

# Envisioning A Socially Developed Ethiopia

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## Introductory Remarks

My own area of concern is social development. But before I turn to the subject matter that is both the origins of my frequent nightmares and the source of my hope for the future, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Ethiopian Economic Association for both honoring me and making it possible to air and share my views and visions. I want to congratulate the Association for having had the courage and the foresight to use and broaden the fledgling democratic space throughout the last decade. How I wish that we were lucky enough to have among us, Dr Eshetu Chole, one of the founding members of the Association whose acute analysis and humor enriched us all and whose vision would have been a great rejoinder in the unfolding debate on the role of agriculture and industrialization going on this country at present.

Before turning to the core of my presentation, allow me to congratulate the Chair, Ms. Meaza Ashenafi, Executive Director of the Ethiopia Women's Lawyers Association who has just won the Africa Leadership Prize of the Hunger Project, otherwise known as the Nobel Prize of Africa. It is I believe a much-deserved prize and indicative of the shapes of things to come, a better world with the courage and resilience of women

and their new modes of leadership. The organization that she along with other colleagues formed about 8 years ago has already revealed the potential power of committed non state actors to bring about change of significant and lasting value even in areas of life that were considered taboo subjects just a few years ago. Thanks to them, gender justice is most certainly on the Ethiopia development agenda and as I will try to show in due course, it is a key component of a transformed Ethiopia in the future

When I first received the invitation, my initial reaction was a paralyzing cynicism in the form of what future? I spoke out loud and said to the two friends and colleagues, one bringing the invitation and the other who quietly listened to our unfolding conversation, "will there even be an entity called Ethiopia twenty years from now? A long-term colleague and friend, Dr Yacob Haile Mariam was no longer quiet. He immediately and eloquently reminded me of the ability of this country to withstand so many overwhelming adversities and its incredible ability to survive. That sobered my initial reaction. As I worked on the presentation and listened to the other speakers, I began to appreciate the immense value of the 'Vision 2020 Ethiopia'. In one of the previous sessions, someone insinuated that by engaging in this envisioning

exercise the Association is just joining the current global fad.

There is indeed a global movement known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that was adopted by the UN Millennium Summit of 2000. There is some resemblance between the 2020 Vision and the MDGs. But, in my view, the major difference is that the exercise we are engaged in, is nationally specific, not bound by a limited set of goals (as important as such time-bound and monitorable goals are) and most important of all it is an initiative that is crafted by civil society. Perhaps the most noteworthy difference is the leeway we have been given to select a subject of our choice, to pay equal importance to its historical anchoring, its contemporary manifestations and to imagine 'the shape of things to come'. In his book, *Visions of the Future: The Distant Past, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, the economist Robert Heilbroner came to the following observations regarding the future:

...As such, its proposals are no means than the first tentative sketch of a social order whose lineaments will be a very long time in the making. Its utopian ambitions aim only at establishing a kind of secular afterlife, not for ourselves as individuals but as members of an extended family called humankind.

During this long, slow, and often errant march I think we can gain strength by reflecting on the Distant Past. For countless millennia humanity found the courage to persist, the inspiration to produce extraordinary works of art, the will to create remarkable civilizations, the strength to endure miseries, and the appetite to savor triumphs, all without the support of a vision of a living future that would be superior to the past. There is no reason why the same resilience should not support humankind if it now sets its sight on the Distant Tomorrow of our Imagination.

It is enough that we can see the future as containing such imaginable possibilities. Openness and potential without assurances of outcomes are our substitutes for Yesterday's bright hopes for Progress and our consolations for Today's more knowing anxieties.<sup>1</sup>

Indulge me a minute or two to seemingly digress from what I have been requested to do by the organizers by starting out not with the past, moving to the present and envisioning a future but by sharing with you some current events that have captivated my imagination and which I assure you have relevance to the major messages that I hope to convey. It is customary to evaluate the significant events of a year that has just ended. When I look back at 1995, the year that just ended according to the Ethiopian calendar, a number of things come to mind. For me one of the most significant events was the release of the book *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia*:

<sup>1</sup> Robert Heilbroner (1995) *Visions of the Future: The Distant Past, Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

*The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*"<sup>2</sup> by the foremost historian Professor Bahru Zewde an event, I am saddened to say has entered our impoverished country without much fan fare.

