

Education in rural Ethiopia (2010-13): Aspirations and uncertainties

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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” (Levine 1961). The commitment to education of the Government of Ethiopia fits well with this half-century-old proposition. This chapter explores changes in opportunities, achievements, attitudes and expectations from education in the WIDE communities between 1995 when they were first studied and 2010-13 when WIDE last revisited them. The chapter focuses on children and young people’s education and on the payoff most hoped for in the communities that is, enhanced livelihoods and life prospects for the younger generation through greater employability. This is also a very important policy concern of the Government, at a time when *“(b)etween 2 and 2.5 million young people are entering the labour market every year”* (World Bank 2012).

The chapter starts by reviewing changes in education provision and attendance over the research period, showing a diversity of trajectories ranging from tremendous expansion in enrolments in some communities, to more mixed progress in others. I then turn to issues of education quality, a key concern of the Government and also acutely perceived as such in the WIDE communities in 2010/13. Next, I focus on who, in 2010/13, was at school and not, and why. This section shows that in all communities, children and youth of poorer and more vulnerable backgrounds were at a considerable disadvantage. It also documents how in many instances attending school was a discontinued experience for various reasons, and notably because many children and youth combined or alternated this with work. In the next section I focus on progress and challenges with regard to girls’ education, concluding that this varied among communities and that whilst change was visible, there remained some way to go to ensure girls’ participation in higher education levels. I then highlight how perceptions of education evolved from 1995 onwards and how, in 2010/13, high aspirations coexisted with the re-emergence of uncertainties about the returns from education.

In the final section I draw on this evidence to make a few suggestions aimed at further strengthening the role of education in the Government’s objective of transforming Ethiopia. I argue that equity in educational opportunities is critical to achieve equitable growth, which calls for addressing both geographical and societal imbalances, the former by targeting greater support to more challenging areas, the latter by making education both more affordable for the poorer and more vulnerable youth, and more flexible to accommodate the growing diversity in individual circumstances found in rural Ethiopia today. I also suggest that a number of additional measures might contribute to address some of the specific challenges girls face, ranging from sexual health advice for girls and boys to guidance to schools and communities to the effect of readmitting young unmarried mothers and married young women. Finally, I propose that there

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needs to be a rebalancing of the education system away from its strong academic bias so that technical training and skills are given the value they need to have to support the Government's economic transformation project.

Access in 2010-13: much increased but unevenly among communities

The country-wide education trends over the past two decades, as summarised in a recent ODI study (Leenhardt, *et al.* 2016), show a remarkable increase in net primary enrolment, with the fastest 1990s-2000s growth rate in Africa. Progress in secondary education was slower, although enrolment almost quadrupled from 1996/97 to 2012/13. More recently enrolment grew rapidly in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions and especially at university. Box 1 below provides an overview of today's education system in Ethiopia.

Box 1: The education system in Ethiopia, 2010-13

The Ethiopian education system is organised as follows. Preschool policy is still evolving, and different modalities are being tried out. At the time of the research, kindergarten (KG), established mostly privately or as faith-based or NGO-supported undertakings and usually in urban (ising) areas, offer three pre-school levels. Government is encouraging all public primary school to open a 'zero-grade' class for the 6-year old to start attending the year before they should join grade 1. Other attempts include child-to-child education whereby students from the second cycle in primary schools teach small children in informal settings (homes etc.), under the supervision of teachers who were trained for this (but do not get any reward for this additional work).

The primary cycle last eight years and is subdivided into two cycles (grade one to four and grade five to eight). There is a regional exam at the end of grade eight, conferring a certificate of primary education completion which is required to pass to secondary. Students failing to get the required marks are encouraged to repeat and re-sit the exam. They can also attend informal/non-formal (levels 1 and 2) Technical and Vocational Education and Training courses (see below).

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) was adopted then rolled out in the mid-/late 2000s as part of the government's strategies to reach UPE. Its objective is to provide an alternative path for children whose life conditions prevent from attending the full formal primary education such as children in remoter areas or pastoralist communities. ABE facilitators, who are trained before they start teaching at ABE centres, are not required to have the same entry qualifications than primary teachers, which in principle, should make it easier to recruit local dropout students as ABE facilitators. ABE centres offer three levels, at the end of which children are supposed to transition in grade 5. While formally, ABE continues to be part of the government policy, it appears that many education managers at regional and *wereda* levels have reservations as they claim that the education provided at ABECs does not adequately prepare the children to enter grade 5.

Secondary education is also organised in two cycles. The lower cycle (grades 9 and 10) is part of general education, whereas the upper cycle (grade 11 and 12), called preparatory, is for students who intend to join university. There are national exams at the end of grade 10 and at the end of grade 12. At the grade 10 exam, students with marks above an annually defined threshold are eligible to pass to the preparatory cycle. Below that threshold and above a lower one they are eligible to attend a public formal (level 3 and above) TVET training course. At the grade 12 exam, students with marks above an annually fixed threshold can join a public (government-subsidised) university. Others can re-sit, or join a post-grade 10 TVET course. Private colleges, TVET institutions and universities have their own entrance requirements, usually lower so that students who get marks too low to enter a public institution can study there, if they can afford the costs.

TVET is now organised according to the *National Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Strategy* (Federal Ministry of Education 2008). The strategy reorganised TVET into five levels leading to different levels of competencies in technical jobs, from least to most sophisticated. The first two levels do not, in principle, require any formal qualifications as basic literacy and numeracy skills are supposed to be imparted to students alongside technical and business skills. Levels three to five are post-Grade 10 courses. Training is modular so that a student first completing level one can return and continue to higher levels later on. There are pathways with university for higher level students.

In this first section I outline how, with variations that I briefly review as well, what I found in the WIDE communities reflected the trends of tremendous change seen at the country level.

In 2010-13, preschool was a recent policy priority (Rossiter 2016). In the WIDE communities, preschool provision was gradually increasing: faith-based or NGO-run kindergartens could be found in five of them (usually in the urbanised parts), child-to-child education in two more remote ones, and zero-classes in six communities. Thus in twelve communities (all studied in 2011/12 and 2013) there was some interest, although enrolment was still small. However, there was no provision at all in eight communities. In peri-urban communities (e.g. Girar in Gurage, near the town of Imdibir, and Sirba in East Shewa, between the towns of Bishoftu and Mojo) a few richer households were sending children to private preschools.

Differences in provision of and access to primary education in 1995 were still reflected in 2010-13. There were still seven communities without a full cycle primary school – with large differences in how easy it was for children to attend the grades not offered on site. For instance, to attend grade 5 and higher grades children from Do’oma (Gofa) had to walk two kilometres from Do’oma centre to the nearby *wereda* capital Wacha, whereas in Luqa (Tsemay, one of the two agro-pastoralist sites), children had to move to the *wereda* capital Key Afer (25kms away) and live at the school hostel. Primary enrolment had steeply risen in at least nine communities of three types: Gara Godo (Wolayta), Do’oma (Gofa) and Aze Debo’a (Kambata), all three predominantly Protestant and already well served in 1995; Adado (Gedeo), also Protestant in majority²; Shumsheha (North Wello), Kormargefia (North Shewa) and Adele Keke (East Hararge), all three peri-urban; and Harresaw and Geblen, both in Eastern Tigray, in a Region where policy implementation has been prioritized.

Alternative Basic Education (ABE) was not widespread. In a few communities it had at some point been offered but had been phased out for various reasons. For instance, an Alternative Basic Education Centre (ABEC) said to give poor quality education had been replaced by satellite schools³ in Dinki (North Shewa). An ABEC had closed down due to lack of a teacher in Korodegaga (lowland Arsi). In Girar an NGO-run ABEC was closed when the *wereda* authorities

² Protestant missions have been involved in promoting education for a long time in Ethiopia and other parts of the Horn of Africa. In the communities where they have been active since several decades, enrolment numbers had therefore started increasing earlier, and the effects were still visible in 2010/13.

³ Satellite schools are usually established in remoter parts of *kebele* and offer the first cycle of primary education so that small children living far from the main school can start attending school closer to home; they are under the same management as the main school (i.e. they do not have their own school director). They are sometimes called ‘feeder schools’ as students are sent to attend the main school once they reach grade 5, usually.

asked the NGO for ‘their documents’ – even though some officials said it was useful for girls working as housemaids. In Turufe’s *wereda* (West Arsi), NGO-run ABECs were handed over to the *wereda* then closed down. In Adele Keke *wereda* officials discouraged children from attending ABE because, they said, there were no qualified teachers. In Harresaw a *wereda* plan of starting an ABEC had failed two years in a row because people were reportedly not interested. However, there were ABECs in the two agro-pastoralist sites Luqa (Tsemay) and Gelcha (East Shewa) although even there their future was uncertain.

