. This suggests that while school expansion was carried out as a government priority, it was difficult to raise the resources required on both Government and the communities' sides.

A range of measures to address quality issues were mentioned – often calling for quite considerable community time/financing/in-kind support. Progress with teaching/ learning materials was noted in six schools. School funding from government and/or donors was mentioned in eight. Many schools had their own source of revenue, often from the use of some of their land alongside parent/ community contributions. School infrastructure development activities were widespread and systematically involved community support. A wide range of measures focused on the teaching/ learning process (teacher development, school supervision, remedial education and the use of students' and teachers' 1-5 networks) but there was little evidence of their effectiveness. In some schools, parents and/or education staff expressed **a sense that issues with quality still prevailed**.

In line with the government policy parents were supposed to also involve in school affairs, notably as a way to address attendance and quality issues. In some communities the Parents-Teachers

Associations (PTAs) reportedly had extensive responsibilities or were said to be powerful, although there was quite a lot of variation in their level of activity and effectiveness.

In sum, there were **marked inequalities between communities and schools in relation to how good primary education was**; the **issue of low quality was perceived as pervasive**, arising from a range of contributing factors, and in turn leading to failure at exams and limited employability and; the measures implemented to enhance quality were not sufficient or not sufficiently well implemented to effectively address the issues.

Who was and was not at school and why

Attending school was a lot more difficult for children from poor/vulnerable households. They were more likely to never enrol or start late, attend irregularly and not have sufficient time to study. This in turn, made them more likely to have low educational achievements – e.g. dropping out in low grades as they started late and/or needed to work for the household or themselves; or being more likely to fail at exams due to the uncondusive environment in which they tried to study (*DB03:inequality*).

Poverty was said to be an obstacle to children's/youth education in all communities, starting from pre-school. At primary level, **personal expenses** on school stationary were a considerable burden at a bad time of the year (pre-harvest) – so that in Harresaw for instance, poor children were punished if they lost a pen. Adding to this, the principle of **community contribution** coexisted with the 'fee free' policy so that **some form of school level payment** was expected in more than half the communities. Costs became significantly higher to attend post-primary education, notably because most often students had to live away from their household.

The **resulting gap in educational (and therefore employment) opportunities** between rich and poor children was highlighted in nine very diverse communities. Respondents pointed out that bright but poor students might have to stop even when they scored enough to be admitted in a government university, whereas children from rich families could continue regardless of their ability as their families would afford private education. As noted above there was also some evidence that better-off children had a greater chance to enjoy the benefits arising from attending preschool.

Children less likely to attend school and more likely to stop early or dropout frequently belonged to **distinctly vulnerable groups** including **elderly-, child- or single parent-headed households, orphans, step-children, children from domestic labourers** and children **placed by their families to work** for an income or to relieve the pressure on the household's resources. In some instances, those households had to make trade-offs to decide who among the children would attend school.

In a number of communities there were **measures to try and address cost-related obstacles, but far from sufficient.** Government provision of school materials for poor children was mentioned in just five communities. Donor/NGO support had existed in nine communities but had phased out in two of them. It was more significant (with no obvious rationale) in only three communities. In some cases well-to-do individuals, clans, iddirs and churches helped a few children. The Productive Safety Net Programme transferring resources to beneficiary households was said to help in five communities. Six communities (including the two Eastern Tigray ones) had developed **local forms of support** – usually full or partial exemption from fees/payments for children from poor families.

Irregular attendance at primary school was **widespread** and had both **community- and household-level causes** (e.g. market days, widespread or rising migration at community level; work for the family, poverty or a sudden shock at household level, hunger). There were also a number of

‘dropping-in and-out’ trajectories i.e. children/ youth joining school again after variably long (sometimes several years) periods out of school.

Irregular attendance could also arise from the difficulties that children/youth faced in **combining schooling and work**. Most children **worked on the family’s farm or in the house** – a social norm in Ethiopia. In addition, in eleven communities there were mentions of children/youth **working for an income**, for the household, themselves or both. This was most often dictated by necessity (and often helped to finance the child’s schooling) although in a few cases it was a choice and children stated long-term benefits such as gaining work experience as a good precaution. Some types of work were easier to combine with schooling but not all children were able to choose what they engaged in. **Domestic chores** were still usually falling mainly on girls and young women and (*DB04:youth, DB07:women*) could be even more of a burden than paid work. It also led to attendance problems, without even the compensation of an income as one girl remarked in Kormargefia (North Shewa).

Thus in the WIDE communities in 2010-13, **out-of-school children** (late starters, dropouts or never enrolled) and **irregular/interrupted attendance** were still **challenges to the universal primary education policy**. **Various forms of non-linear schooling trajectories** resulted from complex mixes of family decisions, individual circumstances, and decisions made by the children/youth themselves.