To me, the major and immediate outcome of the book is **pride in our history** without however any complacency and revival of a determination to emulate those befallen Pioneers of Change. In this regard, those of you who have the access and interest in the activities of the Ethiopian community in the diaspora would know that the book has generated an unusual and healthy debate on the implication of the book for our current existence and future trajectories. As the year, came to an end, in a rare revelation of the way that the ruling party formulates policies and engages or fails to engage in debates that determine the destiny of the country, an event that commanded considerable air and print time, the Prime Minister of the country urged us to be ashamed of our past. A colleague who was bewildered by this devaluation of our history informed me that had it not been for his possession of *Pioneers* which he read and reread after each of that lengthy broadcast, he was afraid that he would have gone insane.

Moving back a year earlier, an event of some significance was the way that our sense of what was in the realm of the possible was activated by a determination of one individual citizen to clean our dirty

<sup>2</sup> Bahru Zewde (2002) *Pioneers of Change in Ethiopia: The Reformist Intellectuals of the Early Twentieth Century*, Eastern African Studies: James Currey, Oxford, Ohio University Press, Athens and Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa,

and unsanitary city. What was remarkable was not only the magnitude of success in cleaning the city but the ways that others particularly the youth and the private sector were motivated to engage in this simple but crucial civic duty. The municipality too joined the crusade to clean the city with much more resources at its disposal. But that was just to 'make up' our city in preparation for the African Union meeting of African Heads of State, who after all that fanfare, only met for a few hours and rushed back to their home driving through a relatively clean city.

I could not help wonder if those 'very busy' heads of state took note of the fact that the roads through which they were rushed back and forth were also cleaned of pedestrians and cars of the cities residents. Thus far we only have the informal version of one of the officials who was responsible for picking up guests on arrival at the airport and taking them to their hotels and back to the airport. He said that he was so afraid that they will ask him, where are the people of Addis? That he talked non stop to destruct their attention from the eerily empty streets. Alas our city is back to its unsanitary state, but we still remember that when there is a commitment to achieve social goals and an environment that encourages voluntary participation of all stakeholders, the requisite resources to achieve those will most certainly be found.

But when I recall the humongous amount of resources that were wasted in the war with Eritrea and given the current stalemate on the

boarder demarcation, it only fires my imagination of what we as a people could accomplish if we were to be voluntarily and enthusiastically mobilized as we seemed to be prior to and during the destructive war. I also can not but wander about the immeasurable advantages that would result if what I would like to call ‘Citizens Peace Initiative’ were to be launched. A situation where all of us were mobilized or still better, mobilized ourselves to reflect as a country and a people on the origins, costs both material and human, and short and long term consequences of the current war as well as those fought in the distant and not too distant past.

Another milestone that I want to recall has to do with the emergence of the draft Press Law and the debate and consultation that it generated. What was remarkable was both the speedy and thoughtful response of the private press and the willingness of the government to engage in ongoing dialogue with all concerned stakeholders. The attempt to engage broader sectors of civil society was also noteworthy. But as I wander but the fate of that Law and the ways in which it will affect our work and life, I will always recall one of the concluding remarks made by the Minister of Information in one of the meetings that I attended. He noted, the willingness of the government to engage in further dialogue but reminded the audience that **all the protest of the press and civil society is but a storm in a teacup.** To my great surprise and dismay, this and other similar observations about the insignificance of the private press did not lead to an

energized debate on the strengths and weaknesses of the independent media

Finally, allow me to share with you one more seemingly disparate anecdote that caught my attention. An article that appeared in the Reporter of September 15, 2003 with the title “The Requirement That DV Applications Be Sent via the Internet Will not Affect the Income of the Post Office Negatively” indicates the incredible myopia that we seem to suffer from. I need not remind this audience about the cotemporary debates regarding the immense developmental possibilities and threats unleashed by the emergence and proliferation of new information and communication technologies. Not only do we lack a pro-active policy and programmes that gears us towards an information-rich society, but sadly we seem to celebrate our information-poor status in this rapidly changing world that is inundated with “information explosion”.

At a time when other third world countries are exploring creative ways that they can devise policies that would make it possible for them to leapfrog stages of economic growth, those who are in charge of this sector are locked in a defensive strategy of government monopoly of the industry. Worse still, while other countries are creating ‘Silicon Valleys’ in their own countries both to attract new types of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to avert an accelerated brain drain, here we have the Post Office focusing on incomes from DV applicants who it hopes will use

government controlled tele centers in various towns. So much for commitments to the role of the private sector and the new mantra in “Attracting Investors”! Before I convince you that my talk is going to bore you with familiar anecdotes, let me return to the task given to me by the organizers of this crucial exercise in thinking about our future.

### Notes on Social Development

As indicated in the title of the paper, my presentation focuses on social development and social policy. Much as I would like to, I am not able to give a substantive historical background of social development in our country. In its broad sense, social development includes social and welfare services; poverty reduction, gender justice, human rights, child welfare; progress in tackling problems such as unemployment, violence, drugs, crime; as well as relations among different groups and development of institutions. For its part, social policy involves overall and prior concerns with social development, as a key instrument that works in tandem with economic policy to ensure equitable and socially sustainable development.