Box 2: ABECs in Gelcha and Luqa

In *Gelcha* the ABE centre had started in 2011 with only one class/grade and one teacher. There were 59 children (27 female) enrolled – quite small compared to the 409 students (172 female) enrolled in the grade 1-8. The ABEC had been built in the most remote zone, bordering the Awash National Park and the river. It had no water and no electricity but good buildings (3 classrooms and an office).

In *Luqa’s wereda* there were 32 ABECs, in sub-*kebeles* with no formal school. Two of these were in Luqa, in sub-*kebeles* farther from the main road and with sparse settlements. These level 1-2 centres (no level 3 yet) had two teachers and their own management body, and taught in the mornings so that students played and helped their parents in afternoons. The enrolment (150 in total) was significant compared to the 271 students enrolled in the grade 1-4 formal school. The *wereda* planned to upgrade all ABECs into formal grade 1-4 schools but there was no indication of how fast they might do this.

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 in or very near the community. In communities underserved in 1995 progress had been uneven so that attending secondary school was still a challenge for many students (particularly from poor households and girls), due to a combination of distance and cost factors as well as security fears for girls. The best access was in Gara Godo with a recently built grade 9-10 school in the small town at the centre of the *kebele*. In eleven communities grade 9-10 schools were found at distances varying from two to 12 kilometres from the *kebele* centre; although distances could vary from 45 minutes’ to three hours’ walk depending on where students lived. In Geblen and Harresaw, the two communities in Tigray, grade 9-10 schools had been recently built in a neighbouring *kebele*. Elsewhere primary schools had been upgraded to also offer grade 9-10 (e.g. in Ude near Sirba, Aliyu Amba near Dinki, and Adele 01 school near Adele Keke) – in line with a policy recently adopted by the government seeking to upgrade at least one primary school to general secondary education level in every *kebele* (Ministry of Education 2016).

There were hundreds of grade 9-10 students in communities where primary enrolment was already large some years back, and with good access, notably Aze Debo’a and Sirba, both quite well-connected. But it was still very limited in the two agro-pastoralist communities, Luqa (with only 5-7 boys and 3-4 girls attending grade 9-10 in Key Afer’s new secondary school) and Gelcha (where only 20 students, including 8 girls, sat for the grade 8 exam in 2010/11).

Similarly, from markedly different baselines in 1995 the progress in relation to post-grade-10 options had been uneven. By 2010-13, attending preparatory education (grade 11-12) required moving away from one’s family, with all the associated costs, in all but three communities

(commuting was possible from Girar, adjacent to Imdibir town; Aze Debo'a 4 kms from Durame town, and Shumsheha 9kms from Lalibela). And in seven communities there was no government Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institution in the *wereda*. So at one extreme, there were relatively large numbers of post-grade 10 educated people in a number of communities. For instance, in Aze Debo'a students could find a preparatory school, a TVET and a private college in Durame, the Kambata zonal capital at 4kms from the centre of the *kebele* on a good road, and grade 12 completers were in their hundreds. At the other extreme, post-grade 10 enrolment was still very small in remote Dinki and Korodegaga in 2010, and in Gelcha and Luqa in 2011/12 (as may be expected given the still small number of grade 9-10 students mentioned earlier). In Luqa for instance, no one attended TVET or a private college, and there were only four boys at university.

Overall, in most communities the bottleneck in terms of access to school, which in 1995 was limited to primary education with in many instances schools not offering the full cycle, had shifted to access to grade 9, with further difficulties in access to the second cycle of secondary education. Peri-urban communities were at an advantage, and access to secondary and higher education was a lot more constrained in remoter communities and in the two agro-pastoralist communities. However, there were also examples of dramatic change in some of the more remote places. The box below illustrates the contrasting trajectories found between communities otherwise sharing similar characteristics, such as Geblen and Korodegaga, both remote farming communities, and the two agropastoralist sites Gelcha and Luqa.

Box 3: Contrasting trajectories

Geblen, one of the remotest WIDE communities, was perhaps the most remarkable example of rapid expansion from a low basis. In 1995 there was no school in the community; 6 girls and an estimated 5% of school-age boys attended primary school in a neighbouring *tabia*, twelve kilometres away from Geblen's centre. By 2010 there was a grade 1 to 8 school and more than 800 children enrolled, a good number of secondary school students attending among others at a new grade 9-10 school located at 45 minutes' walk from Geblen centre, and several households with students attending or having graduated from university, including a few young women.

Korodegaga, another of the remote communities, offered a stark contrast. The 1995 grade 1-4 school had only been expanded to grade 5 by 2010; after which children had to cross the Awash River on a hand-hauled raft to go to Sodere Town or walk fairly long distances to schools in neighbouring *kebeles*. Attending secondary school was a challenge, and no one knew a girl from the community who had completed grade 10.

Similarly, there were marked differences in education access and achievements between the two agro-pastoralist sites, with *Gelcha*, encircled by the modern economic world, faring better than *Luqa* in remote South Omo. In *Gelcha* the World Bank-financed Pastoralist Community Development Programme had built a full-fledged grade 1-8 school; several secondary schools were accessible in neighbouring areas (although quite far to commute); and the *Aba Gada* had negotiated for 40 Karrayu students, including a few from *Gelcha*, to study at a private college in Adama city for half the tuition fees. In *Luqa* there was only a community-built grade 1-4 school; grade 5-8 was provided in the town of Key Afer (the *wereda* capital 25 kilometres away). The community had just agreed to upgrade the school to allow children to attend higher grades locally. A grade 9-10 school had opened in 2009/10 in Key Afer, and in 2010/11 39 students of the *wereda* had qualified for TVET admission after the grade 10 exam, which was considered a big achievement.

External support by donors, NGOs and faith-based organisations was patchy, in terms of geographical reach and type of support. Somewhat surprisingly if support were commensurate to needs, there was no or very little support in four of the remote communities (Geblen, Dinki, Korodegaga, Adado). Moreover, support most often focused on infrastructure and poor/vulnerable children, but the former was usually 'one-off' and in several cases the latter had not been sustained. For instance, in Harresaw two local NGOs supporting vulnerable children phased out their activities in a few years before 2011/12; in Turufe there used to be a programme supporting vulnerable children, but no-one among the research respondents was sure whether it was continuing or not. Neither the support provided nor the way it was phased out seemed to be predictable or managed in coordination with the *wereda* authorities. School feeding and incentive programmes such as the provision of cooking oil to girls in Luqa were said to be effective, but they were vulnerable to donor funding cuts. For instance, school feeding had been phased out in 2010/11 in Harresaw and in Shumsheha.

Education quality in 2010-13

Reflecting trends documented in a recent survey (Wendmsyamregne Meshaka and Bereket Kelemu 2015), a range of 'lacks' or shortages in primary schools were highlighted in all communities, and were associated with substandard quality of education (notably compared to urban schools) and in turn, poor job prospects for the youth. For instance, the head-teacher of the oldest-established primary school of Aze Debo'a (Kambata) blamed poor education quality as the main reason why so few students reached university. He noted that:

The quality of education is not maintained in the kebele schools. There can be more than 70 students attending in one room, which is very difficult for teachers. As a result many of our students fail. First, few of the students enrolled reach Grade 8 and take the exam. Then, only a fifth to a quarter of those who attend grade 9-10 make it to preparatory. And among those joining grade 11-12 only about a quarter manage to join university. Half of those leaving grade 10 might get into TVET.

And students' progression was likely to be worse in many of the other schools/communities, given that Aze Debo'a was a site in which education had historically been well developed since decades.

In a few communities there were concerns that the teaching of English, in particular, was inadequate to prepare the children to secondary education⁴. In at least five communities, automatic promotion⁵ 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 teaching policy⁶ was also disliked on the grounds that it can be unfair for children who had a bad

⁴ Primary education is expected to be taught mainly in mother tongue; the medium of instruction is English from grade 9 onwards. The four Regions concerned by the research have different ways of managing this transition. In Amhara several subjects are taught in English in grades 7 and 8; in Tigray the teaching is exclusively in Tigrinya up to grade 8; in Oromia teaching in grades 7 and 8 is in English and in SNNP this is the case from grade 5 onward.

⁵ The Government has in the past decade introduced automatic promotion in the lower primary cycle. This provides for students to be continuously assessed throughout the year and those who struggle to get more support so as to pass from one to the next year without repeating and with the required level.

⁶ Self-contained teaching was introduced as a concept in the 1994 Education and Training Policy. Its implementation began in earnest from the early 2000s onward. The principle is that in the first four grades students

teacher. In all schools except in Do'oma (Gofa) children attended only a half-day⁷. They could in this way combine work and school, which was said to be indispensable in some sites and was a widespread reality across all – as I discuss later in this chapter.