A range of **measures to try and address attendance issues** were mentioned. Depending on the community, the school staff, kebele authorities, the PTA or specialised committees, the ruling party cells, Development Teams and 1-5 networks, were supposed to convince parents and/or students to enrol on time and attend regularly. The extent to which these efforts were effective was not clear. In some communities, authoritative customary figures played a role (e.g. a highly respected Gurage clan leader in Girar, the elders in Luqa/Tsemai, religious leaders in Adele Keke/East Hararghe).

In six communities the **school calendar had been adjusted** to break for a week or two at peak harvest time, with catch-up classes at week-ends. But this could not work e.g. for the longer coffee harvest time in Somodo and Adado or the repeated harvest of irrigated chat in Adele Keke. Any adjustment also had to accommodate teachers’ upgrading classes at fixed times in the year.

Inclusive education for inclusive growth

Inclusive growth is a key Government objective and in turn, **demands inclusive education**. This is all the more challenging that Ethiopia’s **immensely diverse** rural society is **increasingly differentiated** (*DB03:inequality*). In such a context, addressing **inequalities between communities and socioeconomic groups** will require going beyond ‘one-size-fits-all’ approaches, to **offer a range of options that can be flexibly adapted to local contexts and individual circumstances**.

ESDP5 includes measures aimed to **overcome inequalities** (special support for emerging Regions and pastoralist, semi-pastoralist, scarcely populated and emergency-prone areas; scholarships for ‘*at-risk, poor and disadvantaged children*’ in upper primary and secondary education; possibly provision of educational materials, school feeding and financial support for ‘*children from poor and low-income family backgrounds*’).

With a view to complementing these, a range of options could be considered to **provide more support and resources to disadvantaged areas/schools** – Including:

- **Giving larger grants to disadvantaged schools** – The current enrolment-based formula does not account for local circumstances, which determine the difficulty of providing quality education more than the students’ number. Smaller/remoter schools, schools found in poorer communities or facing specific difficulties (e.g. pastoralist life) face

greater challenges; yet currently they get the same support as better established/connected schools, located in richer communities. **Calibrating the formula**, e.g. raising the per capita allocation for disadvantaged schools, would help them to overcome the extra-challenges they face.

- **Offering additional support and incentives to teachers in more challenging environments** – in line with the ESDP5 diagnostic that focusing on enhancing teachers' skills is not sufficient and calling for a *“strategy to ‘transform teaching into a profession of choice’”, with a “focus on the needs of teachers”*.
- **School feeding/incentive programmes** in food insecure areas and for hard-to-reach population.

Making education more inclusive also requires **addressing the different types of individual-level constraints** that prevent some children/youth from attending school. To **address financial constraints** Government should consider:

- Providing **scholarships** beyond secondary school, to youth eligible to join a **government TVET institution or university** but for whom the **indirect costs** (transport, books etc.) are too high.
- Ensuring that **poor/vulnerable households are systematically exempted from fees and other contributions** (including in-kind and labour) for **primary and secondary school students**, developing specific guidance to this effect for schools and communities. Schools should be compensated for the foregone income through a larger grant, like what is done through the government health cost exemption programme.

Financial/in-kind support covering education costs will address some of the constraints but not all. **Making education more flexible and more open to locally adapted solution is indispensable** to accommodate the non-linear schooling trajectories which were found to be widespread, especially among children/youth from poor/ vulnerable backgrounds. Options to consider include:

- Maintaining the **provision of shift education** where it is the local community's preference; and of **Alternative Basic Education** where it is clearly beneficial for groups of children (as for working children in Girar);
- **Encouraging schools to adapt the school calendar** to seasonal/weekly community patterns such as harvest of important crops and important market schedules
- Further expanding **evening class options at all levels** and easing transitions between evening and day courses;
- **Sponsoring access to/expanding distance education** (as part of a broader Government-led move towards ICT-based solutions to expand service outreach, *DB02:(r)urbanisation*) – currently exclusively private and yet a very useful alternative, in particular, for students from households badly needing their labour force at home;
- **Modularising courses** and **easing administrative regulations** so that young people can alternate work and education more easily.

While this last set of measures might apply especially at TVET and university levels, there is a strong case to also make it easier for secondary and even primary school students to be readmitted after years of absence. This would help to attract back in school a number of youth who may otherwise end up making little use of their prior education, as well as enabling young migrants or returnees to enhance their educational achievements during or after a migration experience (*DB08:mobility*).

Several of these provisions are already part of GoE policy – for instance, the MoE ‘Blue Book’ (2002) encourages schools to adapt the calendar to local specificities and wereda officials to establish local criteria to allocate funding to schools etc. (see endnote ii). However, education ²managers may need further support to **implement such measures**. Government may also want to draw on international evidence illustrating **how greater flexibility** in the education system can **actually support better learning** – as the ultimate measure of quality (see endnote iii).

Gender equity – Progress and shortcomings

In most communities there was **visible progress and attitudes to girls’ education were said to have significantly improved** over the last decade. But there were still **big differences between communities**. For instance, in Geblen which had no school in 1995 there were girls among the post-secondary students and graduates in 2010, whereas in the same year in Korodegaga nobody knew of a girl having completed Gr10. Overall, girls still faced a lot of challenges in four communities (including the two agro-pastoralist ones); and it was not easy in the four, otherwise very diverse Amhara communities. Girls’ education had made most progress in the two Eastern Tigray and two of the peri-urban communities.