I use the concept social development and social policy as elaborated by the distinguished African economist Thandika Mkandawire. In a recent work, he stated “I define social policy as collective interventions directly affecting transformations in social welfare, social institutions and social relations. Social welfare encompasses access to adequate and secure livelihoods and income.

Social relations range from the micro to the global levels, encompassing intra-household relations of class, community, ethnicity, gender, etc. Social institutions are the “humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions’ or rules of the game’ in a society (North, 1990). It is now widely recognized that these are important determinants of economic development, which in turn, facilitates achievements in these areas.”

Such an approach challenges the well-entrenched hegemonic view prevalent also in this country that perceives a trade-off rather than complementarity between economic growth and social development. The important point that needs emphasis is that economic growth and social development are complimentary. That in the long run, social development that is **improving health and education along with meeting other basic needs raises the quality of a country’s labor force, which** is critical in determining the growth potential and competitiveness of the economy. But the lesson from successful experiences in the past is that social development ought to be tackled directly and not as an

uncertain side effect of economic growth.<sup>3</sup> Given the persistence of global poverty and the recognition of limitations of measuring poverty through income, in 1997 the UNDP described poverty in a broader sense with the use of a new measure of poverty. In its Human Development Report of 1997, it noted, “poverty has many faces. It is much more than low income. It also reflects poor health and education, deprivation in knowledge and communication, inability to exercise human and political rights and the absence of dignity, confidence and self-respect.” It is thus no longer sufficient to limit one’s definition of poverty in terms of a lack of material resources, but also reflects inadequate access to economic, technical and socio-political knowledge.

This broader view of poverty has been eloquently captured by Amartya Sen who developed the notion of poverty as capability deprivation. As he points out, “there are good reasons for seeing

<sup>3</sup> Gita Sen (1994) Development, Population and the Environment: A Search for Balance in Gita Sen, Adrienne Germain, Lincoln C. Chen (eds.) *Population Policies Reconsidered: Health, Empowerment and Rights*, Harvard Series on Population and International Health.

poverty as a deprivation of basic capabilities, rather than merely low income. Deprivation of elementary capabilities can be reflected in premature mortality, significant undernourishment (especially of children), persistent morbidity, widespread illiteracy and other failures,”<sup>4</sup> and gender inequality. Hence the capabilities approach focuses directly on the lives that people lead, on what they succeeded in doing and being.

### A Glance at The State of Human Development in Ethiopia

#### Health Status

When we explore the Ethiopian reality of both yesterday and today, the magnitude of capability deprivation is staggering. It has been noted that most of Sub-Saharan Africa suffer from capability deprivation but it is important to note that the case of Ethiopia exceeds the regional average.

<sup>4</sup> Amartya Sen (1999) *Development as Freedom*. Alfred A. Knopf, New York Pg. 20.

**Table 1: Comparison of health indicators with other developing countries, 1995.**

Country	Life expectancy at birth (years) m=male f=female	Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births)	Crude death rate (per 1000 people)	Crude birth rate (per 1000 people)	Total fertility rate
Ethiopia	50.6 (m), 52.9 (f)	110	15.0	44.2	6.5
Uganda	44 (m), 44 (f)	-	19	49	6.7
Kenya	57 (m), 60 (f)	58	9	35	4.7
Namibia	55 (m), 57 (f)	62	12	37	5.0
Vietnam	65 (m), 70 (f)	41	7	26	3.1
Sub-Saharan Africa	-	92 (1994)	15	41	5.7
World Average	-	53 (1994)	9	23	2.9
Industrial Countries	-	-	8	13	1.7

Source: The World Bank, World Development Report 1997.

A major challenge facing the country is the rapid population growth. According to the DHS, between 1990-2000, the total fertility rate declined from 6.4 births per women to 5.9 births per women, a drop of 0.5 children per women.

But it remains high in rural areas. The actual effort invested in reducing the fertility rate is minimal compared to the challenges resulting from rapid population growth especially those related to achieving other social goals.

The most elementary capability would appear to be that of survival. As can be observed from the following table, life expectancy is one of the lowest in the world and what is more we might be facing further drastic declines.