School infrastructure and equipment was usually better in older schools, although funding maintenance was often a struggle even in those schools. School access to water was still problematic in more than half of the schools. There was no water in all schools in Kormargefia (North Shewa) and Adele Keke (East Hararge), in the main school in Gelcha (East Shewa) and Gara Godo (Wolayta) (where it was disconnected since 2009), in the smaller schools in Do'oma (Gofa), Harresaw (East Tigray), Dinki (North Shewa) and Turufe (West Arsi), and no piped water in the main school in Dinki, while in Geblen (East Tigray) water did not last the whole year.

Shortage of teachers (noted in eleven sites) was usually less of an issue in peri-urban or better connected communities though even there it often affected the smaller, more remote schools. Issues associated with teachers were widespread (see box 4) and ranged from insufficient qualifications to heavy workload, poor motivation, and absenteeism or coming late to school – notably in peri-urban communities where teachers would stay in town and commute to the community.

Box 4: Teacher issues in both remote and better connected schools

Teachers in remote communities – In *Geblen*, the head teacher said teachers' absenteeism was worse than students'. She was unhappy due to the school's poor status and not getting her salary increments. Teachers were reportedly demotivated due to high workload and low pay. One of the female teachers had even migrated to work as a housemaid in the Gulf countries, as did many youth from Geblen (see chapter on migration). In *Harresaw* too teachers were found to migrate (more than 30 in the *wereda*, including Harresaw School's previous director). In *Korodegaga* (Arsi), one teacher described a very high workload (including work related to the EPRDF party, twice a month, and study for summer education at weekends). He was unhappy because he had hoped to get recognition of his attendance to continuous professional development, but this was not implemented. In *Gelcha* teachers' motivation was also an issue. Teachers were discouraged by the harsh conditions and did not want to live in the teachers' quarters, so they commuted to Metahara and were often late or absent. The head teacher was also very discouraged by the various challenges she faced and wanted to resign.

Teachers in better connected communities – In *Kormargefia* there were enough teachers but almost all lived in Tebase or Debre Birhan towns and were late due to difficulties to get public transport. Several respondents doubted teachers did their job properly, as shown by the poor results at the grade 8 exam. In *Somodo* (Jimma), some people thought that insufficient attention was given to teachers' working and living conditions; and there were students undermining teachers. Half the teachers lived in Jimma and tended to be late. As it took them time to travel to and from Jimma they did not have enough time to prepare their lessons properly. In *Oda Haro*

remain with the same teacher for all subjects and throughout the four years, so that the teacher develops a good understanding of each of her/his students' strengths and weaknesses.

⁷ A majority of schools in Ethiopia are organised in shifts. In many instances this is a response to a shortfall in school infrastructure or in teachers or in both, so that the school teaches some of the children in mornings and others in afternoons. The Government is trying to promote full-day schooling, to address the concern that with the shift system children and youth do not have enough time at school to cover the curriculum well; and in line with the idea that higher levels of pupil-teacher contact time lead to better educational achievements.

(West Shewa) some teachers were reportedly absent. There was no teacher accommodation so teachers lived in Tibe town.

Lack or shortages of teaching/learning materials were mentioned in eight of the twenty communities. Other weaknesses were identified such as poor *wereda* supervision in Korodegaga, the lack of parental follow-up in several communities (e.g. Gara Godo, Somodo), lack of budget in Luqa (Tsema), the *wereda* having stopped providing basic inputs such as paper, pens etc. in Oda Dawata, and a general lax attitude by teachers, students and parents in Oda Haro. Class sizes were reasonable in some schools such as in Shumsheha (North Wello), Kormargefia (North Shewa) and Gara Godo (Wolayta), with approximately 50 students compared to the Ministry of Education's standard of 45, and were even smaller in Aze Debo'a, where the proximity of the zonal capital Durame attracted teachers. But pupil-teacher ratios were much higher in other schools, notably in Adele Keke and Do'oma.



Headteacher office/library, Adado



School library in Somodo

Overall, there was evidence that more remote schools usually fared less well in relation to the most important quality factors, as illustrated by the contrast between the head teacher's office also serving as library in Adado and the dedicated library in Somodo.

For instance in peri-urban Aze Debo'a, the well-established 'old school' faced some textbook shortages for some topics in some grades and for the library but had enough teachers, a good proportion of them qualified, and was otherwise faring well, with water nearby, separate students' and teachers' toilets, and electricity. In contrast schools in remote Geblen, Korodegaga and Dinki had poor facilities (including no electricity in all three) and not enough teachers, and lacked teaching/learning materials. Satellite schools or schools more recently established were also usually struggling, suggesting that, while school expansion was carried out as a government priority, for both the Government and the communities it was hard to raise the resources required to reach acceptable quality standards.

In a number of communities where there was some choice, parents were sending their children to schools that were farther away but perceived to be of better quality. These were often older, better-established schools, mainly in nearby towns or more urbanised areas, such as e.g. Kuyera school in Turufe, Adele 01 school in Adele Keke, and Wacha school in Do'oma. Some better-off parents sent their children to private primary schools (e.g. in Durame for children from Aze Debo'a), or to urban schools when they had a relative who could assist (e.g. the wife of a successful businessman in Somodo planned for her son to stay with relatives to attend the upper primary cycle in Jimma town).

A range of measures to address quality issues were mentioned – often calling for quite considerable community support in terms of time, financing or in-kind contribution. Progress with teaching and learning materials was noted in six schools. School funding from government and/or donors was mentioned in eight. School infrastructure development activities were widespread and systematically involved community support. A wide range of measures focused on the teaching and learning process (teacher development, school supervision, remedial education and the use of small groups of students supposed to help each other and the same among teachers, called the one-to-five networks⁸). But there was little evidence of the effectiveness of these measures and in some schools, parents and/or the education staff expressed a concern that poor quality still prevailed.

Many schools had their own source of revenue, alongside parent or community contributions (discussed later in this chapter). Schools in nine sites (Dinki, Korodegaga, Harresaw, Shumsheha, Aze Debo’a, Gara Godo, Adado in Gedeo, Oda Haro, and Oda Dawata in Arsi) got an income from the use of some of their land – contracting it out, getting students or parents to help grow crops for sale, keeping animals or growing and selling grass. In Oda Dawata the main school did not raise fees but used many other different ways of raising funds, including hiring out students to harvest potatoes - which some parents remarked, was like a commercial enterprise. In line with the government policy parents were supposed to also become involved 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 effectiveness⁹.

Some of the schools could also rely on less usual community contributions to improve the quality of education they offered, as shown in Box 5 below.

Box 5: Some less usual contributions to school

Following the Gurage tradition, the Gurage diaspora had contributed 40,000 birr through its *iddir* in Addis Ababa, and the local *iddir* contributed 20,000 birr, for the expansion of the local school in *Girar*.

In *Sirba* (West Shewa), at the suggestion of local youth supported by the big local *iddir*, the *kebele* community raised 400,000 birr from selling stone and red ash, and 250,000 birr from selling wood from the community forest, for the construction of grade 9-10 classes in the *kebele* main school.

In *Adado* the Coffee Union had promised to finance two classrooms with cement blocks.

In *Luqa*, the school upgrade was supported by the elders; this had been decisive in helping the headmaster to convince the community to contribute 50 birr/household to this effect.

In *Harresaw* the community contributed for the secondary school in Dera from its ‘grain budget’ – a budget which the *tabia* raised through deducting a portion of the Productive Safety Net Programme (PSNP) transfers to households and auctioning the grain. From the same budget, *tabia*

⁸ The use of one-to-five networks, whereby peers help each other in various undertakings and a model/the network leader teaches the others, is a key tenet of the Government’s approach to knowledge dissemination and mobilisation which was developed soon after the 2010 election. One-to-five networks were first established in the livelihoods and health fields. Their use was then expanded to other fields, including in education institutions at all levels.

⁹ Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) are supposed to exist in all schools and meet regularly to oversee school operation. Members are elected from among the school teaching staff and the parents.

officials also planned to contribute 30,000 birr (of the total 86,000 birr required) to build a separate classroom for the newly started zero-grade pre-school education.

In sum, there were marked inequalities between communities and schools in relation to the quality of primary education; 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. Furthermore, the measures implemented to enhance quality were not sufficient or not sufficiently well implemented to effectively address the issues.

Who was not at school and why

Alongside these trends of progress and inequalities between communities, there remained significant challenges to equity within the communities. In this section I show how poverty and vulnerability was a tremendous obstacle for the children and youth concerned. I also illustrate how for many children and youth in rural Ethiopia attending school is only one of many responsibilities, with implications for attendance.

The obstacle of poverty and vulnerability

Attending school was a lot more difficult for children from poor/vulnerable households, as also noted by Pankhurst (see chapter on inequalities) and by Young Lives (2012). 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; they were also more likely to fail at exams due to the uncondusive environment in which they tried to study. At the country level the outcome of such inequalities is stark: in 2011 the average educational attainment for the poorer 40% of the population was half that of the richer 60% (World Bank 2016). In 2014, a 15-49 woman of the wealthiest quintile was thirty times more likely to have some secondary education or more than a woman from the poorest quintile (CSA 2014).