Greater proximity of (primary and in some cases Gr9-10) schools in many communities had helped, as well as **Government overall affirmative action policy**. Specific measures included special committees and experience-sharing events, tutorials for girls, support to girls menstruating and incentives for the families (e.g. oil for girls’ attendance in Luqa) – though found in only one or a few communities. Larger-scale support was only found in Aze Debo’a, where a Kembata NGO specifically targeted older girls and young women as part of broader gender equity activities. Mobilisation against early marriage was widespread, with stories of successes (teachers alerted and stopping the family; girls reporting to the police or wereda women’s affairs) but also cases of avoidance strategies (e.g. families marrying girls off during the *kiremt* school break in Gelcha) (also see *DB04:youth*).

Girls’ education interacted with and challenged customary social norms and practices in various ways. Educated girls were said to be more likely to resist being overburdened with domestic chores, stand up against arranged marriage and female genital mutilation (e.g. in Aze Deboa), and be wanting to choose their partner or to get an independent income before marrying. They were said to be better wives because better able to help their husband to improve their lives. Girls’ educational achievements was said to be one of the factors contributing to shifting perceptions of women’s status and role. **Role models of educated working women**, sometimes coming from a poor family, were appreciated. Girls aspired to education as a way towards a ‘modern life’ and as part of this, a number of them said they did not want to marry a farmer. (*DB07:women*)

Progress was challenged for the same reasons **as for young men** (fear of failure and unemployment, attraction of migration), as well as **by ‘conservatives’** contesting the relevance of educating girls; and due to **a number of additional challenges**. While in some cases boys dropped out more for farm work, girls faced the additional school/domestic chores trade-off and seemed to be more vulnerable to dropping out permanently in case of a household shock. Menstruating girls were deterred by the lack of water, latrine and support at school. Early marriage was still a real challenge especially for poorer young women (*DB04:youth; DB03:inequality, DB06:maternity*). Girls falling pregnant generally dropped out. So that, while **girls’ participation was generally good in the lower grades it gradually decreased higher up**, variably fast in different communities.

However, that **change was on the way** was further illustrated by cases of young women having returned to school after marriage or having a child. These were still rare, prompted by exceptional circumstances. But the determination of these young women, who often had had the support from

at least some members of their family in communities not particularly progressive (Korodegaga/Arssi, Adele Keke/East Hararghe, Shumesheha/North Wollo and Do'oma/Gamo), were encouraging signs.

Building on progress...

Further progress with **gender equity in education** is also high on the ESDP5 agenda – with measures such as monitoring and enforcing the Code of Conduct for schools to reduce gender-based violence and harassment; ensuring a supply of potable drinking water and adequate, gender-specific, sanitation facilities in all schools, and separate spaces for providing health advice to university and TVET students. The suggestions made below flow from the analysis in this paper as well as *DB04:youth; DB06:maternity; and DB07:women*, and aim to complement or enrich these measures.

First, there is no room for complacency in **combatting early marriage** - hardly mentioned in ESDP5. There may be scope to strengthen the measures in place in e.g. learning from what has worked and not in a more systematic manner. Consideration should also be given to generalising measures providing **access to sanitary pads and advice** on how to use them for menstruating girls to complement the ESDP5 measures related to access to water and adequate latrines.

However, **enhancing young women's chance to pursue higher levels of education** calls for measures beyond those. Notably, Government should consider:

- **Providing adequate, age-specific and culturally sensitive sexual health advice to students** (both male and female), including advice on contraception and where to access it, as a way of better protecting young women from unwanted pregnancies, with sufficient guidance and resource materials for teachers and health workers.
- Developing guidance for **schools to (re-)admit married young women and young unmarried mothers** - recognising that early marriage and unwanted pregnancy may still be a reality for some time to come. Keeping the concerned young women out of school is an 'ex post', useless sanction, whilst the 'bad influence' that they supposedly might have is a fallacy as most of the time other students are aware of what has happened to their schoolmate even when she does not return to school.
- Encouraging schools to establish **child-caring centres** to allow older sisters and young mothers to attend – e.g. by specifically providing a higher block grant to help schools with such centres to run them.
- **Affirmative action giving priority to women for local government positions** such as HEWs but also teachers, DAs, vets, kebele managers etc. – as role models of professional women and to accompany Government measures promoting girls' education.

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research products are available at <http://ethiopiawide.net/>.

ⁱⁱ The *Organization of Educational Management, Community Participation and Finance* directive (Ministry of Education, 2002) – also known as the ‘*Blue Book*’.

ⁱⁱⁱ See (among others) “*The rebirth of education – Schooling ain’t learning*”, Lant Pritchett, Center for Global Development 2013, for numerous examples of why locally flexibly managed and adapted outperform more rigid systems, in which ‘more of the same’ will not raise quality.