**Table 2: Life Expectancy, Infant Mortality and Child Mortality, 1984 - 1994.**

	80-85	85-90	90-95	95-00
Life expectancy at birth (all)	42	45	45	43
Life expectancy at birth (women)	44	46	47	44
Life expectancy at birth (men)	40	43	44	42
Mortality rate adult, female aged 15-59 (per 1000 female. Adults)			358	510
Mortality rate adult males aged 15-59 (per 1000 male adults)			448	550
Mortality rate under 1 (per 1000 live birth)	159	132	124 (190)	107
Mortality rate under 5 (per 1000 live birth)	167		190	175

Source: World Bank Mortality, and thus life expectancy are based on Demographic Survey rather than census estimates

In the period between 1984 and 1994, there was a decline of 2.46 percent in life expectancy. In the 1990s, infant and child mortality rates have registered a steady decline. However, as of 1995, adult mortality rate rose sharply and resulted in a sharp fall in life expectancy. According to a recent study, by 1998 an estimated 10 years of life expectancy have been lost due to the AIDS pandemic and that by 2010 another 16 years will have been lost. The same study warns that if Ethiopia does not take strong and sustained responses the epidemic is likely to take on a catastrophic proportion.<sup>5</sup> This was a study undertaken about 4 years ago and given that no strong or socially

relevant measures has been taken, there are many indications of a further deepening of the pandemic.

While reliable data on the impact of the current famine is not yet available, there is anecdotal evidence at least from the Southern region that infant and child mortality has gone up sharply. The first ever Demographic Health Survey 2000 (DHS)<sup>6</sup> revealed that although there is an increase in the effort to save children from preventable morbidity, infant and child mortality is unacceptably high especially in rural areas and in regions such as Afar and Gambela.

### Nutritional Status

Again Ethiopia registers one of the highest child malnutrition rates in Sub-Saharan Africa. As can be seen from Table 3, children suffer from being underweight, stunted or wasted. A careful look at the data would reveal that in rural areas both stunting and wasting have registered an increase of more than 10 percent since 1983 and although lower than the rural areas, the urban rate is still extremely high. Studies have revealed that children suffering from malnutrition experience poorer psychomotor development, interact less frequently in their environment, tend to delay school enrollment and score less well on cognitive tests.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank (1999) *Ethiopia: Poverty and Policies for the New Millennium*. Country: 22. Macroeconomics2. Country Department 6- Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan.

<sup>6</sup> CSA & ORC Macro (2000) *Ethiopia Demographic and Health Survey*, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia Calverton, Maryland, USA.

**Table 3 : Child malnutrition (6-59 months) in Ethiopia (population weighted)**

		1983			1992			1995/96		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
Rural	Severe Stunting	39.0	36.9	38.0				47.4	43.8	45.6
	Stunting	61.0	58.6	59.8	65.7	62.7	64.2	70.0	66.7	68.4
	Severe Wasting	3.4	3.1	3.2				3.4	3.8	3.6
	Wasting	9.0	7.8	8.3	8.7	7.2	8.0	9.3	9.8	9.5
Urban	Severe Stunting							32.1	31.9	32.0
	Stunting							56.6	55.2	55.9
	Severe Wasting							2.3	2.4	2.3
	Wasting							6.5	7.2	6.8
Ethiopia	Severe Stunting							45.2	42.2	43.7
	Stunting							68.1	65.1	66.6
	Severe Wasting							3.3	3.6	3.4
	Wasting							8.9	9.4	9.2

Definitions: Severe wasting : weight- for-age Z-score below-3: Wasting: Weight-for-age below-2>Severe stunting: : height-for-age z-score below-3:  
Stunting: height-for-age z-score below-2