Poverty was said to be an obstacle to children's/youth education in all communities, starting from pre-school, despite the principle of 'free schooling'. At primary level, personal expenses on school stationery were a considerable burden for poor households so that in Harresaw (East Tigray) for instance, poor children were punished if they lost a pen. Adding to this, the principle of community contributions coexisted with the 'fee free' policy so that some form of school level payment was expected in most of the communities. In some schools these were occasional and asked for specific reasons (often for school infrastructure expansion or maintenance), such as in Yetmen (East Gojam), Girar (Gurage), Turufe (West Arsi), Adele Keke (East Hararge), or Luqa (Tsemai). But in more than half of the communities an annual payment was expected – ranging from 10-20 *birr* to a couple of hundred *birr* in Sirba (East Shewa). Some schools exempted poor children although this was not always working well (e.g. Adado in Gedeo, Sirba in East Shewa). Others did not, and in Do'oma (Gofa) and Gara Godo (Wolayta) the school annual contribution was deducted from households' PSNP transfers alongside other payments due such as loan repayments.

Costs to attend post-primary education were significantly higher, notably because most often students had to live away from their home. Households who could somehow afford it would spend thousands of birr. For instance, the household of an Information & Community

Technology (ICT) student from Do'oma was spending 500 birr/month and an additional 1,000 birr for a year to send him grain. A middle-wealth farmer from Adado with a son attending Agricultural TVET had spent 15,000 birr on his first two years at college. For those who could not afford, this meant having to stop sometimes promising trajectories. For instance, the son of a poor farmer from Harresaw whose family had supported him up to Grade 12 and whose exam results allowed him to join a government university, had to stop because costs such as transport, books, etc., were just too much: instead, to his mother's sorrow, he had migrated to Saudi Arabia. In some instances parents borrowed under other guises to be able to pay for their children's education costs. A poor farmer of Kormargefia (North Shewa), for instance, did this and explained "*I don't have any wealth for my children to inherit, so investing in their education is the only means by which I can help them*".

Children more likely to fail to enrol, drop out early or be often absent belonged to distinctly vulnerable groups including elderly-, child- or single parent-headed households, orphans, step-children, children of domestic labourers and children placed by their families to work in other households for an income or to relieve the pressure on the household's resources.



Young out-of-school boy placed as herder, Do'oma

In some instances, vulnerable households had to make trade-offs to decide who among the children would attend school. Hunger and fear of stigma were also factors, as shown in the box below.

Box 6: Access to education... so much harder or impossible for poor and vulnerable children

Costs, however small, as a barrier – A poor woman household head in *Shumsheha* (North Wello), with children in grade 2 and grade 6, explained that they did not pay school fees. But September was a very difficult month as she had to buy her children's school materials, a once-a-year expense much higher than whatever else she had to pay in other months. A poor woman from *Adado*, doing daily labour as her only income source, had four daughters aged 8 to 17, but only one attended school as she could not afford to send more children to school. Her only son, 20 and who attended grade 4 the year before, had quit and became a trader.

Vulnerable groups – In *Turufe*, recent migrants formed an underclass of domestic labourers, often unable to send their children to school. E.g. the 10-year old daughter of a woman migrant working as domestic labourer, did not go to school.

Children in single-parent households, orphans or step-children often faced difficulties too. For instance, a poor divorcee from *Adele Keke*, who had fled from her mentally ill husband with her five young daughters, sent two of them to school but they were turned away as she could not afford the exercise books and cash or wood contributions. A teenage girl from *Shumsheha* who had fled from home after her mother's remarriage and continuous problems with her step-father, wanted

to attend TVET but had no one to support her. So she was working to save money to realise her plan. In an orphan-headed household in *Kormargefia*, the oldest brother had dropped out to support his two younger siblings who continued to study. The eldest girl in an orphan-headed household in *Aze Debo'a* was working and trying to keep her youngest siblings at school, with some support from the *kebele* who had made them eligible for Direct Support from the PSNP.

Children placed to work in another household often were unable to attend school – In *Somodo*, a 13-year old poor girl had to stop school in grade 3 as her parents told her they could no longer afford her education. She first worked for a year in her uncle's tea house in Jimma (for 20 birr/month from 6am to 10pm every day). Her parents then found someone who needed a servant in Somodo and for whom she worked as a housemaid and baby-sitter for 50 birr/month. In 8 months she had been able to save 500 birr but she was not able to attend school.

Other forms of exclusion - In *Harresaw*, the children of a poor woman sometimes did not go to school when they were too hungry. The children of a poor divorcee sometimes did not want to go to school because they compared their tattered clothes with other children and felt ashamed, also because their father did not live with them. In the same way a poor woman from *Gara Godo* said her children would not go to school as other students laughed at them because of their old clothes.

The resulting gap in educational (and therefore employment) opportunities between rich and poor children was emphasised almost everywhere. Respondents pointed out that bright but poor students might have to stop even when their exam results were sufficient to be admitted in a government university, like the young man from Harresaw mentioned earlier. They noted that children from rich families had a lot more options, such as re-sitting for a failed exam or, regardless of their ability, attending at private institutions which their families could afford. A good example is the daughter of a rich businessman in Somodo, quoted below:

I missed being able to join preparatory college by a single mark. Because of this I joined government TVET College in Jimma and I am attending the ICT programme. I am attending level one. I will need three more years to complete as it is a 10+ level 4 program. I am living there in a rented room with one of my classmates. I go home every Friday to help my mother in trading and I get back to Jimma every Sunday or Monday. I usually take some food from home and I also buy some in Jimma. I have registered to retake the grade 10 exam (for 10 courses) this year. If I get better results I could join preparatory college to join University. In this case I would attend the preparatory college regularly and the TVET College in the evening programme.

As noted earlier there was also some evidence that better-off children had a greater chance to enjoy the benefits arising from attending preschool (Rossiter 2016).

In a number of communities there were measures to try and address cost-related obstacles, but these were 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 been phased out in two of them. It usually concerned a rather small number of children, except in Oda Dawata where USAID supported 120 orphans, Gelcha where an NGO supported 310 disadvantaged children, and Aze Debo'a where a local NGO supported dozens of female secondary students from poor background as part of a zone-wide programme.

In some cases well-to-do individuals, clans, *iddirs* and churches helped a few children. For instance, in Korodegaga (Arsi) the teachers had approached an Australian investor who had been allocated some irrigable land by the *kebele*, and he supported six orphans. Clans were said

to help in Gelcha (East Shewa) and I mentioned above the *Aba Gada* support to *Karrayu* students. Protestant churches in Gara Godo supported orphans, and in Luqa poor students but presumably, as explained in Do'oma, this concerned only their followers. The PSNP transferring resources to beneficiary households was said to help in five communities. Local forms of support, usually full or partial exemption from fees/payments for children from poor families, existed in Geblen and Harresaw (both in East Tigray), Luqa, Shumsheha, Somodo and Sirba. In Harresaw the *tabia* leadership was using part of the 'food aid budget' mentioned earlier to support a few poor students to attend secondary school.

Irregular attendance

Irregular attendance at primary school was widespread and had both community- and household-specific causes. At community level attendance was irregular on a weekly basis linked to markets – as in Korodegaga, Girar where girls sold pottery on the market, Harresaw, Adado where the afternoon shift was disliked because it clashed with the time of the daily local market, and Oda Dawata (Arsi) where most children reportedly missed school on market day. There were also seasonal attendance problems linked to peak agricultural times – with irrigation work in Korodegaga; grain harvest in Dinki, Yetmen, Harresaw and Shumsheha; *chat* harvest three to four times a year in Adele Keke; and during coffee harvest/processing season in Aze Debo'a, Adado and Somodo.

Idiosyncratic factors (at household or individual level) also played a large role. Children/youth were absent because of work-related reasons (see below), household-level shocks or events (e.g. girls helping at home after mother's delivery, mentioned in Dinki and Korodegaga), or personal circumstances such as illnesses, lack of interest, or disputes with the teachers.

There were also community-level patterns in relation to dropouts. In communities where significant numbers of somewhat educated youth migrated and/or were unemployed ('*sitting idle*'), dropouts were said to be increasing as more children/youth heard of or knew stories of successful migration and/or lost faith in education as a way of changing their life, and were seeking an alternative way.

Many children or youth attended on a 'dropping-in-and-out' basis, joining school again after periods of various durations out of school, at any education level, and sometimes for several years. For instance, in Gelcha, the 22-year old son of a politically important leader working as a guard at the sugar factory was hired at the factory after completing grade 10 but joined the Rift Valley College in Adama after three years when he got the chance of someone paying half of his fees. A young man from Gara Godo, who had migrated to Addis for work but got sick and returned home, opened a Satellite TV shop and at the same time resumed school in grade 7. Some of these young people returning to education after several years and therefore often much 'overage' found it hard, and in some cases schools did not want to take them back, as in the case of a young man in Shumsheha who had stopped for four years.

At all levels, irregular attendance could also arise from the difficulties that children and youth faced in combining schooling and work. Most children worked on the family's farm or in the house – a social norm and economic necessity in rural Ethiopia (see for instance Young Lives 2012; Orkin 2013; Pankhurst et al. 2015; and recent survey data showing that work caused 27.5% of the cases of absenteeism of enrolled 7-18 year-old students in rural areas, CSA 2017). In addition, in more than half of the communities there were mentions of children and youth working for an income, for the household, themselves or both. In Korodegaga, Gara Godo,

Do'oma, Aze Debo'a and Adado there was a sense that this was a rising trend – in line with similar findings by Pankhurst et al. just mentioned. As illustrated in the box below, this was most often dictated by necessity, and often helped to finance the child's schooling. These examples also show that some types of work were easier to combine with schooling, but not all children were able to choose what kind of work they engaged in.

Box 7: Children and youth studying and working

In *Gara Godo*, the children in a poor female-headed household were working during the school break to help cover their costs. The oldest son (18) migrated for a year on a charcoal-making job, returned with savings that he spent for clothes, shoes and school materials and returned to school in grade 8. Another 14-year son went to Awash for cotton-picking in November and December. He expected to go back to school in January on his return (although he would have missed a lot of classes).

In *Somodo*, the youngest son of a very poor farmer, age eight and attending grade 3, first worked on collecting coffee. He then bought two chickens with what he earned and was selling eggs to cover his educational expenses. The two chickens were the only livestock owned by the family.

In a poor female-headed household from *Oda Dawata* all the children at home worked and studied. The daughters were trading vegetables on the market at weekends and when they were not in school. One of them also worked on flower farms in the summer. The youngest son was helping a trader. The children covered their educational costs and sometimes could help the household.

Work could be difficult to combine with school. For instance, in *Adado*, a poor girl who sold flour on the local market, had to go to Bule, the *wereda* capital, to buy flour, and she was late or absent from school when she had to do this. Yet she had to trade to repay the loan she had taken from a relative to buy pens and exercise books. In some cases, combining work and school was just impossible, as in the case of the 13-year old poor girl from *Somodo* working as a housemaid and babysitter mentioned earlier. She planned to do something else and start school again.

In *Sirba* some of the 16 year-old boys worked for the Chinese company building the main road. Those who loaded lorries could do this for half days and attend school at the same time. But one of them was hired to weld and construct fences and the Chinese wanted him for the full day so he could not combine this with school and dropped out. However, he intended to return to school the following year and in the meantime, with what he earned he had rented 0.75 ha land and ploughed it with his family's oxen.

A 13-year old boy from *Oda Haro* had also worked for four months for the Chinese company awarded the contract of the main road to Bako, earning 2,100 *birr*. With this he bought his uniform (200 *birr*), gave 100 *birr* to his parents and bought a cow (1,800 *birr*). He felt that selling milk would be a better income-generating activity since although the road construction work was well paid, it had been very hard (carrying stones, digging ditches and holes) and bad for his health.

In a few cases, working while attending school was a choice, like a 13-year old rich girl in Adado who decided to start selling ginger and pepper during school break to get an income. Some children saw long-term benefits such as a young man in Oda Haro who thought that gaining some work experience was a good precaution in case of failure at grade 10 or grade 12 exams.

Domestic chores could be even more of a burden than paid work, and were still mainly falling on girls and young women (see the chapters on youth transitions and on women's economic participation as well). These also led to attendance problems, without even the compensation of an income. So, this girl from Kormargefia had a plan:

I am sometimes absent from school because I have to make injera and I am too tired by the evening to study. I can say that it is impossible for me to mix education with domestic work. So, the option that I have is leaving the community to go to town. In town, I will search for a job, which may have a better return. Keeping working in the day, I will continue my education in the evening programme.

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. And at primary and higher education levels, 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 finding resonating with the concept of 'diverse education tracks' outlined by Louise York in her ongoing PhD research on rural female students in SNNPR (personal communication with the author, May 2017).

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 one-to-five 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 (Tsemay), religious leaders in Adele Keke (East Hararge).

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 for longer periods 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' professional development schedules. So, in Somodo the school staff had discussed the possibility of shifting the whole calendar to close the school part of the time during the coffee harvest. But they had concluded that this was not possible because it would mean keeping the school open during part of the summer break, when a number of teachers had to attend upgrading courses outside of the community.

Gender equity – Progress and shortcomings



Boys fetching water for the school in Oda Haro



Girls playing volleyball at school in Oda Haro

Turning now to girls and young women's education in the WIDE communities, the picture is one of mixed progress and 'a long way to go'. In most communities there was visible progress and attitudes to girls' education were said to have significantly improved over the last decade. This resonates with broader trends observed at the country level – e.g. recent survey data show that while only 14% of 30+-year old women from rural areas were literate in 2015/16, this proportion was 77.5% for the 15-19 girls; a much steeper rise than for men/boys of the same age groups (CSA 2017). Educating girls also helped convey broader gender equity messages, as shown by these pictures of the school in Oda Haro.

But there were still big differences between communities. For instance, in Geblen (East Tigray), which had no school in 1995, there were a number of female post-secondary students and graduates in 2010, and two young women from Geblen were working elsewhere as teachers. In contrast in Korodegaga (Arsi), where there were few secondary students altogether, nobody knew of a girl having completed grade 10. In a number of communities, the sense that girls' education was less important than boys' was still present. In Gelcha (East Shewa) for instance, as noted earlier only five of the 20 students who sat for the grade 8 exam in 2010/11 were girls; all the students known to be at university were male; the first young woman who had completed grade 10 was the health extension worker who was working in the community. In Adele Keke (East Hararge) the ten students attending preparatory were all male and there were only two girls attending post-grade 10 education (in a Teacher Training College (TTC) and in a private college). In Luqa (Tsemay) only a handful of girls had ever completed grade 10.

Thus overall, girls still faced a lot of challenges in four remote communities (including the two agro-pastoralist ones); and the four (otherwise quite diverse) communities in Amhara were also rather conservative with regard to girls' education. The most progress had been made in the two Eastern Tigray communities, and in Aze Debo'a (Kambata) and Somodo (Jimma), two peri-urban communities. In Aze Debo'a this was also clearly linked to earlier Protestant mission activity, so that for instance, the four adult daughters of a wealthy farmer had all four completed secondary school and beyond, more than a decade before the WIDE3 fieldwork.

Greater proximity of (primary and in some cases grade 9-10) schools in many communities had helped, as well as Government overall affirmative action policy. Specific measures to promote girls' education included special committees and experience-sharing events, tutorials for girls, support with sanitation for girls menstruating, and incentives for the families (e.g. providing edible oil in exchange for girls' attendance in Luqa); but these measures were generally not

widespread. Aze Debo'a stood out as an exceptional case of large-scale and systematic support to girls' education, not least thanks to a Kambata NGO specifically targeting older girls and young women as part of broader gender equity activities.

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 circumcision, and be wanting to choose their partner or to get an independent income before marrying. Girls' educational achievements were 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. As also noted in the chapter on women's economic participation, 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.

Box 8: Interacting shifts in girls' education and perceptions of women

Educated girls seeking 'an independent life' – Two of the daughters of a successful farmer from *Somodo* had completed grade 10. Their mother explained that unlike herself who had married very young, she and her husband left them time to find some work instead of pushing them to marry.

Educated girls resisting to women's traditional roles - As seen earlier, in *Kormargefia* (North Shewa) some girls considered leaving their family and getting a job in town to be able to study better while earning a living, instead of being burdened by unpaid domestic work. One young woman from *Shumsheha* (North Wello) had divorced her husband who prevented her from attending school. In *Aze Debo'a* (Kambata) educated girls were said to be more likely to resist female genital mutilation – and the support offered by both World Vision and the *Kembatti Mentti Gezzima* (KMG) local NGO was conditional on girls not being circumcised.

Shifts in community and parental perceptions - Young boys from *Harresaw* (East Tigray) were said to prefer marrying “an educated lady” who could work and improve the household's life. In *Shumsheha* too, men were said to prefer educated women. In *Kormargefia* women's increasing participation and achievements in education were mentioned as factors in a broader shift in perceptions of women's status and role. In *Somodo* and *Luqa*, women heads of households who had successfully educated their daughters who then had found a job, were considered as models. In *Girar*, parents with girls who had graduated from higher education commented on their maturity.

Education as a path to 'modernity' - “Pursuing education and finding a good job” was an ambition for young women in *Sirba* (East Shewa). In *Somodo* girls were motivated by their desire of a 'modern life'. In *Oda Haro* young women were said to have the same aspirations as their male counterparts. In *Luqa* the few female grade 10 leavers were role models. In *Harresaw*, all of the young women interviewed wanted their children to go to school, and the health extension workers noted that educated women had a better attitude towards maternal and child health services.

Some of the reasons why girls and young women might not pursue their education were the same as for young men, (fear of failure and unemployment, attraction of migration). In four of the communities studied in 2013 migration abroad competed with girls' education both directly, as a path towards a better future, and more indirectly as a factor contributing to shifting perceptions of women's status and role. For instance in *Kormargefia* one woman highlighted the

economic and social empowerment effect of migration abroad for women, while another thought that the possibility of migrating for work had diverted the attention of many young girls, thinking of getting a job rather than pursuing their education for longer-term benefits.

However, girls and young women faced a number of additional challenges. First, were the 'conservatives' contesting the relevance of educating girls. They also faced the additional difficulty of having to combine school and domestic chores (although in some cases, especially in lower grades, boys dropped out more for farm work e.g. in Yetmen, East Gojam) and seemed to be more vulnerable to dropping out permanently in case of a household shock (Yisak Tafere and Pankhurst 2015).

Other aspects of their transition to adulthood were more difficult to fit with schooling. Menstruating girls were deterred by the limitations in availability of water, latrine and support at school. Moreover, young women growing up were navigating choices involving education as well as income-generation and marriage (see chapters on youth and girls' transitions). The widespread mobilisation against early marriage tend to gloss over the different possible rationales behind young women's choices, and had mixed outcomes in the WIDE communities. There were cases of teachers being alerted or girls reporting to the police or *wereda* women's affairs and the process being stopped; most likely these concerned girls with educational prospects and whose first choice was not to marry. Yet some of the young women clearly had chosen to marry early, as the most feasible option open to them, as also found by Louise York in her research on secondary school-age young women in SNNPR mentioned earlier. However, there were also cases of families adopting strategies in which the question of the young women's agency was not clear cut (e.g. girls being married off during the *kiremt* school break in Gelcha). Early marriage was still a real challenge especially for poorer young women.

Both early marriage and unwanted pregnancy usually led to dropout, as explained for instance by a young woman from Geblen:

I was studying to 9th grade (in Adigrat) when I became pregnant. I kept the baby, and returned to live with my mother in Geblen. My family initially was unhappy with my decision to keep the baby but they have now accepted. I am working on the PSNP since then. I don't have anything, but am happy to have my daughter. I am still young so my daughter will be a friend to me when she grows up. I knew about family planning and made the mistake of not taking contraceptive. Now I have started to live according to the lesson. I dream of continuing my education and completing university to get my own work and money to be independent, have a good life, and raise my daughter well.

As a result, while girls' participation was generally good in the lower grades it gradually decreased higher up, more steeply and starting in lower grades in some communities than in others. For instance in Dinki (North Shewa), Yetmen, Korodegaga, Shumsheha, Adele Keke and Luqa there was gender parity or even more girls than boys in the first primary cycle but this was then drastically reducing. In Oda Haro (West Shewa) girls were found to be less susceptible to dropout in early grades but this was reversed higher up.

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, as illustrated in the box below.

Box 9: Dropping-in after marriage or having children

n *Korodegaga*, a young woman who had had an abortion was married following her family's decision as the third wife of her polygamous husband, and went to live in another community as her family wished. After one year she divorced as she could not adjust to her life condition as third wife. She returned to her mother's house. She re-joined her education and at 22, she was in Grade 7 at Sodere School, while also doing daily labour to support herself.

In *Adele Keke* a teenage girl from a wealthy family had stopped in grade 6 after having got pregnant at a young age, getting married and having a daughter. But she rapidly left her husband and returned to her parents. They were keen that she returned to school, and she attended grade 8. She wanted to go to university and be a nurse.

In *Shumesheha* a rich 23-year-old had dropped out after grade 4 when her parents married her off. But after six months she had returned home and to school, divorcing her husband because he did not want her to continue her education. She was taking a private exam to pass grade 10.

A young woman of 22 from *Do'oma (Gofa)*, married with a child, returned to school in grade 9 in Sodo Town where she was living as a married woman.

These cases were still rare and prompted by exceptional circumstances. But the determination of these young women and the fact that they had been encouraged and supported by some members of their families, in otherwise very diverse communities, were encouraging signs.

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

In this section I first briefly sketch out how much perceptions of education had changed in the WIDE communities between 1995 and 2010/13. I then discuss why by 2010/13 there was a variably strong but rising sense of interrogation regarding the relevance of education.

From uncertainty to aspirations

As illustrated in the sections above, the 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 for a farmer or a farmer's wife was contested. In Geblen and Gara Godo it was feared that educated people would move away from farming. In Do'oma respondents thought literacy and numeracy were not useful for farming. In three communities some people were outright opposed to education. It was said to lead to "*deterioration of agricultural activities*" by an influential farmer in Dinki; to be "*separating children from their family*" in Shumsheha; and to be "*disturbing identity and the traditional way of life*" in Adele Keke. The picture was bleak for girls, with even more doubts about the value of educating them. Education was seen as possibly useful for non-farm activities, although in Adado and Shumsheha people remarked that there were no such activities anyway.

There was a shift towards higher expectations in 2003 in relation to both individual aspirations (including of moving away from a farming life) and the community's development. So for instance, in Shumsheha the community wanted a secondary school to be built locally. In Gelcha someone explained that educating children would mean that there would be local manpower able to give a "*development vision*" to the community. However, serious concerns related to high costs and relevance were raised in a number of communities. For instance, in Geblen some people noted that post-grade 10 education was affordable only for rich people, "*taking us back to the Imperial system*", and leaving a majority of grade 10 completers with "*empty hands, detached from farming*" and yet with no other option. There were similar concerns in Dinki, Aze Debo'a and Oda Dawata, and people wanted the government to set out mechanisms for poor children to have equal access to education, such as government loans or some other forms of credit. For respondents from Oda Haro, 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. And in Aze Debo'a there was a sense that stopping at grade 10, which would be the fate of many, was way too early.

As we saw earlier in this chapter, in 2010-13 there was tremendous (albeit uneven) progress in access to and achievements in education. This was underpinned by a cultural conversion vis-à-vis the value of education. Government awareness-raising, Universal Primary Education (UPE) campaign efforts, expanded service provision and broader modernisation trends had made education firmly part of, and interacting with other elements of the local modern repertoire as shown in the box below.

Box 10: Education and local modern repertoires

Gender - In the local modern repertoire girls had equal rights to education and to joining university (*Geblen*); 'modern parents' educated their daughters in the same way as their sons (*Harresaw*).

Livelihoods - For many youth in many communities, education was seen as a way to leave the land and farming world, as in *Dinki*. In *Turufe* the proximity of urban areas like Kuyera and the booming Shashemene was said to make this prospect all the more attractive. In *Yetmen*, *Girar*, *Gara Godo*, *Sirba*, *Kormargefia* and *Adado* the prospect of landlessness was said to make it more necessary for people to "*try education*". Education was associated with a more business-oriented mind set in *Adado*, or "*market-oriented production*" in *Somodo*.

Social development and ideas - In a number of communities, educated youth were expected to be more receptive to 'modern' ideas such as marriage by choice, sanitation, birth delivery at health centres and family planning (e.g. *Harresaw*, *Yetmen* and *Gara Godo*), neat dressing, housing and sanitation (*Somodo*) and resistance to 'harmful traditional practices' such as female genital mutilation (e.g. in *Aze Debo'a*). In *Kormargefia* educated youth married by mutual consent and also avoided spending large sums of money on weddings. Local youth with their "*modern ways of thinking*" were listened to more than in the past (*Adado*, *Sirba*).

Sometimes perceptions were more contested as in *Gelcha* where education was identified as one of the external influences leading to erosion of traditional customs, such as only marrying *Karrayu* women. In *Luqa* (Tsema) there was a fear that educated young women would not want to return, as they would prefer a town life and be free from the customary family control.

Convergence between repertoires – Education was a point of convergence between government repertoire and that of the 'progressives' in *Girar* (even those rather critical of government generally), *Shumsheha* and *Yetmen*. In *Oda Haro* even the conservatives were said to be in favour

of education. In *Luqa* education was part of the local modern repertoire closely associated with conversion to Protestantism. But elders also seemed to be convinced as they were instrumental in the campaign to upgrade the school and getting the community to agree to contribute.

Back to uncertainty?

However, this increase in enthusiasm for education may be 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 remote (e.g. Geblen in East Tigray) 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 (grade 8 leavers discouraged after failing at the exam, grade 10 leavers with marks too low to join a government institution, dropouts at various levels) left with no further education option and poor employment prospects.

There was a range of different perceptions. In several 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 aspirations coexisted with uncertainty.

This was the case in economically striving communities such as Girar or Oda Haro for instance. In Girar, high hopes that *“there would be professors, doctors and degree holders from the community”* coexisted with a conviction that it was a *“disaster for the community”* when educated youth did not get jobs. A similar tension was felt in Oda Haro with the sense of an increasing gap between the education level and aspirations of the youth and the options available to them. Some parents’ interest was waning as they saw that after ten or more years of investment the positive outcome they hoped for did not materialise, and their children emerged jobless and dependent on them. The head teacher feared that this was *“creating chaos in the community”*, particularly among the poor families, and attitudes to education were said to be ‘shaken’ even among the ‘progressives’.

Some people in communities faring less well economically but where many had invested in education shared similar concerns. In drought-prone Harresaw and Geblen in East Tigray people talked about how young people were led to *“hopelessness”* after failing at grade 8, 10 or 12 exams and how therefore, migration had increasingly emerged as preferable to this. As also noted in the chapter on migration, there was indeed a complex pattern of interactions between education and migration. To take just a few examples, in Gara Godo, respondents explained that education and migration were in fact correlated, as those with high school or college education and diplomas did not find meaningful local employment. In Aze Debo’a disillusion with education was spreading and many linked the rising migration trend to this. As one man said:

“since two years there is no access to jobs for many graduates in the area. So, what can be expected from the young generation, except leaving the country to look for jobs? This is very sad as it pushes young people who would have done well in continuing their studies, to migrate instead”.

In some of these communities there was a sense that young people were reorienting their focus away from education. So for instance, in Adado and Geblen, young people were said to develop *“an attitude of improving their life through earning their own income, giving less attention to*

education when they come across an income-earning opportunity"; or to be interested in *"being successful in making their own business"* more than *"in education and being employees."* And while this may fit with some aspects of Government's youth policy, it was seen as a disturbing trend by those who still thought that more education was a path towards a better life, who seemed to perceive a gulf between education and business rather than them being complementary or mutually reinforcing. This may link with attitudes towards TVET seen as a second best option, as further discussed below.

At the other end were communities in which commitment was uncertain, enrolment, especially at post-primary level, was still small, and expectations from education at a nascent stage. This was most notable in remote Luqa, Korodegaga and Dinki where on one hand a father saw education as *"the source for everything"* but on the other, a woman was *"begging the authorities"* to let her daughter stay at home as she was often sick. In most other communities, somewhere in between these two ends of the spectrum, concerns relating to low quality, failure and unemployment were rising.

In addition, there was uncertainty with regard to the worth of attending TVET. In 2010 TVET was considered as an option but access was a challenge in several communities, such as Dinki, Korodegaga and Girar. In Yetmen, those failing to join preparatory education seemed to consider TVET as an option but costs were acting as a barrier. In particular, many wanted to study elsewhere than at the recently established *wereda* TVETs, said to be poor quality and which offered only lowly-considered options such as training to become a mason, carpenter, or electrician for household appliances or electrical machines. In 2011/12 and 2013 perceptions were definitely mixed. There were serious concerns about low quality and/or limited relevance of the TVET options on offer (insufficiently trained tutors, lack of machines/tools, limited practice work and narrow range of options) and about 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 viewed as a second best attracting lukewarm interest, as illustrated in the box below.

Box 11: Lukewarm interest in TVET

In *Shumsheha* some respondents noted that costs had increased in the past few years, making it more difficult for potentially interested students, and there was the additional problem of low quality mentioned earlier. The prospect of not getting a job was also a big disincentive as it was said that students graduating from the TVET did not get employed. There were indeed such cases – e.g. a respondent had a cousin who graduated in water pipe work, paying 40 birr/month to finish the TVET course, but was not employed. Another knew a General Mechanics graduate from 2009/10 who had to open a barber's shop, which he did not find very satisfactory. So, a rich young man (25) who completed grade 10 in 2008/9 with enough points to join TVET decided not to do so because he thought it was 'not important' and below his capacity as he was expecting to go to university.

Nobody from *Adele Keke* had ever attended the government TVET in Kersa. There were issues of economic problems and distance. But also, community respondents explained that upon completing most graduates did not get a job because they did not acquire adequate skills. Some

people thought that the new TVET system could be an improvement¹⁰, but still, the TVET teachers were not qualified and there was a shortage of materials.

In *Somodo*, many students failed the Certificate of Competence (COC). Some respondents said that parents and students did not value TVET and private education even though it was available. So that, when students failed at grade 10 most did not try anything else and as a result, there were a large number of unemployed grade 10 leavers in the community. There were a few local examples of people who had graduated from TVET and found a job, but this seemed rare.

In 2013 an additional problem was emerging as TVET graduates were required to pass a regionally-set Certificate Of Competence (COC) recognising their skills¹¹ as an additional step before having a chance to get a job. But in some sites such as Adele Keke and Somodo, many reportedly failed. In Oda Haro too there were a number of youth who had gone for private college and TVET. However, many did not pass the COC, and while they might have gained some useful experiences on the way, there was a strong sense that these additional years invested in studying just aggravated their losses.

Conclusions and policy considerations

The evidence presented in this chapter reflects the government's longstanding and consistent commitment to education, and indicates that an impressive distance has been travelled in the past decade or so. In turn, this makes evidence-based policy adjustments all the more important, in order to safeguard the enormous investment made so far. In this final section I draw on the evidence presented in this chapter to make a few suggestions to Ethiopian policymakers and practitioners. These focus on the three main challenges which, based on the evidence of WIDE, I see as most important to tackle, in order fully to reap the benefits of education in rural Ethiopia. They are: making education more inclusive to enable inclusive growth; secondly, further building on gender equity; and finally addressing the question 'education for what?'

Inclusive education for inclusive growth

WIDE provides evidence of persistent inequalities in education opportunities and outcomes, both between communities and between socioeconomic groups, and with lifelong consequences. Yet inclusive growth, a key Government objective, requires inclusive education. The Government fifth Education Sector Development Programme V (2015/16-2019/20) (Federal Ministry of Education 2016) includes a range of measures aimed to overcome inequalities – such as 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*'. However, the challenge of equitably meeting the needs of Ethiopia's diverse and increasingly differentiated

¹⁰ This was presumably a reference to the shift introduced by the *National Technical and Vocational Education & Training (TVET) Strategy*, Ministry of Education, August 2008 – summarised in Box 1 above.

¹¹ The COC is awarded to TVET students who have demonstrated that they master the competencies that they are supposed to have acquired through attending a specific level and specialisation of TVET training. The tests are organised, results assessed and awards granted by actors external to the TVETs. It is not possible to get a government job without COC, and those with a COC have a clear advantage even for non-government jobs.

rural society will require going beyond macro-designed approaches for macro-identified categories, to offer a range of options that can be flexibly adapted to local, *wereda* and *kebele* or school contexts, and to individual circumstances.

On the supply side, a nationwide, sustainably financed school feeding programme targeting schools in food insecure areas and tailored incentive programmes in schools with hard-to-reach population could help to enrol and retain more vulnerable children. There could be good lessons to learn from the fairly large-scale emergency feeding programmes of 2015/16. Moreover, recent research evidence that children who have been malnourished in their very early childhood can catch up at a later stage suggests that nutrition interventions targeting children at school could make a difference (Young Lives 2015).

On the supply side, the Government could consider providing more support and resources systematically to locally identified disadvantaged areas/ schools, wherever they might be. A first means of doing this could be through adapting the school grant policy. Through the current enrolment-based grant formula, smaller/remoter schools, schools found in poorer communities or facing specific difficulties (e.g. pastoralist life) get the same support as better established schools, better connected to urban areas and located in richer communities. That is, the formula does not account for local circumstances, even though these determine the difficulty (and cost) of providing quality education more than the students' number. Calibrating the formula so that it provides higher grant amounts to disadvantaged schools would help them to overcome the extra-challenges they face.

The Government has also recognised that enhancing teachers' skills is not sufficient and is calling for a *"strategy to transform teaching into a profession of choice"* with a *"focus on the needs of teachers"* (Ministry of Education 2016). In addressing teachers' needs, there is a case for recognising the special difficulties faced by those teaching in more challenging environments. Offering them additional support and incentives could be one way of responding to these special circumstances.

Making education more inclusive also requires addressing the different types of individual-level constraints that prevent some children and youth from attending school. Some of these are financial. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, primary and secondary school contributions are a barrier for children from the poorest and most vulnerable households. Government could consider exempting systematically those households from all school level contributions (including in-kind and labour) or at least heavily subsidising them, and developing specific guidance to this effect for schools and communities. Schools could also be compensated for the foregone income through a larger grant, like what is done through the government health cost exemption programme. At post-secondary level indirect costs (such as transport, books) are too often what prevents bright youth eligible to join a government TVET institution or university from seizing the opportunity. Providing post-secondary scholarships, especially for those established as belonging to poorer households, would enable the more gifted to continue.

Financial or in-kind support covering education costs is one side of the inclusion coin. The other is about making education more flexible and more open to local solutions. This is indispensable to accommodate the non-linear schooling trajectories which we found to be widespread, especially among children and youth from poor and vulnerable backgrounds. There are a range of options that could allow this. First, shift education could be maintained where it is clearly the local community's preference, to ensure that children can, as they need to, combine school and other responsibilities instead of dropping out. In the same way, Alternative Basic Education

could be maintained where it is clearly beneficial for locally-identified groups of children (such as working girls in Girar). Schools could also be more strongly encouraged to adapt the school calendar to seasonal and weekly community patterns such as harvest of important crops and important market schedules.

Another way of making it easier for children and youth to combine education with their other responsibilities is to further expand evening class options at all levels, and ease transitions between evening and day courses. Distance education could also be a very useful alternative, in particular for students whose labour is badly needed at home. At the moment exclusively privately provided, it could be expanded and provided publicly or sponsored as part of a broader Government-led move towards ICT-based solutions to expand service outreach.

Modularising courses and simplifying administrative regulations for student registration and re-registration would also help young people to alternate work and education more easily. This type of trajectory is provided for in the Government TVET strategy (Federal Ministry of Education 2008). However, the approach could be expanded, to university education and even secondary and upper primary education. In the same logic as for TVET, greater modularity and easing modalities for youth to be re-admitted at school or university after years of absence would allow them to iterate between acquiring competencies and using them, as well as accommodate the constraints, financial or others, which force them to temporarily quit school. Among others it would enable young migrants or returnees to enhance their educational achievements during or after a migration experience – which as noted in the migration chapter, is currently not very easy.

Several of the suggestions made above are part of the Government's policy. For instance, the 'Blue Book' of the Ministry of Education (2002) encourages schools to adapt the calendar to local specificities and *wereda* officials to establish local criteria to allocate funding to schools etc. However, education managers may need further encouragement and support to actually implement such measures.

Education staff and administrators could also be concerned that too much flexibility in the system might work against raising the quality of education, which has been a prominent goal of the Government in the past few years. But the Government could draw on ample international evidence showing that this need not be the case, and illustrating how greater flexibility in the education system can actually support better learning – the ultimate measure of quality¹².

Building on progress with girls' education

Further progress with gender equity in education is also high on the ESDPV 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; girls' clubs in all schools; and separate spaces for providing health advice to university and TVET students. In addition to these, the evidence in this chapter suggests the need to also take account of other aspects of the transition that girls and young women go through while attending school (see the chapters on youth and girls' transitions for more on this).

¹² See Pritchett 2013, among others, for numerous examples of why locally flexibly managed and adapted outperform more rigid systems, in which 'more of the same' will not raise quality.

First, we have argued above that early marriage, hardly mentioned in ESDPV, is a complex issue that requires a nuanced approach. The Government could consider ways of learning more systematically from what has worked and not. As noted in the chapters on youth transitions and young women's reproductive health and wellbeing there seems to be room for shifting the focus on 'convincing' rather than 'coercing', whilst also opening up more skill development training and employment opportunities for young women as alternatives to early marriage. Consideration could also be given to generalising measures providing access to sanitary pads and advice on how to use them for menstruating girls, to complement the ESDPV measures related to access to water and adequate latrines in schools.

Beyond these, enhancing young women's chances to pursue higher levels of education calls for measures that would address the perceived and real higher risks that they face. Scholarships helping households to meet indirect costs, as suggested above, would help them to select safer accommodation when they live away from home to study. Young women, who become sexually active and meet young men while attending school, also need to be better protected from unwanted pregnancies. The systematic provision of adequate, age-specific and culturally sensitive sexual health advice, including on contraception and where to access it, in schools at all levels starting from upper primary and addressed to both male and female students, would contribute to this. The Government could consider developing guidance and resource materials for the teachers and health workers who could impart this advice.

At the same time, early marriage and unwanted pregnancy will still be a reality for many young women for some years to come. Keeping young mothers out of school is a useless sanction. The 'bad influence' that they supposedly might have is also a fallacy: other students are usually well aware of what has happened to their schoolmate even when she does not return to school. The concerned young women ought to be allowed to continue their education. There is no policy provision suggesting otherwise, but schools and communities may need guidance specifically aimed to (re-)admitting married young women and young unmarried mothers. As part of this schools could be encouraged to establish child-care centres to allow young mothers to attend, which would also help older sisters who care for younger siblings. Building on the suggestion made above on school grants, higher grants could be given for schools to establish and run these centres.

Finally, the WIDE research highlights that role models matter, when it comes to girls' education and more broadly (also see the chapter on women's economic participation). Seeing more educated women working as professionals in local government positions, such as health extension workers but also teachers, development agents, vets, *kebele* managers, *wereda* officials and councillors etc. would strengthen other measures promoting girls' education. Government could consider further gender-focused affirmative action in all its recruitment procedures and processes.

Addressing the 'education for what' question

Earlier in this chapter I highlighted how perceptions of education have strikingly changed in rural Ethiopia, but also that new questions have arisen, given the mismatch between high aspirations, mainly geared towards academic success, and the failure of many rural youth at exams, which leaves them with no further education and with poor job prospects. Here I suggest that addressing this mismatch is indispensable to achieve the economic transformation envisaged in the second Growth and Transformation Plan and in particular, to meet the government rural job creation and industrial policy objectives. This, in turn, calls for placing greater value on non-

academic professions and lives, and for providing ways through which these rural young people, many of them not reaching grade 10, or not with the required marks, could nonetheless continue some form of vocational and technical education and training. As noted in a recent study, *“facilitating the transition from school to productive employment is a top policy issue”*, and this in turn, calls for a system that *“imparts the skills needed for work”* (Cleland et al. undated).

The ESDPV foresees the establishment of at least one TVET facility in every *wereda*. However, TVET will only be considered worthwhile if quality and relevance are seen to improve. The evidence from the WIDE communities suggests that TVET institutions need to be adequately resourced when they are established, and that this is a prerequisite for them to become gradually able to raise more of their own revenues (as foreseen in the TVET strategy, 2008) and in turn, offer quality training.

Moreover, at the moment non-formal/informal TVET provision (i.e., level 1 and level 2 training that do not require grade 10 completion) mostly relies on non-government actors such as NGOs and private colleges. NGOs were scarcely present in the *weredas* of the WIDE communities, and private colleges were too expensive for many young people. Government TVETs are supposed to develop non-formal options but they rarely do – as they already struggle with the formal TVET streams. This, combined with the fact that most provision of TVET is taking place in urban areas, means that in rural areas very few would even think about informal/non-formal TVET as an option.

Opening up much needed options for pre-grade 10 dropouts and grade 10 leavers scoring too low for levels 3 to 5 TVET would require considerably strengthening non-formal/ informal TVET. There is a case for Government to take a strong lead in this direction, at least initially, as there are at the moment few incentives for private actors to make such an investment in rural areas. Deliberately prioritising non-formal options in public TVET centres would be one of the ways to do this. The Government could also consider how to tailor the provision of TVET training options to local ‘rural youth job creation’ initiatives. In turn, and as argued in other chapters, this could be further enhanced by expanding in rural areas the programme of support for the establishment of Micro and Small Enterprises, and by promoting the development of small/medium-size agro-processing industries in rural towns.

The lukewarm interest in TVET found in the WIDE communities resonates with the ESDPV 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 jobs will contribute to gradually change perceptions and attitudes. The Government could also promote the establishment of ‘local labour exchanges’ that would provide information services to both prospective employers and prospective employees as a way of responding to employers’ needs, and assisting TVET graduates to find work.

In addition, the WIDE evidence suggests that there is scope for addressing public perceptions more directly. Not everyone should be a university or a formal TVET graduate. The changes in rural living standards which we found in the WIDE communities mean that skilled technicians capable of repairing water pumps, grain mills, mobile phones, electric connections etc. should become increasingly valued in rural Ethiopia. Other non-farm job opportunities arising from further emphasis on rural MSEs and rural agro-processing industries would also demand such skilled labour force.

Media campaigns raising the profile of formal and informal/non-formal TVET studies and of the kinds of job that these lead to would help young people and their parents understand this. The primary and general secondary school system has been criticised for being too academic (Cleland et al., undated), and the WIDE evidence tends to support this criticism. Rebalancing the system away from this overbearing academic focus through greater attention to life skills in the curriculum and teaching/ learning process, would also help shaping children and parents' expectations in a less one-sided manner. Schools and TVET institutions could also be encouraged and supported in linking up so that the latter can provide guidance and counselling to rural students, as provided for in the TVET strategy.

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