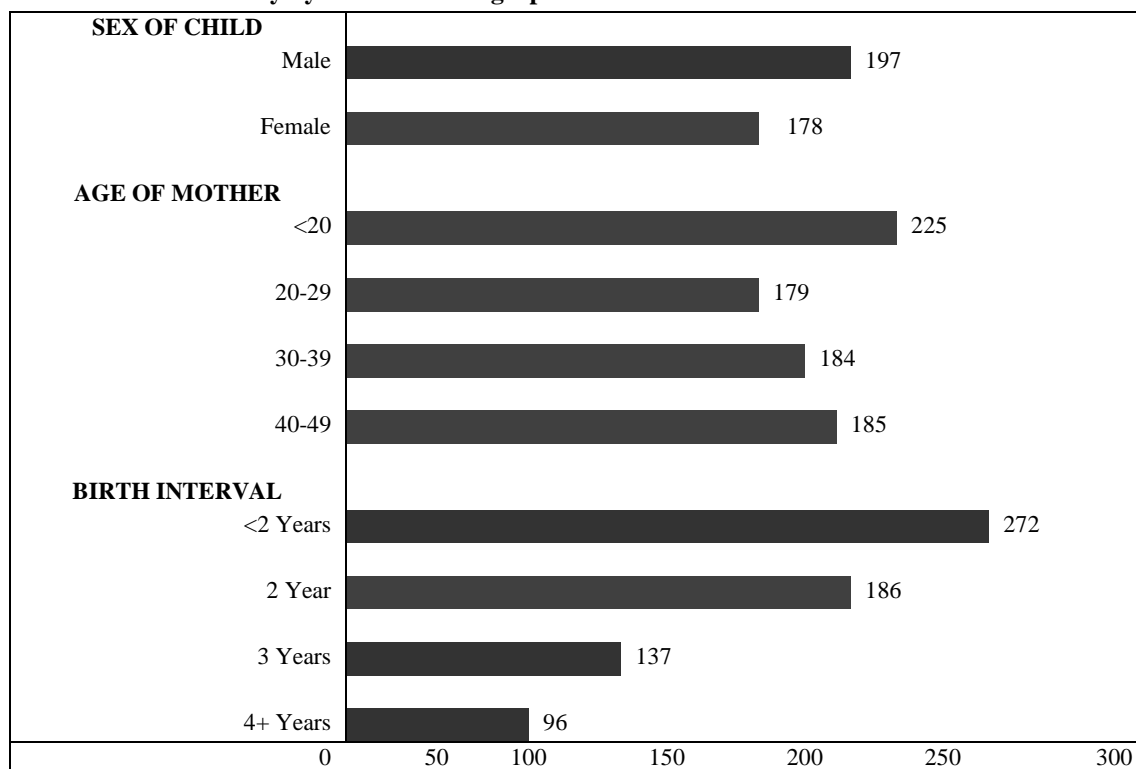
Source: World Bank (Ethiopia: Poverty and Policies for The New Millennium)

As indicated by the chart below child malnutrition is caused by many factors, the major ones being political disability, famine and recurrent drought as well as the health and educational status of

mothers. Had it not been for the availability of food aid, the situation would have been much worse. It is interesting to note that the increase in GDP growth and consumption in the 1990s has not translated into

improvement in nutritional status of children and underscores the point made earlier that these kinds of concerns have to be tackled directly through an imaginative and comprehensive social policy.

#### Under-Five Mortality by Selected Demographic Characteristics



To be brief, the dismal state of other services such as safe water, and adequate sanitation further aggravate the health status. In the 2000, the percentage of people with access to improved sanitation was only 12 percent and people with access to safe water are 24 percent with significant urban/rural disparities.

### Education Indicators

Here is another dismal indicator of Ethiopia's social landscape. Adult literacy is a long term indicator and reveals the cumulative effects of formal education and literacy programs across different generations on the total number of literate people. Not only is literacy very low but all available data indicates that it has been declining by about 15 percent for males and by about 20 percent for females between 1984 and 1994. The 1995/96 Welfare Monitoring Survey indicated a slight increase in male literacy rates and further decline for females.

It is hard to imagine what the rate would have looked like in the absence of the National Literacy Campaign that was launched in 1979. As a result of this campaign, by 1983 it was reported that illiteracy was reduced significantly. While the reliability of the existing data is questionable and the coercive nature of the overall campaign, and the insufficient resources especially those needed to sustain the rate of literacy limited its success, the goal of achieving universal literacy was commendable. While the experience indicated that it is possible to eradicate illiteracy, the failure to

sustain it by the military regime and lack of commitment to eradicate illiteracy by the current regime has led to the loss of both the minimal capabilities gained and the momentum that was generated by the previous Literacy Campaign and related informal training programmes.

### Educational Profile<sup>7</sup>

Ever since its inception about a century ago, the Ethiopian educational system has been constantly faced with two major challenges- a narrowly focused objective and institutional instability. In the recent past, the educational system set up by the Imperial regime was put through a significant number of changes under the military regime. Guided with a populist rhetoric and without much reflection on resource availability and the long-term implications of educational reform, drastic changes were introduced that have had deleterious outcomes for human resources and the development process as a whole. Well thought out and planned change is both positive and necessary. But when it is done in haste and in response to demands without analyzing both the short term and long-term consequences change can generate a vicious cycle from which it is hard to extricate the system.

Although modern education was introduced in the early 1900 by

<sup>7</sup> I have depended on the following recent study for data on the educational profile: Ethiopian Human Rights Council (2003) *The Impact of Federalism on Education in Ethiopia 1991-1998*, Ethiopian Human Rights Council, Addis Ababa. As such the profile stops at 1998. The trend since 1998 indicates further deterioration in educational attainment.

1961, only 6.6 percent of the school age children were enrolled in school. This low level of achievement is partly explained by the Italian Occupation, which incidentally introduced the notion of teaching in local languages in certain key regions. The post war imperial government took a key interest in expanding education. But on the eve of the revolution in 1974, the elementary school enrollment was only 15.3 percent. The military government committed itself to universal primary education and introduced a new curriculum. During the first decade of military rule elementary school more than doubled, as did the teaching staff and student enrollment. But the quality of education was on a constant downward spiral.

With the intensification of the war coupled with recurrent drought and the 1984 famine, education was neglected and was marked with high wastage rates, regional, gender and rural/urban disparities. In the final years of the war, schools were either looted or destroyed. The gains made in the first decade were all but reversed.

In the early 1990s, the educational system underwent another drastic form of reform and once again without much prior preparation and reflection. The three major changes entailed decentralization, use of national languages as media of instruction with implications on the quality and availability of textbooks and change in the structure and the curriculum. To be sure, there has been an increase in the educational budget but the growth has not kept pace with the growth rate of the population. Consequently, the

number of primary schools has increased by 3.1 percent with an annual growth rate of 17.2 percent indicating a doubling of primary school enrolment. The gross enrollment ratio is 45.8 percent. Not only is this still one of the lowest gross enrollment rates in the world, but also requires a closer look at the actual educational attainment.

### Gender Disparities in Education

One of the major objectives of the educational policy is the elimination of gender disparities in education. As gender disparities are caused both by factors that prevail in the educational system as well as

external factors, it requires a much more focused attention to all the inhibiting factors. The following two tables provide a gender-disaggregated data on female enrolment at elementary and secondary level and the prevailing gender gap in education.

**Table 4: Percentage of Female Students by Level, 1994/95 - 1998-99.**

Level	Year				
	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98	1998/99
Primary	37.9	36.8	36.4	36.7	37.8
Secondary	44.3	43.2	41.5	40.9	40.6

Source: MOE (1999), *Education statistics Annual Abstract 1998/99*, Addis Ababa: MOE, EMIS, pp. 28-35.

As can be seen from the following table, although there has been some growth in female enrolment, the gender gap is actually on the

increase. Female enrolment in elementary schools is 37.8 percent. The major reasons for lower female participation are attributed to girl's

engagement in domestic work, early marriage, and a growing sense of insecurity as a result of growing levels of abduction,

**Table 5: Gender Gap in Primary Gross Enrolment Ratio.**

Level	Year						
	1992/93	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1997/96	1997/98	1998/99
Male	22.0	24.0	31.7	36.6	43.0	52.0	55.9
Female	16.0	17.0	20.4	22.7	26.0	31.2	35.3
Gender Gap	6.0	7.0	11.3	13.9	17.0	20.8	20.6

Source: Calculated from MOE , *Education Statistics Abstract 1998 and 1999*, Addis Ababa: MOE, EMIS.

### Extremely High Attrition Rate

Another disturbing feature of the educational system is the high drop out rates. About 27 percent of children leave school before reaching grade two. As can be observed from the following table,

of the cohorts the enrollment in grade 1, only 42 percent of boys and 44 percent of girls survive to grade 5. This implies that more than 55 percent of the children of both sexes leave school after a maximum of four years of education. And given the overcrowding, the

teacher/student ratio and scarcity of learning materials and other constraints related to the implementation of the language policy and low level of teacher morale, there is a high probability of dropouts reverting to illiteracy.



Table 6: Repetition and Dropout Rates by Grade and Sex, 1997/98.

Level	Repetition Rates			Dropout Rates		
	Boys	Girls	Both	Boys	Girls	Both
1	16.3	19.0	17.3	27.2	26.5	27.0
2	9.0	11.7	9.9	10.9	9.3	10.4
3	7.	9.9	8.2	9.2	7.9	8.7
4	6.6	9.8	7.2	8.7	7.3	8.2
5	7.1	11.4	8.6	9.8	7.5	9.0
6	4.9	7.2	5.8	5.0	1.1	3.5
7	12.7	21.5	16.3	13.8	12.0	13.1
8	19.2	26.3	22.2	14.4	18.5	16.7
Total	10.4	14.6	12.0	12.4	11.3	12.1

Source: MOE (1999) Education Statistics Annual Abstract 1998-99, Addis Ababa: MOE, EMIS, p.88.

### Secondary Education

The growth rate in the number of secondary schools is 5.6 percent while that of enrolment increased by 6.2 percent. In 1998/99, the gross enrolment ratio was 9.7 percent with significant gender and rural/urban disparities indicating that **90 percent of secondary school age youth are outside of the school system.**

### Gender Equality

One of the major goals of social policy is gender equality both for its intrinsic and instrumental value. In Ethiopia, this has been one of the most neglected aspects of development despite the prevalent rhetoric. Advocates of gender justice have pointed out a myriad of disadvantages faced by women in Ethiopia ranging from early marriage and other traditional practices with dire consequences on their own health and that of their children, their limited participation in education, employment and decision making structures. Looked at from a comprehensive social policy, gender disparities have a determinant role in population

growth rate, children's mortality and morbidity and the overall educational and health status of the country and overall poverty.

The DHS of 2000 and recent analysis of household survey results all point to the key role of maternal knowledge, and women's education as a key factor in lowering fertility, reducing child malnutrition and addressing a host of other social concerns. A case in point is the recent study on child malnutrition<sup>8</sup> that comes to the conclusion that in addition to expanding access to schooling, promotion of food security and income growth, there is a need for complementary and timely response to child malnutrition in the form of increasing maternal nutritional knowledge. Through such measures, the study concludes child malnutrition in Ethiopia could be reduced by up to 43 percent. For me, the key message is the need for complementary responses to social concerns as income growth is not a panacea for these problems.

<sup>8</sup> Luc Christiansen and Harold Alderman (2001) *Child Malnutrition in Ethiopia: Can maternal Knowledge Augment the Role of Income*. Africa Regional Working Paper Series No. 22, the World Bank

### Towards a Comprehensive Social Policy

The social indicators in Ethiopia leave us with two stark options. Tekeste Negash used the concept 'crisis' to organize his observation of the educational system that prevailed under military rule<sup>9</sup>. My own sense borders on 'collapse' of our health and educational system. Not to mention the uncertainty surrounding the limited pension coverage. Continue the current approach of treating social concern as residual to the illusive economic growth and face an apocalyptic future of unimaginable proportions of poverty, waste and total marginalisation from the rest of the world; or mobilize all our mental, human, moral and other resources to devise a responsive social policy. The major point I am trying to make here is that the state of social development today is a barometer of what we will become tomorrow. Moreover, the dire state we are in today is the outcome of failed

<sup>9</sup> Tekeste Negash (1990) *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*. Uppsala: Uppsala University, Department of Education

policies and resource misallocation of yesterday.

The most alarming legacy of the military dictatorship was the decline in real government expenditures on the social sector. For example a recent World Bank study<sup>10</sup> indicates that in 1989, the military expenditure as percentage of GDP was 13.6, a whopping 239% of the education and health budget. The study goes on to show that by the late 1980, defense expenditure was 30-35 percent of public expenditure, a direct contributor to the low levels of investment in basic infrastructure and human capital.

Those forms of disinvestments in health and education are felt today as evidenced by amazing depletion of human resources on the one hand and the slow down pace of mortality and fertility decline. The lesson from our past is that investment in the social infrastructure, pays off in the medium and longer terms. If we are going to have a better future tomorrow, we have to make the right types of social investment today. The time dimension is extremely crucial. But we need to draw dispassionate lessons from where we went wrong in the past and how we can overhaul the system without destroying the gains already registered.

The most immediate and urgent task is to have a comprehensive national debate on the state of social development in Ethiopia. Other countries have tracked the progress made and the remaining challenges

<sup>10</sup> World Bank (1999) Ethiopia: Poverty and Policies for the New Millennium, op cit.

through the publishing of National Human Development Report that is then put to public scrutiny. A through discussion of census data is another method used as a powerful tool of informed and participatory policy-making. It should not be perceived as a ritual that we perform every so often whose regularity we can change at a whim as the Parliament did a few weeks ago when they took the decision to postpone the undertaking of the census. A recently missed opportunity as regards to participatory policy making was the occasion of the formulation of the Poverty Reduction Paper. But this is an ongoing process and recognition of the dilemmas we face should help us change our inflexible stands on both side of the state/civil society divide.

The alarming spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic forces us to move our analytical gaze to social relations in the household, in the community, and that illusive phenomenon which goes by the name of culture. What I am suggesting is that we should try and turn disastrous circumstances- those affecting survival-such as famines and the HIV/AIDS pandemic as an occasion to engage in new possibilities.

The anecdotes referring to the cleaning of our city was to show that municipal activism does not depend on economic growth and can be undertaken now and most consistently. But the objective should be first and foremost geared to our needs as citizens. In recognition that sanitation is

important for our well-being. Our history is full of stories of valiant and spontaneous mobilization in times of national crisis. We need to excavate those social norms and structures that still flourish in the form of Debbo, Iddir and recreate trust in each other and in institutions but only those that are transparent and that we will be able to hold accountable.

### Envisioning A Transformed Future

A concerted effort towards a holistic approach to development policies, that is the crafting and simultaneous implementation of welfare-enhancing and productivity-enhancing measures will translate into healthy, knowledgeable and active citizenry, an accountable state, dynamic market and sustainable economic growth. If such a path were to be followed, I envision a dramatic improvement in human development twenty five years on.

### Healthy Children

This would imply healthy babies will be born and live a long, productive and meaningful lives as a result of a plethora of measures all of which defy the current belief that states that "Children grow through chance". Responsibility for childcare would be shared equally by both parents as well as childcare institutions. The cognitive capacities of children would have been highly stimulated through encouraging their curiosity and keen

interest in discovery prior to their enrollment in regular schools, while they are in school as well as over and beyond their school years. In other words, education will start before school and becomes a life long phenomenon.

### **Literacy**

The goal of universal adult literacy would be one of the powerful tools used not only to impart the mere ability to read and write and to enumerate, but also to unleash the process of health education in the broadest sense of the term, economic awareness and civic engagement. It is such a life long and broad based learning that facilitates the full implementation and sustainability of health, education and environmental policies in addition to its direct link to economic growth and rapid cultural transformation.

Schools would be arenas that unleash the full human potential of students through a variety of educational and recreational approaches. The process of learning will not only focus on variety of academic, technical subjects, but it would also impart core values and practices such as democracy, human rights, gender and ethnic equality and relevant life skills ranging from nutrition, health including reproductive health and sanitation, technical know-how and household management. Through an emphasis on social learning that is learning by doing and a variety of extra-curricular activities, schools would encourage the formation of a

multiplicity of school clubs that would instill civic engagement, organizational skills and broaden the cultural horizons of the participants and their ability to collaborate for shared concerns.

In recognition of both the intrinsic and instrumental value of education and training, the government, the private sector, civil society, communities and parents would allocate substantial resources that would make it possible to overhaul the educational system and create the entire necessary cultural and technological environment. Schools would be considered and maintained as one of the most pivotal institutions by the community. The current milestones of schooling, the 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades would only be a pause that would be used to choose the most suitable future training needs and will not be considered as the culmination of the life long training process.

### **A Skilled and Confident Youth**

The tangible outcome of such an investment in a world class quality education are knowledgeable, confident and creative youth that will have the imagination, skills and ready willingness to engage in bringing about further economic growth and social development- a youth that is fully informed and proud of the past, present and future potential of its country and continent and one that would have the choice to be a respectable world citizen; A youth that excels in a variety of sports, scientific

innovations, as well as art, music and limitless other possibilities: A youth that is imbued with the full extent of democratic values, including gender and ethnic equality and one that can celebrate and further enrich the cultural diversity of the country.

### **Changed Gender Identities**

Such dramatic cultural changes will certainly lead to new gender identities, norms and practices of equality. The genesis of a truly just and democratic society is the family and starts with the transformation of the prevalent gendered division of labor within the family along with the associated distribution of power, responsibility and privilege. In such a new context, notions of maleness and femaleness will no longer be premised on hierarchy, subservience and domination of one sex over the other ushering an end to intra-household gender inequalities in the distributions of benefits and the difference in patterns of household expenditure.

In brief, social norms or the social construction of masculinity and femininity that defines men as the producers and primary income earners and women as dependent housewives would have given way to equality in terms of men's and women's ownership of assets, responsibilities and equality of opportunity. This will put an end to the norm of unilateral decision making within the family. Males will be just as skilled in child care and household work as they are with public activity while women

will be able to function equally comfortably in public and will be able to engage in all types of occupations and public interests.

Harmful and life-threatening cultural identities and practices would have been replaced by life-affirming and creative endeavors. A culture of equality with respect to inheritance by children would be routinely implemented. The prevailing political context would be one where the values of equality and democracy as well as their institutional forms are guaranteed. Such an enabling environment would create public spaces where both men and women would have equal rights and voice in

deliberations over such matters as rights and culture as well as other national policies.

### **The Flourishing of Associational Life**

Traditional associations such as *Equbbs*, *Idders* and *Mehabers* would be reinvented to suit the changing times and values but retain and regenerate their core values of solidarity, social trust and practical reciprocity. In the meantime, Ethiopian society young, adult and old would be inundated with a variety of associations and political parties ranging from professional associations, issue based organizations, cultural and

educational associations etc. Together with a vibrant media, the Ethiopian landscape would be inhabited by an active public-spirited citizenry, by egalitarian political relations and a social fabric of trust and cooperation. As Putnam reminded us, "Citizens in civic communities expect a better government and (in part through their own effort) they get it. They demand more effective public service and they are prepared to act collectively to achieve their shared goals."<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Robert D. Putnam (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey

