



DEPRIVED CHILDREN AND EDUCATION

Ethiopia



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Executive Summary

Ethiopia is still facing huge challenges on the way to achieve universal primary education. The current net enrolment rate stands at 57.4%, and the education sector is characterised by a large rural-urban disparity, as well as a serious gender gap. Access to school is one of the problems that needs to be overcome, a problem that is especially pronounced in rural areas. According to the 2001 Child Labour Force Survey, one in seven children gives as reason for non-enrolment the lack of a school in the area [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2001]. The 2000 Welfare Monitoring Survey found that one third of the children in the rural sample lived at least 5 kilometres from the nearest primary school. Lack of schools in remote rural areas and overall poor infrastructure make access a significant obstacle on the way to achieve Universal Primary Education. In rural areas only 43.6% of children are enrolled (compared to 85.5 % in urban areas).

The locations

The research in Ethiopia focused on areas where schools are available, but where enrolment and/or attendance remain low. Three locations in two Zones were selected: two in the southern Zone of Borena, a sparsely populated (semi-) pastoralist area bordering Kenya, and one in the Eastern Hararghe, close to the border with Somaliland. Common to these locations was the rural context, dominated by subsistence economy and small-scale trade, a lack of general infrastructure, as well as deeply-rooted traditions that dominate many aspects of daily life. In Borena, the economic and cultural life is centred on the raising of cattle and other livestock. The area is very prone to drought and poverty levels are high. In the area around Gursum in East Hararghe, growing and trading chat, as well as small scale farming, dominates the economy. Overall school enrolment in the research areas was very low, between 10% and 30%. This was the result of a combination of factors, some stemming from the communities and their families, others related to the school itself. Poverty, the high demand for child work from the families, and strong traditions, formed major obstacles.

Perceptions of relevance

In all researched areas, schooling was available and, theoretically, within reach of the vast majority of the population. Nevertheless, only a small proportion of families opted to educate their children. Besides various obstacles that will be discussed below, the perceived (lack of) quality and relevance of education played an important role. The motivation to send a child to school is related to what individuals or communities see as the purpose and benefits of education. In rural Ethiopia the majority of children do not attend school, which also means that there is no social norm established. Sending a child to school entails defying convention and tradition, and is thus a conscious decision that is related to certain expectations of what education can provide. It is therefore rather a question of why a child should be sent to school rather than why it should remain with the family at home. Staying at home, even if the child is not required for labour, is presently the normal thing to do.

Of those parents sending one or more of their children to school, the overwhelming majority see education as a potential path leading to employment in the formal sector. A family member with a paid job means a secure income benefiting the whole family. Such a future is becoming increasingly important due to the decimation of livestock, regular droughts and increasing population pressure on limited resources. The expected future financial benefits of education serve as a major motivational factor. But the benefits, if they are being realised, depend on the level of education and the employment opportunities in the respective area. When talking about the relevance of education as well as the expected returns, it is important to bear in mind what the likely termination grade of schooling of the particular child will be. One of the problems with primary education in rural areas is that the last grade at the village school is often the termination grade as well. Education in the village primary school is only affordable because the child can remain living with the family and can still assist with household and/or farm chores; however, sending a child to another school for further education is far more difficult and costly (direct, indirect and opportunity costs). Many village schools offer only education up to grade 6, and thus a level of education of only limited use for proper employment. In the eyes of many parents grade 10 is the minimum level of education that can pave the way for formal employment.

In the absence of opportunities for further education and training and the resulting lack of employment prospects, traditional values appear to weigh far heavier than the perceived benefits of education. The benefits are only theoretical and the decision to stick to the old ways then appears as a rational decision. Awareness campaigns on education focus on the economic benefits of education, and this is generally reflected in the expectation which students and parents voice. The problem is that those benefits often do not materialise, at least not in the short term or in the expected manner, which easily leads to frustration, disillusionment, and consequently non-enrolment or dropout. The lack of successful role models is also an important factor. In (clusters of) villages where at least one person has succeeded to make a career and has contributed something to the family or the community at large, the motivation to invest in education is likely to rise.

Perceptions of quality

Most of the school-going children in the research areas were first generation learners and their parents did not always have a clear idea about what their children were exactly supposed to be learning at school. When parents raise questions about quality, they are not so much related to the curriculum or the teaching methods, but rather to the visible outcomes such as the ability to read and write, the ability to continue with further education or training, and/or to subsequently find employment.

Another major indicator named by respondents for the quality of education was the discipline of the teachers. The low motivation and morale of the teaching force, manifested in frequent absence, coming late and leaving early as well as “passing time” at school, is a very worrying trend. The majority of the interviewed teachers mentioned a feeling of being under-paid and neglected. The directness and openness with which some teachers voiced their discontent shows how serious this issue is. Teachers lament the low prestige that their profession carries, which is reflected by their low salary. Many of them became teachers because they didn’t have any other training or employment options, and the teaching profession was a last resort. At the same time, lack of supervision at all levels enable teachers to get away with serious neglect of their duties. Control

mechanisms within the school are not functional, and school inspection by independent officers does not take place, at least not in a structural way.

This low motivation and morale has severe consequences for the quality of education, a fact that is not lost on parents, whether they are educated themselves or not. While illiterate parents might be less critical of the content of the curriculum and the teaching methods than those who have been educated themselves, they are still very critical when they see that their children are not taught at all or not to the extent that they are supposed to be. Especially when families have to make sacrifices in order to send a child to school, this failure to deliver a minimum standard of education can easily tip the balance and lead parents to the conclusion that education is not worthwhile.

The quality of the education has a direct bearing on the judgment of children and their parents. If it cannot possibly contribute to real improvements of the lives of children, their families and communities, enthusiasm will be difficult to generate. Since many of the parents themselves have never gone to school and do not have much understanding of what should be thought and how it should be thought, the most basic indicator for quality is the amount of time that a teacher actually teaches. In this regard, a huge capacity is lost as many teachers fail to utilise their time and other resources to full capacity. Since education has not yet been accepted as a social norm, the work avoidance by teachers has far-reaching consequences.

The formation of school committees and parent-teacher-associations is supposed to improve communications between the schools and the communities, enhance enrolment, attendance and retention, as well as address the accountability of the teaching staff and the quality of education. School committees and parent-teacher-associations exist. In practice, however, these goals are rarely attained. The committees and associations, if functioning at all, mostly fail to provide a platform on which teachers and community members can openly address challenges and ultimately improve the education opportunities for their children.

Other obstacles

Child work

Obstacles to education coming from within the communities and families concentrated around three major issues, namely that of poverty, tradition (including traditional gender roles) and the high demand for child work within the household [Admassie 2000]. In Borena, the traditional economy, including the traditional division of labour, has a strong influence on school enrolment and attendance. The (semi-) pastoralist lifestyle in Borena results in a high demand of child work within the families. Children play a central role in herding livestock (cattle, goats, sheep and camels), working on the family plots, fetching water and firewood, assisting with other household tasks and minding younger siblings. The ways in which these tasks are organised and assigned form a major obstacle to school enrolment and regular attendance. Herding, for example, is time-intensive and rather incompatible with regular school attendance. Particularly during the dry season, the animals have to be taken out for many hours, seven days a week. Herding only in the afternoon, after schooling hours, would not provide the animals with sufficient fodder. But more than the actual work load as such, it is the strict division of work according to age and gender that poses the bigger challenge. Herding (especially of smaller livestock such as goats and sheep) is a task assigned to children; (young) adults refuse to take on these tasks [Kielland & Tovo 2006]. Only in large families,

where these tasks can be taken on by other siblings, do parents recognise the option to send some of their children to school. These activities are also partly to blame for late enrolment; some children have to wait until a younger sibling is old enough to take over their work. It is also the reason why not a single family sent all children to school. The enrolment of one child depends on whether the respective work tasks can be taken over by another member of the household, usually a sibling. Children start helping at an age as young as 6 or 7 years old. At that age they are seen as mature enough to start herding goats and sheep, animals which are very easy to handle and which find sufficient fodder close to the village. The next step is herding calves, a task left to 8-10 year-olds. From the age of 10 or 11, boys are deemed old enough to herd cattle, a task which takes them away from the village for a substantial amount of time. Working on the land together with the adult men is left to older boys as it requires substantial physical strength. Girls start helping their mothers from an age of 7 years onwards; it is not rare to see an 8 or 9 year old girl caring for younger siblings when the mother is occupied with other tasks.

A reorganisation of the workload would free children of their work burden. Such reallocation of work is possible in theory, but very difficult to achieve in the short term. It is hampered both by limited resources and deeply-rooted traditions. Changes occur where the traditional modes of livelihood are under threat, as exemplified by the sharp increase in enrolment at a school in Borena after a severe drought had led to an extreme decimation of livestock, freeing children from their herding responsibilities. Around Gursum, where animal husbandry is far less important and where farming and trade stands more central, the demand for child work was less prominent and school enrolment and attendance were higher. Families relied on their farm plots surrounding the villages, and the main source of income was chat and peanuts. In Gursum, many more children, mainly boys, were found idling in the villages instead of either working or going to school. The disparity between the work loads of females compared to that of males was very pronounced in this area, and it was often on demand of their mothers that girls remained at home and helped rather than go to school. Girls assist their mothers at home and run errands for male members of the family. Girls and young women also sell chat to traders, either on the local market or along the road, an activity which is incompatible with regular school attendance. Also here, the traditional division of labour is at least as decisive as the work load itself.

As child work forms a major obstacle to school enrolment and the main demand for child work stems from within the family, those families with relatively more assets, more land and more livestock do also have more reason to keep their children out of school. This was observed to be more pronounced in pastoralist Borena than in Gursum.

Within the tightly-knit communities, families also guard the reciprocal commitments and the social and economic balance. Families view it as very problematic if a member of the family cannot fulfil a duty, such as communal work, because one or more children are attending school instead of practically assisting in the household. Social coherence and equality is valued by some communities higher than personal ambitions, even if this prevents education and advancement of children and youth. Men in East Hararghe, for example, could not sell their main crop chat on the market without “losing face”, as trading chat is a typical female task.

Poverty and child agency

Poverty is an obstacle most often invoked by parents as being the major obstacle to education. Even though the fees are small, they can still be substantial for very poor families. In a subsistence economy, the ability to absorb economic shocks such as a harvest failure and loss of livestock is very limited. Cash income is very scarce and any additional investment that fails to bring short-term returns is very unattractive. Having to buy pens, exercise books, clothes and shoes for school-going children can effectively prevent parents from sending their children to school.

Another obstacle related to poverty is migration. In Borena, in the case of drought or failed harvests families have to migrate with their livestock. This of course impedes enrolment and regular school attendance. In some such cases, in the context of poverty and food insecurity, incentives such as school feeding programmes help to attract and retain students.

Nevertheless, there appears to be no certainty that sending a child to school depends on the relative wealth of a family. In a number of cases, the poorest families did send their children to school, while the better-off did not. The motivation and determination of both the parents and also the children themselves proved to be far more important than their economic situation. Especially the motivation of children is not to be underestimated. Even when parents do enrol their children in school, they often lack the time to supervise regular attendance, let alone assist their children in their learning efforts. Motivation and determination of a child are therefore crucial for success at school. In all research locations, children were encountered who even went to school in defiance of their families' wishes. Those students, both male and female had struggled to convince at least one family member or influential community member to support their ambition. In all research locations, examples of this successful "agency" were found, and these students also served as role models to others. This is especially challenging for girls as they also have to break through traditional gender stereotypes.

Gender

Apart from the higher work load of females, general notions of gender roles often prevent girls from pursuing their education once they reach puberty. Early marriages are still very common, even more in East Hararghe than in Borena, and many families fear that education might "spoil" their daughters and lessen their chances of a "good match". Girls are often married as young as 12-15 years old, and even though the practice is officially discouraged it is still prevalent. An early marriage is said to be desirable as young brides are especially sought by bridegrooms and "more easily formed" for their traditional roles. An educated girl or young woman is already defying her traditional role by attending school and socialising with boys. While many parents worry about their daughters individually, the social pressure and public opinion within the community plays a paramount role in the decision to send a girl to school or not. Sending a daughter to school easily exposes a family to criticism and gossip, and successful role models for girls' education become very important. The decision by the government to employ an increasing number of female teachers has helped to encourage girls' enrolment, but especially in the higher grades, a large gender gap remains.

Conclusion

It will not be possible to provide education for all marginalised and hard-to-reach groups of children in Ethiopia through a one-size-fits-all policy. Economic and cultural particularities and realities differ substantially and any attempt to reach more children and achieve higher enrolment and retention, will have to take these economic and cultural realities into account, either by accommodating or by altering them. Tasks assigned to children, either out of necessity or tradition, are a major obstacle to enrolment. While certain activities could be combined with education, many of those tasks are, by their duration, intensity or nature, not compatible with regular school attendance.

While problems of access to primary schools still need to be overcome, the quality of education has to be addressed in such a manner that more parents feel that the sacrifices they have to make are justified. The poor quality of education, particularly the poor motivation and morale of the teaching force has to be addressed. The PTAs as they function today, embedded in the power relations, have failed to address this issue. In a country where education has not yet sunk in as the social norm, the laxity of teachers only helps to maintain the social distance between school and the illiterate villagers. For them the quality of education starts and falls with the active presence of teachers.

As long as education is propagated as an investment from which a financial return can be expected, the relevance in a rural context will be limited. Even where primary schools are available at the village level, the lack of secondary schools makes that investment in education questionable in the eyes of many parents. It is important to bear in mind what the purpose of (basic and primary) education is supposed to be in general as well as in a particular context and to what extent it will be accepted by the local population. As long as education is seen as an investment rather than a right, and success is measured by employability, the relevance of primary education as such is very limited. Due to the apparent lack of direct benefits of education, traditional considerations outweigh attempts to promote the importance of schooling.

Introduction

International treaties have recognised free and compulsory elementary education as a human right for more than half a century now, and especially during the last decade the drive for universal (primary) education has gained momentum. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), agreed upon in 2000, set 2015 as the year in which universal primary education (MDG-2) and gender equality (MDG-3) are to be achieved. Despite such efforts and their echoes in national policies, many children are still out of school. The mid-term results for MDG-2 suggest that big strides have been made in terms of universal enrolment, but also give reasons for concern.

The overall statistics are merely averages and tend to hide what happens to the most vulnerable and most excluded children. Various forms of deprivation continue to put tens of millions of children in a difficult situation without access to education. The estimates of these children not attending school vary from 100 to 200 million. Successes in extending primary education have been unmistakable, but actual school attendance in most regions is still dramatically low, despite high gross enrolment figures (and fairly lower net enrolment figures).

Table 1: Out-of-School Children (millions)

	1998	2002	% Girls
Sub-Sahara Africa	45	40	55
Arab States	8	7	58
Eastern Asia	8	15	58
South & West Asia	36	30	59
Latin America	4	2	45
North America & Europe	2	2	53
Central & Eastern Europe	3	3	55

Source: UNESCO [2005:48]

Table 1 shows that the number of out-of-school children has generally decreased since 1998; unfortunately, the progress is slow and too many children have not yet found their way into the education system.

The current policy focus on education is not only based on article 29 of the UN Convention on the rights of the Child: “the child’s right to develop its personality, talents, physical and mental abilities to its fullest potential” [UN 1989]. Education is also generally considered a key factor in reducing poverty and child labour and in promoting democracy, peace, tolerance and development [UNICEF 2002b]. Both approaches largely draw their attention away from the perspectives of parents and children themselves. Efforts have been directed instead towards sensitising uneducated masses of their “right to education” and the “importance of education”. Yet not much is known about how exactly uneducated people perceive education as a tool (or impediment) for their own

family's subsistence or advancement. What future expectations and aspirations do parents have for their children, or children for themselves? How does (basic) education feature in these ideas? And does the quality of the education on offer influence such ideas? What are the perceived obstacles preventing access to education, and which changes should be made to remove these obstacles?

Repeatedly, there has been a summing up of relevant factors that form major barriers for achieving basic education for all. Sarkar [2004:12] has classified these factors into four groups:

- *Accessibility* - the physical and social distance to school, discrimination, the burden of household chores, and the burden faced by children combining work and schooling
- *Affordability* - direct, indirect, and opportunity costs
- *Quality* - the lack of infrastructure, facilities, materials, and support systems for children, inadequate conditions of work for teachers, low status of teachers, lack of adequate training, aids and materials for teachers, and the lack of sensitivity of education authorities and teachers to the needs of children at risk
- *Relevance* - curriculum detached from local needs, values and the aspirations of children at risk, curriculum inadequate to prepare students for gainful skilled employment

Quality issues have become a central theme in the education debate over the last few years. Increasingly, it is being acknowledged that quality must be seen in the light of how societies define the purpose of education [UNESCO 2004] and that quality can influence parents' choices to invest in education [Plan Netherlands 2006]. However, not much is known about the (lack of) intrinsic, social, cultural or economic benefits different parents and children may see in the education that is on offer to them, or in which way they feel school-attendance may influence their children's prospects. By collecting village case studies from seven developing countries, this study aimed to provide insights into local ideas about future expectations and aspirations of parents and children, and how (basic) education features in these ideas.

In periods of three to four months during 2006 and 2007, research was conducted in different areas of three South-Asian countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, and Pakistan) and four Sub-Saharan-African countries (Ethiopia, Kenya, Burkina Faso and Ghana). These countries were selected on the basis of their enrolment and attendance data.

Figures for the selected regions for 2000-2005 show that in Sub-Saharan Africa only 61%, and in South Asia 74% of children of primary school age are enrolled [UNICEF 2006:105]. In certain countries within those regions figures are significantly lower. The selected countries, with the exception of Kenya, used to have adult literacy rates that were substantially below the average of developing countries, but have made substantial progress over the last decades. The exception is Kenya, where the youth literacy rates in 2004 were actually lower than in 1990. Table 2 shows that where the countries in Asia have done reasonably well (in Nepal, for example, female literacy increased from 27% in 1990 to 60% in 2004), the African countries have had mixed results. Burkina Faso still had, in the early years of this century, male and female youth literacy rates of only 25.5% and 14.0% respectively.

Table 2: Literacy in Selected Countries

	Adult & Youth Literacy				Share of Females in Illiteracy		Youth (15-24) Literacy Rate				Not enrolled (millions)
	1990		2002-4		1990	2002-4	1990		2002-4		2002-4
	M	F	M	F			M	F	M	F	
Bangladesh	44.3	23.7	50.3	31.4	56	57	50.7	33.2	84.2	67.7	2.9
Nepal	47.4	14.0	62.7	34.9	63	65	67.0	27.3	80.6	60.1	0.9
Pakistan	49.3	20.1	61.7	35.2	62	63	62.5	30.6	74.8	53.9	8.1
Burkina			18.5	8.1					25.5	14.0	1.4
Ethiopia	37.6	19.8	49.2	33.8	57	57	51.5	34.1	63.0	51.8	5.7
Ghana	70.1	47.2	62.9	45.7	65	60	88.2	75.4			1.3
Kenya	80.9	60.8	77.7	70.2	68	58	92.9	86.7	79.8	80.0	2.0
Developing countries	75.9	57.9	83.2	69.5	63	64	85.8	75.8	85.0	88.7	

Aggregated from UNESCO [2005]

Access to the research areas was facilitated by local staff of Plan International and other NGOs, but they were not necessarily regions in which these NGOs worked. The long stay in each area, a minimum of three weeks, allowed the researcher to build up a relationship of trust and to distinguish official statements from reality.

This study was initiated to deepen the understanding of household and village level perception of education in rural areas, and to get an insight into the factors determining the continuation of non-enrolment and non-attendance despite the efforts made by governments and NGOs to facilitate education for everyone, including the poorest segments of society. A central, underlying theme is the perception of education in terms of relevance and quality by parents and children, and the way these perceptions influence decision-making with regard to school enrolment and attendance. The main question addressed is:

How does the perception, on household and village level, of relevance and quality of education, in interaction with other economic and cultural factors, lead to non-enrolment, non-attendance and/or dropout?

The research was qualitative in nature and the results cannot haphazardly be applied to any country at large. However, the research areas were selected in such a way that they covered the poorest families in the poorest areas where school-enrolment is low.

The research involved close contact with the various stakeholders, particularly with the parents and the children. Much attention was given to their perceptions, and thus to how their circumstances, ideas and experiences may explain non-enrolment, non-attendance and dropout, or enrolment and attendance in the face of adversity. Such insights are needed in order to design education policies that respond well to the ideas and circumstances on a grass-roots level.

Country selection

Ethiopia was chosen as one of the seven countries to be included in this research. While Ethiopia is officially committed to achieve universal primary education, it faces huge challenges on the way to achieve this goal. The current net enrolment rate stands at only 57.4%, and the overall situation in the education sector is characterised by a large rural-urban disparity, as well as a pronounced gender gap. Access to school is one of the problems that need to be overcome, a problem that is especially pronounced in rural areas. According to the 2001 Child Labour Force Survey, one in seven youths blames the lack of a school in the area as the reason for non-enrolment [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2001]. The 2000 Welfare Monitoring Survey found one third of the children in the rural areas of the sample lived at least 5 kilometres away from the nearest primary school. But even out of the group of rural children with a primary school in the immediate vicinity, only 43.6% are enrolled (compared to 85.5% in urban areas). These numbers point to the fact that problems of enrolment and attendance are more complex than simply distance and that improved access needs to be combined with other incentives. Even though the government has made a commitment to improve equal access to education, and its quality, much remains to be done to make a lasting impact.

Methodology

The fieldwork in Ethiopia took place between mid January and mid April 2006 and was mainly carried out in three (clusters of) villages in two provinces, within the Region of Oromia, the largest of Ethiopia's nine Regions. Oromia has large geographical and climatic disparities between its Zones, some of which have very low enrolment rates. The research locations were chosen in close cooperation with the Oromia Education Bureau and the respective district level education offices. Selection criteria for the research sites were relatively low enrolment numbers in areas where schools are principally available. The first two research sites were situated in the Borena Zone in southern Ethiopia, the third in East Haraghe, in the eastern part of the country. Both Zones are border areas, receiving relatively little attention from both the central government and international NGOs.

Each research site consisted of a cluster of villages belonging to one Kebele (the smallest administrative unit) in relative proximity to a primary school. The demarcation of one village is difficult to make in the Ethiopian context, as villages are arranged in clusters. A "core village" consists of a maximum of 20-60 families, sometimes within sight of the next core village, but the distance can also be greater - up to several kilometres. These core villages form clusters, and for the purposes of the research, several core villages within a cluster were selected. All selected sites were within a distance to school that could be covered by foot, making school (at least physically) accessible to all children. One research site had a boarding school, enabling students who lived further away to attend classes. In two cases, the primary schools were operated by the government; a third school was run by a catholic mission. None of the locations had a secondary school on site, and the distance to the closest secondary school ranged from 16 to 40 kilometres.

All sites were located in remote rural areas with very limited infrastructure and without any major aid programmes in place. Another commonality of the sites was the prevalence of (subsistence) farming as the general means of livelihood. While the Borena Zone is dominated by pastoralists and

semi-pastoralists, animal husbandry plays only a minor role in Eastern Hararghe, where crops such as chat, coffee and peanuts are cultivated and form the main source of income.

The vast majority of the interviews in field locations were conducted with the aid of a translator. Oromo is the native language for the majority of the population as well as the language of instruction in primary schools in all research locations. Even though English is taught as a subject from grade 1 onwards, the overall functional level of English is low and conducting interviews in English was mostly impossible. Due to the sensitivity of gender related issues, the initial preference went out to a female translator, but this appeared to be impossible at times. For practical reasons, it was decided to recruit a translator locally, and a female translator was recruited successfully in only one location. Working with a male translator worked well, but led to constraints especially in interviews with teenage girls.

Existing sociological and statistical data formed the quantitative basis for the research, and data was obtained from local organisations, institutions and administrations. The bulk of the data was obtained through anthropological methods, such as:

- Interviews of key persons, (children and their parents, teachers): both structured interviews aimed at general information, and in-depth interviews with selected informants.
- Case studies of a selected and limited number of children and the household in which they live.
- Focus group discussions on key issues.
- General observations at the schools, on community and household level.

Interviews were conducted both with school-going and non-school-going children. Talking to children who did not attend school was very challenging in many aspects. Children in rural Ethiopia are not used to seeing foreigners, let alone talking to them. The time needed to win trust and confidence was sometimes limited, and children were exceptionally shy. Another major challenge was the fact that children who do not attend school invariably help their families, either within the household, on the fields or herding livestock. That means that they are not easily approached. Children herding animals are often told by their parents that they have to stay clear from the roads, and that they shouldn't talk to people who they do not know. These are precautions both for the safety of the children themselves and for the animals they are taking care of. One successful strategy was to wait at watering places where each child herding livestock would have to pass and spend some time. Here children could be approached and talked to in small groups. Interviewing children in small groups gave them a feeling of relative safety, and it also freed them from the control and interference of adults. School-going children on the other hand were much more easily approachable, on their way to and from school and during breaks.

Scarcity of water, the threatening drought and the resulting hardships were a central theme that ran throughout the research. Within the Borena Zone, some Woredas (districts) were affected to an extent that livestock began to die and communities started to migrate. First measures were being taken to bring in outside relief, in the form of fodder for animals, food aid and water trucks. Other areas were affected to a lesser extent, but even there, the threat of a severe drought was serious enough to lead to major hardship for the population [OFS et al. 2005]. Therefore, it was contemplated to shift the research activities to another, altogether lesser affected area. Had the drought been an uncommon event and an acute emergency, another area would indeed have been

selected. Unfortunately, droughts are a recurrent situation and a structural problem and have to be addressed as such. Also with regard to the education sector, the frequent droughts and the resulting consequences and coping mechanisms of the households and communities have an impact on efforts to increase enrolment and retention of children in the education system.

Outline of the report

The first chapter introduces the background, the Ethiopian context and the past and recent challenges with regard to education. The second chapter introduces the research locations. The third chapter deals with the perception of the relevance of education, as seen through the eyes of parents and students themselves. Here, the expected returns, the ambitions with regard to secondary or other continuing education, as well as intrinsic values of education will be discussed. Chapter 4 focuses on the quality of education, again as perceived by the (potential) beneficiaries. The teacher's qualification and performance, issues of age structure in the classroom and policy regarding examination, the language issue as well as community involvement will be addressed. In Chapter 5, the main obstacles to school enrolment and attendance are scrutinised. Those obstacles include tradition and gender, limited access and poverty as well as child work. The findings are summarised in the Conclusion.

Chapter 1

Background

Ethiopia has a population of 73 million and consists of more than 100 ethno-linguistic groups. Out of these, the Oromo people form the biggest group (40%), followed by Amhara (30%), Tigray (12%), Sidama (9%), Shankella (6%), Somali (6%) and Afar (4%). 50% of the population are Ethiopian Orthodox Christians, and 40% are Muslims. Ethiopia has an annual population growth rate of 2.36% and 43.9% of the population is under the age of 14. Ethiopia ranks among one of the poorest countries in the world with an estimated 44% of the population living below the poverty line [Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia 2005]. According to the World Bank [2005], the average income barely exceeds 100 USD per day. An estimated 85% of the population lives in rural areas, and the main source of income is traditional agriculture with a low level of productivity. Agricultural production depends on rainwater, which is unreliable and leads to recurrent droughts.

Ethiopia has a federal government system; the country is divided into 9 regional states and two city administrative councils. The Regions are mainly formed on the basis of language and ethnicity, and are sub-divided into Zones, Woredas, and Kebeles. The 1994 constitution introduced far reaching autonomy for the regional authorities and strengthened the importance of the regional languages; together with this general decentralisation of power, the educational planning, including curriculum reforms and development, was referred to the regional authorities.

1.1 Education: an historical overview

Education had historically been a neglected sector in Ethiopia; until the beginning of the 20th century, formal education in Ethiopia was basically restricted to religious instruction under the control of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, preparing individuals for the clergy and other religious positions. Secular education was introduced to Ethiopia in 1908 with the first public school in Addis Ababa, followed a year later by the opening of a primary school in Harar. The focus was on foreign languages with French being mandatory and English, Italian and Arabic being optional. Also taught were mathematics and basic science. The introduction of government-sponsored education was a reaction to an increasing need for an educated elite to fill positions in the government, as well as to advance trade and industry. Even though plans were made in 1925 by the government to expand education, by 1935 only 20 public schools were serving a total of 8,000 students. Expansion of the education system came to a halt during the Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941, when all governmental schools closed down.

After the end of the Italian occupation, the Ethiopian government renewed efforts and by 1952 a total of 60,000 students were enrolled in 400 primary schools, 11 secondary schools and 3 colleges. In the 1960s, an additional 310 mission and private schools operated alongside the country's public system. The first institution of higher education was the Haile Selassie University in Addis Ababa, founded in 1961.

By the time that Ethiopia hosted the UN-sponsored Conference of African States on the Development of Education in 1961, the Ethiopian education system was ranked bottom of all African nations. Only about 10% of school-age children in the country attended school, there were severe school and teacher shortages and a high dropout rate. This poor record led the Ministry of Education to develop a new education policy which stayed in effect until 1974. The policy included a curriculum revision, and more attention to technical training. In the decade between 1961 and 1971, the Ethiopian government declared universal primary education as a long term goal, and by 1971, the total number of primary and secondary schools increased to 1,300 and the number of teachers to 13,000. Nevertheless, the situation remained bleak, especially in small towns and rural areas. The whole system suffered from a shortage of funding and facilities as well as a lack of qualified teachers. While the construction of new schools was supported by international donors, the training of teachers could not keep up with the pace, and many areas remained seriously under-serviced.

Between 1968 and 1974, the government expenditure on education increased from 1.4% to 3% of the GNP, still a low figure when compared to the increase in other African countries (2.5-6%). Primary education was funded through a tax on agricultural land, while secondary and higher education was financed by the central government. The agricultural tax led to an inequality between poorer and wealthier regions and especially between disadvantaged rural areas and urban centres that benefited most from the education system, but which were initially exempted from the tax.

Under the Derg¹ the education sector continued to expand. In 1975, the government initiated a national literacy campaign that deployed an estimated 60,000 students and teachers to rural areas as part of the government's Development through Cooperation Campaign. But rather than promoting literacy as such, the campaign was aimed at promoting the new political and social order as well as a land reform. From 1975 onwards, improved education opportunities in rural areas were regarded as a way to enhance productivity and economic development, and a new curriculum emphasised non-academic future opportunities. Control and operation of primary and secondary schools were delegated to sub-regional level. Special attention was given to rural areas and small towns where the situation was especially bleak. From 1974/75 to 1985/86 the total number of primary schools increased from 3,196 to 7,900, partly due to the involvement of local communities in the construction of schools. During the same period, the number of students enrolled in primary schools increased to 2,450,000. Despite these achievements, the challenges remained huge. In the school year of 1985/86, around 42% of primary-school-age children were enrolled, and only 5.3% of children were in enrolled in secondary schools.

1.2 Current policies and issues

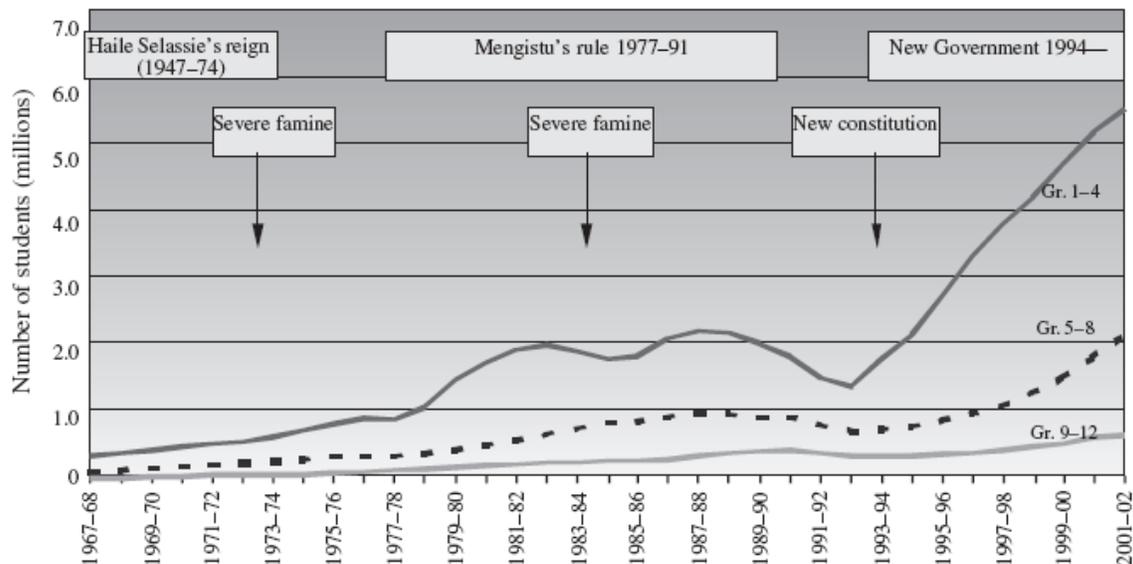
The new government which succeeded the socialist Derg drew up a new constitution in 1994, initiated political reforms leading to a federal structure of government and took steps towards transforming the countries' poor economic situation. Within Ethiopia's Sustainable Development and Poverty Reduction Program (SDPRP), education received a central role. In 1994, an "Education and

¹ Socialist military regime that governed Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991

Training Policy” was formulated, addressing issues such as access, quality and relevance [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994a]. In order to implement the “Education and Training Policy”, the Education Sector Development Program (ESDP) was launched in 1997/98. The main objective of the ESDP was to improve both access and educational quality of primary education, with a special emphasis on rural areas and girls’ education, and to achieve basic universal education by 2015 [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994b]. The ESDP consists of a long-term plan covering 20 years (from 1997 to 2017) and is divided into several phases. The first phase, ESDP-I, covered the years 1997 to 2002, and was concluded in 2003. It was aimed at the expansion of primary education (with special attention given to girl’s education, rural areas and equal distribution of education opportunities). The second phase, with a 3-year duration, has also been completed, and the third phase (ESDP-III) has been launched. This third phase, starting in 2005/06 and extending to 2010/11, forms an integral part of the current Ethiopian Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP).

The effort is showing its results. According to the World Bank [2005], the education sector has undergone a dramatic growth: “aggregate enrolments in grades 1-12 rose at a steady pace of about 9 percent a year between 1992-93 and 2001-02; and in grades 1-4, the first cycle of primary schooling, they grew even faster: 15 percent a year.” National statistics also show substantial growth with regard to access to primary education: gross and net primary enrolment increased from 45% and 21% in 1995/96 to 61% and 34% in 1999/2000, and to 74% and 38% in 2004 [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2005]

Figure 1: Historically unprecedented growth in primary school enrolment since 1993-4



Note: Data includes only students in regular programmes in government and non-government schools.

Source: World Bank [2005]

In recognition of the difference in the education participation between girls and boys, the Ministry of Education has selected the enrolment of girls as one of its major goals. The percentage of female enrolment is slowly but steadily increasing, although it has still not equalled the enrolment levels of boys.

Table 3: Gender gap in the primary and secondary enrolment ratio 1999/00-2003/04

	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04
Primary					
Male NER	51.2	55.7	59.0	60.6	62.9
Female NER	36.6	41.7	45.2	47.2	51.8
Gender Gap	14.6	14.0	13.8	13.4	11.1
Secondary(9-10)					
Male NER	7.0	7.1	8.6	10.1	12.0
Female NER	6.6	6.1	6.2	6.7	7.5
Gender Gap	0.4	1.0	2.4	3.4	4.5

Source: [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2005]

Overall, literacy in Ethiopia is low; the average rate for adult literacy in the year 1999/2000 was only 29.4%. Table 4 shows a large disparity between literacy rates in urban and rural areas as well as a marked difference in female and male literacy.

Table 4: Literacy Rate in Ethiopia in 1999/00

Sex	Urban	Rural	All
Male	82.1	33.0	40.0
Female	61.2	11.0	19.5
Total	70.4	21.8	29.4

Source: [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2002]

The efforts to increase access to education have had some unfortunate consequences. Evaluations of the first two phases of the ESDP indicate that expansion of the education system has come at a cost: while overall access and enrolment has increased, other (qualitative) indicators show that efficiency and quality have suffered; the student-teacher ratio has increased, there is a shortage of textbooks and other teaching materials, and a severe lack of sufficiently qualified teachers [Asgedom et al. 2001]. Primary school dropout rates rose from 8.9% in 1999/2000 to 19.2% in 2003/2004.

The problems are particularly severe in rural areas, where the student-teacher ratios are higher than in urban areas. Recruitment of teachers in rural areas is challenging, as rural settings often lack basic infrastructure such as transport facilities and adequate housing for teachers, thus making a posting in a rural area much less attractive than employment in an urban setting [Shibeshi 2005]. The high student-teacher ratio negatively affects the quality of the education, the time that a teacher can spend with each student, and it also results in heavier workloads for rural teachers. The 2005 World Bank report points out that in the Oromia Region, the weekly teaching load in rural schools amounts to 29 hours in grades 1-4 and to 24 hours for grades 5-8, while the respective work load in urban schools is significantly lower at 22 and 18 weekly hours [World Bank 2005:xxiv].

Even though improvements have been made, the problems remain immense. The net enrolment rate is only 57.4%, and education opportunities are still extremely unevenly distributed. The Ethiopia Child Labour Survey Report 2001 [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2001] quotes a number of reasons given by children and their families for non-attendance: too young (31.9%), help in household chores (18.7%), no school available nearby (10.4%), need to generate family income (9.5%), cannot afford expenses (8.7%), parents do not give permission (7.5%).

1.3 Structure of the education system

According to the Ethiopian Economic Association (EEA) previous problems within the education sector were partly due to the failure “to distinguish between regional, cultural and linguistic diversities” [Gebre-Mariam 2002]. One of the outcomes of this analysis was a more regionalised curriculum and the introduction of regional languages as languages of instruction in primary schools. From 1962 to 1994, Ethiopia’s education system was structured into 6 years of primary education, 2 years of junior secondary school and 4 years of senior secondary school. The new education policy came into effect in 1994, and this structure was changed into a 4-4-2-2 structure: primary school consists of grades 1 to 8 (divided into two cycles of four years), and secondary school includes grades 9 to 12 (divided into two cycles of two years). Admission to the first and second cycle of primary education is open to all students. At the end of the second primary school cycle students are required to sit for the 8th Grade National Examination. Primary education is aimed to impart functional literacy, grades 9 and 10 are preparation for further education, including vocational training, and grades 11 and 12 are supposed to lay the foundation for tertiary education.

But due to rapid expansion and limited resources, many rural schools do not (yet) offer even the full cycle of primary education. Only a fifth of all governmental primary schools offer classes up to grade 8. Many rural primary schools only offer classes up to 6th grade (the old cycle of primary education), or even only up to grade 4. Between grades 1 and 4, students automatically pass on from one grade to the next; officially there is no repetition of classes at this level. This measure is in place to prevent first grade from becoming overcrowded.

Schools can be generally divided into governmental and non-governmental schools. Governmental schools officially do not charge fees of their students, and are run and financed by the federal and regional governments. There are nevertheless indirect costs involved, like maintenance fees, examination fees, as well as the costs for pens, exercise books, and uniforms. Non-governmental schools are funded through fees or other external sources. Non-governmental schools such as mission schools have to follow the official curriculum in order to be recognised.



Young street vendors in Addis Ababa

Chapter 2

The Research Locations

2.1 Borena

The Oromia Region is the largest of Ethiopia's 9 Regions and is divided into two parts (western and southern), and subdivided into 12 Zones. The Borena Zone lies at the southern tip of the Oromia Region, bordering on Kenya. The Zone consists of a lowland area, with elevations between 500 and 1500 m, and a mid to highland area. The mid to highland areas are more densely populated than the lowlands, with 73% of the rural population. The Zone is home to the Borena people, an ethnic group of pastoralists and agro-pastoralists who also inhabit the northern part of Kenya on the other side of the border. The Borena are semi-sedentary pastoralists and cattle are their most important livestock, both economically as well as culturally. Other livestock include camels, goats and sheep. Livestock is not only the main source of income and wealth, but also governs most aspects of Borena life. While cattle remain most significant, a diversification has taken place as a result of the recurrent draughts over the last 10-20 years. The mode of livelihood makes draughts especially threatening for the poor rural population.

Main sources of water are (rainwater-) ponds, traditional wells called *Elas*, hand dug wells and boreholes. There are two seasonal rains, the "Gena", or big rain, which takes place between mid-March and the end of May, and a short rainy season, the "Hagaya", which normally starts in mid-September and extends through October into mid- or end November. Both rains can be unreliable, delayed or can even fail to take place. The area experienced a major drought in 1992, which led to the demise of as much as 75% of the livestock, followed by another serious drought in 1999.

Every 2-3 years of sufficient rainfall is commonly followed by a year of relative drought. This drought may be limited locally, as rainfall is often scattered, in which case families move their herds to other areas that have received more rainfall. If a drought affects a whole region, the problem becomes more serious. During the dry season of 2005/2006 the problem was compounded by the even more severe drought in neighbouring regions and south of the border in Kenya, which pushed pastoralists from these areas up north, putting an extra strain on already scarce resources.

The irregular and scarce rainfall also limits the cultivation of crops. Harvests rarely yield a surplus, and many rural households are faced with food insecurities during several months of the year. Part of the impact of this food insecurity is absorbed by tribal and social obligations, but reliance and dependency on outside support has also been increasing over the last decades. Saving and credit schemes to deal with difficult periods are not very prevalent. Selling of livestock in times of difficulty is one possible coping strategy, but remains limited because in times of drought the price for cattle drops, which is due to the high supply of cattle and the poor health of the animals. Owners are mostly reluctant to sell at sometimes only 30-60% of normal price. In addition, cattle play a central role in the Borena society and culture (wealth and standing of a family depends to

some extent on the heads of cattle), and thus and selling one's livestock in times of need is seldom done.

During the time of the research, the drought took an alarming turn for the worst. The southern Zones along the Kenyan border were particularly affected, and the whole process was exacerbated by migration: Borena pastoralists from the Kenyan side of the border started to move north with their life stock in search of grazing grounds and water. The local herders in turn were pushed out and thus started moving north themselves.

A major problem in the Region is the increasing population and the corresponding increasing number of livestock putting pressure on resources that are depleting quickly. The vegetation does not have sufficient time to recuperate and droughts are now reported to be occurring at increasingly shortening intervals.

2.1.1 Yabello

As the capital of the Borena Zone, Yabello served as the base for the first part of the research. The town acquired this position only a few years ago, and has since become a magnet for people from the surrounding areas, especially in times of drought. Yabello is situated 600 km south of Addis Ababa, and around 200 km north of Moyale, on the border with Kenya. Coming down from the highland agricultural areas, Yabello lies in the lowland, with a very hot and dry climate.

Yabello town hosts an estimated 14,000 inhabitants, and serves as the commercial and administrative centre for the Zone. The roads in town are unpaved, and only in February of 2006 was the town finally supplied with electricity by overland lines. Before this, generators were the only means of electrical power and most households still either rely on generators or candle light. There are few motorised vehicles in town, mainly owned by the local administration or NGOs, whereas private cars are virtually absent. The only forms of public transport around town are horse-drawn carts. Yabello is connected to other towns by a daily bus service and several minibuses.

Most employment opportunities are limited to the numerous government offices, of which Yabello hosts a staggering 40. There are two international and one national NGOs operating in the area. Yabello Woreda (district) has a Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of 58.7% (70.8% boys and 46.3% girls), which is relatively high when compared to the GER for the Borena Zone that stands at 48.3% (63.6% for boys and 32.3% for girls). But the statistics for Yabello include both the urban and rural areas, and enrolment declines sharply outside Yabello town itself.

The first research site chosen was at Diida Yabello, a Kebele (the smallest administrative unit) consisting of a total of 53 small villages, grouped into 7 clusters. The Kebele population is 6,903 (source: Kebele administration 2004). The area has suffered severe droughts in the past, and there were two major famines (in 1991 and 1999). During the course of the last 10 years, much of the forest has disappeared, as has most of the wildlife. There are 6 groundwater wells in the Kebele which are operated by hand pumps. Two of these 6 were broken at the time of the research, and there was one additional motorised pump. Due to the low ground water level 60-100 meters below the ground, it is very difficult and expensive to drill additional wells. Several efforts have been made, both by the government and by NGOs, to locate suitable sites for additional groundwater wells, but without success.

The Diida Yabello primary school is situated within a cluster of small villages, around 4 km off the main north-south road, to be reached by a sandy dirt track. There are no other paved roads in the vicinity, and the town of Yabello is 16km away. The school serves at least 10 villages and is the only school within 16 km. There is no public transport to the school and the only connection is an occasional bus or minibus that can drop off passengers at the point where the dirt track meets the main road. Close to the school there is a health post that is staffed once or twice a week with a nurse from Yabello. The village has a DA (Development Agency) office, which is a newly installed governmental agency aimed to support rural development. One DA office is responsible for the Kebele, consisting of 53 villages in Diida Yabello. The office is staffed by young and enthusiastic, but largely inexperienced, staff. There is also a small “shop” and a place to buy locally produced alcohol.

Unfortunately there was no official data available on enrolment rates in this particular Kebele. Estimates by teachers suggest that around 20-30% of the children of school-going age are enrolled. This estimate is confirmed when comparing the data of the last census of this Kebele with the number of students enrolled. The school is a ten-year-old governmental school and was the first school in and around this site. In theory, the school operates in 2 shifts; in the mornings grades 1-4 have class, and in the afternoons it is the turn for grades 5-8. The school started with 45 students; the total number of enrolled students is now 517 (192 female and 325 male), with uneven distribution across grades:

Table 5: Distribution of pupils at the Diida Yabello primary school (2006)

Grade	# pupils
1	37
2	88
3	60
4	60
5	91
6	176
7	45

The school has 7 classrooms, of which some are semi-permanent structures. Only 3 classrooms have a cement floor, others have a mud floor. The school also has a small headmaster’s office, basic teacher’s accommodation and one pit latrine. Furniture is scarce, and there are not sufficient benches and tables to seat all students.

2.1.2 Dhoqqolle

Dhoqqolle Kebele is situated further south in the Borena Zone - in the Moyale Woreda. The population of the Zone as a whole is around 300,000; Dhoqqolle Kebele and its surroundings have an estimated 15,000 inhabitants. As in the area around Yabello, pastoralism is the dominant mode of livelihood. Dhoqqolle is situated 35 km off the main road to Moyale, around 100 km north of the border with Kenya, and is accessible only by a dirt track. Only 4-wheel drive vehicles or cars with a high ground clearance can negotiate this road. The nearest market place and town is Dubluk,

situated at the turn-off to the main road. There is no regular public transport to and from Dhoqqolle.

Compared to the area around Yabello, overall enrolment numbers in and around Dhoqqolle are extremely low, due for a large part to the very limited access to education in the whole Region. There are no exact statistics available, but enrolment in the area is no more than 10-20% of the school-age population. Other estimates are as low as 5%. The only school in Dhoqqolle is operated by a catholic order, the Spiritans. The “Holy Ghost Mission” has been active in Borena since 1974, and supports several schools and student hostels; besides the school in Dhoqqolle, the Spiritans run another primary school in Dhadeem, and one at Dharitto, as well as student hostels in Dubluk and Yabello. Although the school is directly managed by the mission, it follows the official governmental curriculum, is run in a secular way, and pupils do not need to be Catholic to be admitted.

The school was set up 24 years ago, at the foot of a small mountain range where sufficient groundwater resources were found, and has since been growing slowly. Over the years, the school and mission compound has attracted a small settlement at its gates, in the form of a cluster of small shops and houses. The school serves both as a boarding school for students from further away and as a day school for children from the surrounding villages. There is a school fee of 100 Birr per year for boarding students and 50 Birr per year for day students. The fee covers the expenses for exercise books and pens, and a school lunch for day students. According to the priests, this fee does not cover the actual costs, but is to be seen as a contribution towards the costs and more importantly as a token/sign of commitment that is made once a student is enrolled. In some cases, payment of this fee proves to be impossible for poor households (or parents are simply unwilling to pay). In those cases, there is a possibility to contribute in kind, such as work on the school farm.

The school has 6 grades and 6 classrooms. The compound also comprises student accommodation, a kitchen, houses for the teaching staff, a building where the mission’s priests live, and a church, which is used for various activities. In the school year 2005/06 (1998 Ethiopian Calendar), student numbers were as follows:

Table 6: Distribution of pupils at the Dhoqqolle mission school

	Male students	Female students	Total # students
Grade 1	32	11	43
Grade 2	43	10	53
Grade 3	38	4	42
Grade 4	32	5	37
Grade 5	26	15	41
Grade 6	51	13	64
Total	222	58	280

The school has 5 male and 2 female teachers. Of the 280 students, 80 are day students from the surrounding villages and another 200 are boarding students. Some of the boarding students previously attended the Dharitto school where only grades 1-4 are offered. Once students have passed 6th grade in Dhoqqolle, they have to proceed to Dubluk if they want to continue their

education. In Dubluk, students can attend grades 7 and 8 while being supported by the catholic mission that runs a student hostel there. But after that, if they want to proceed further, they need to continue their education in Yabello or Mega. If they travel to Yabello, there is still a chance that they will receive continuing support from the catholic mission. There is a girls' and a boys' student hostel in Yabello, and students receive the essential school materials, food as well as a little pocket money. Students proceeding to Mega have to cover their own expenses. Interestingly, in the clusters of villages around Dhoqqolle, enrolment varies hugely. From the nearest village, situated right beside the school and consisting of only a handful of huts, most children study at the school, while no children are enrolled from a village an insignificant distance away.

2.2 East Hararghe

East Hararghe is the most eastern Zone of the Oromia Region and borders on the Somali Region. The East Hararghe Zone has a total population of around 2.5 million, with less than 7% of the inhabitants living in urban areas. It is a predominantly Muslim area, and the main city, Harar, is an important centre of pilgrimage. The local economy and modes of livelihood in East Hararghe are, as in the Borena Zone, an important aspect taken into consideration when discussing obstacles and importance of education. Originally well-known for its coffee production, East Hararghe has become an important centre for chat cultivation. Chat is an evergreen plant, from which the leaves are chewed for their narcotic effect. It has traditionally been used on religious and social occasions, for example at weddings, funerals, at coffee ceremonies and to welcome guests. Over the last years, the use has become more widespread and chat is now consumed by a large proportion of the male population, and on a daily basis. The effects of chat are increased concentration and alertness, but excessive use of chat can also lead to sleeplessness and loss of appetite. As coffee prices have been falling by 70%, chat has become the most attractive alternative, as the plant does not need a lot of tending, is robust and resistant to drought. There is a growing demand for chat in Ethiopia and neighbouring countries, with Somalia being one of the most important export partners. On a positive note, chat provides an important source of income for farmers, and generates more cash income than other crops. On the other side, production and consumption of chat also have less desirable consequences. The majority of adult men chew chat on a daily basis, and in the villages the leaves do not need to be purchased as most families cultivate their own plot of chat. While the work in the fields is mainly done by men, women and girls are responsible for carrying the chat to the market for selling. Especially in the case of school-age girls, these responsibilities come in conflict with school enrolment and attendance.

Gursum town is the administrative seat of Gursum Woreda (although the town is officially called Funyanbira); it is situated 30km east of Harar, and 15km north of the track heading east to Jijiga, which is the administrative centre of the Somali region. Gursum Woreda borders on the Somali Region, in the north eastern part of the East Haraghe Zone. The Woreda consists of both highland and lowland areas, and the lower lying parts are often threatened by drought. It is densely populated, and most families own only small plots of land with a yield that is hardly sufficient to cover a family's needs.

The East Hararghe Zone has a total GER of 63.2% (84.4% for males and 41% for females), and Gursum Woreda has a GER of 32.3% total (47.5% boys and 16.6% girls), which is the lowest GER in the Oromia Region. The whole Woreda has 39 schools, out of which 26 offer only grades 1-4, 12 school have the

full primary cycle of grades 1-8, and only one school offers grade 9 and 10 and is currently expanding to grades 11 and 12. The overall enrolment is low, and attendance often even lower, although there are no official statistics for the latter. The research in Gursum Woreda centred on a cluster of villages in Awdaal Kebele. There are 10 villages around this Kebele's school, the furthest being merely 2 kilometres away. The primary school at Awdaal offers education from grades 1-6. In the school year 2005/06 the Awdaal primary school had a total of 358 students, 285 males and 73 females [Oromia Education and Capacity Building Bureau 2004].

Table 7: Distribution of pupils at the Awdaal primary school

	Males	Females	Total
Grade 1	100	42	142
Grade 2	56	16	72
Grade 3	41	9	50
Grade 4	30	2	32
Grade 5	39	2	41
Grade 6	19	2	21
Total	285	73	358

Chapter 3

The Perception of Relevance

According to a World Bank report on the education sector in Ethiopia, "...a plausible barrier to schooling of children may simply be the fact that parents themselves have not been to schools and have no idea what schooling can do for their children" [2005:135]. Ethiopian education officials on all levels as well as a majority of teachers express a similar view that a lack of "awareness" and interest is at the root of the problem. Awareness campaigns by the government and aid organisations are geared towards addressing this problem. In Borena, where the vast majority of adults has never been to school, many respondents claim that they have become "more aware" and "less ignorant" of education matters since the government has started to campaign in the villages. To some extent, campaigns have succeeded in instilling a sense of what "politically correct" behaviour with regard to education ought to be, and what authorities might wish to hear. But while respondents readily repeat the arguments brought forth by campaigners about why children are supposed to be in school, many families continue to argue the reasons why, in their particular situation, education for their children is either out of reach or would not bring about the desired effects.

14 year old Jero, for example, had been selected with two other youths to participate in an awareness campaign. He was attending grade 7 and lives a 15-20 minute walk from the school at Diida Yabello. He is the only one of his siblings attending school. He has 5 sisters and 1 brother; 4 of the girls are already married, and Jero is the youngest of the family. "None of my sisters went to school. At that moment, there was no 'awareness' to send girls to school. Maybe now they would go. From my village, 20 children go to school, 15 don't, those who don't, go to the fields with the cattle or the other animals". He related how NGO workers came to the school and asked for three students to participate in the meeting "Preventing Ignorance", in which there would be group discussions on the importance of education. Subsequently they were supposed to instruct others in the area about it:

Afterwards the people promised to send their children to school, but in the end they didn't keep their promise! Education is good, everybody knows that. The person who does not get any education does not know about himself. The difference between an educated and a non-educated person: knowing about the world, about diseases etc. When I finish school, I will get a good chance. When I get this chance, I will help myself and I will help my family. I want to become a doctor. People still don't send their children to school because of ignorance. If you send your children, maybe they will help you when they get a job in the future. If you have educated children, they will fight poverty. Even if there are no jobs here, they can go somewhere else to find work. And if an educated person is wise, they will not forget the parents here in the village.

The motivation to send a child to school is related to what individuals or communities see as the purpose and benefits of education. In rural Ethiopia the majority of children do not attend school, which indicates a lack of established social norms concerning formal education. Sending a child to school defies convention and therefore becomes a conscious decision influenced by certain expectations. As it stands, people are more likely to question the reasons of sending a child to school rather than the reasons for keeping a child at home.

3.1 Expected returns

The overwhelming majority of parents of school-going children in the research locations see education as a path potentially leading to employment in the formal sector. A family member with a paid job means a secure income benefiting the whole family, something which is increasingly important due to the decimation of livestock, regular droughts and increasing population pressure on limited resources. The expected future financial benefits of education serve as a major motivational factor. Some parents even believe that education results in a certain entitlement to employment, which is the consequence of past practices under the previous government. Back then, every school graduate was guaranteed a paid position, mainly in one of the government offices. Even though this practice was abolished, the notion that education shall lead to a “white collar job” still persists. In response to questions about future goals and ambitions, “office work” and “government office” were most frequently named, followed by “doctor” and “teacher”. The exact nature of the former two occupations is usually not exactly defined, as there are few or no role models in the communities. Important is both the secure income as well as the social prestige. At the same time, however, most parents are aware that the real employment opportunities are limited. Several respondents voiced the belief that students from poor backgrounds often cannot find (government) jobs, because the system is corrupt and only those who can bribe and are well connected have a chance. NGO jobs on the other hand are often the only formal employment alternative to governmental jobs and are perceived to be more open to honest competition. Therefore, a career with a national and especially an international NGO is held in high esteem.

A father of 5 from Dhoqqolle was the first from his village to send a girl to school. He told of how he had faced a lot of criticism from the community. Everybody had disagreed because they believed education to be useless and that it would spoil the daughter and estrange her from the community. He explained his motivation:

From this Borena community there has been one man who has sent his daughter to school. She went through the whole cycle of schooling and now works for an NGO. She is the one now to come and advise the community. I saw her, she is really a Borena girl, but she is educated. That is when I decided to also send my daughter to school. I want her to become somebody and to be independent.

A father of 8, of whom 2 were school-going, said:

With education, there is the chance to get a job, in order to help them and to help the family. What kind of job is not up to me: if the government gives them good jobs, that will be fine, if they are not hard workers, maybe they will be without jobs. Only for

hard workers there will be jobs. Many actually do not get a job, and then investment in education could be a waste of money!

This feeling that investing in education is only worthwhile if there is a financial return is very widespread. Unfortunately, there are few successful role models in the villages, and community members are accustomed to see investments in education fail to bring about the desired returns.

Sometimes there is no return, and educated unemployed people can be worse off than the uneducated who have simply learned some marketable skills. Kielland & Tovo [2006] refer to a study in Ethiopia which found that:

Formal education only made a difference for people lucky enough to find a job in the formal sector, while for work in the informal sector (which employs the vast majority of people in Africa), returns from education were basically zero, and the only significant determinant of wages was the entrepreneur's level of capital.

3.2 Continuing education

When talking about the relevance of education as well as the expected returns, it is important to bear in mind what the likely termination grade of schooling will be. One of the problems with basic/primary education in rural areas is that the final grade at the village school is often the termination grade as well. While education in the village primary school is commonly only just affordable, since the child can remain with the family and can still assist the family with household or farm chores, sending a child to another school for continuing education often becomes unaffordable. Many people realise their children's education will therefore likely be limited to primary education, which is mostly believed to be insufficient to bring about the desired returns on their investment. Without a belief in the inherent benefits of education it is possible that these parents will not commence with educating their children at all.

If education is, for example, only offered up to grade 6 (as is the case in Awdaal), many families feel that there is not much use. In order to continue education, children would have to proceed to a school in Gursum, which is 12 km away. Children would have to walk that distance, or take one of the pick-up trucks that run between Gursum and the main track leading towards Harar. The first option is considered to be too tiring and dangerous, as the area is known for its smugglers and robbers. The second option is unaffordable for most families. Completing the full cycle of primary education (up to grade 8), and continuing onto secondary education invariably entails a move to Gursum or beyond. According to students from Awdaal, the inability to continue after grade 6 is the main reason for dropout even before completing grade 6. There are plans to upgrade the school up to grade 8, but for an upgrade the total number of students enrolled would have to rise. The government argues more pupils are needed in the higher grades in order to justify the extra costs of expanding the school, while parents argue that the lack of grade 7 and 8 at this school is one of the main reasons for dropout before grade 5 and 6, and thus fewer pupils in higher grades.

In the eyes of the majority of parents, the minimum level of education required to make a difference, i.e. to secure formal, paid employment is grade 10. With grade 10, admission into the lowest civil service or becoming a teacher is possible. Parents around Awdaal therefore argued that if the school were to be upgraded to grade 8, they would only have to bridge 2 more-expensive

years rather than 4. In fact, many village schools only offer grades 1-5 or 6, and students are expected to travel to a town school if they want to continue. Attending a town school brings with it many financial responsibilities, such as lodging and food. This is the point at which many students drop out. The headmaster of Awdaal explained:

We could not mobilise the people to send their children to school. One of the problems is that once students pass grade 6 here, they would need to go into town. But they could not sustain themselves in grade 7 in town, which is very bad for the motivation of the others. They could not survive in town, and this had a very bad impact here. The school has been operating since 1999 and the students now in grade 6 are the first generation of graduates; many had to return to their families, because they had no other option. Since this school opened, 70 students in total have continued in town, the other 250 remained in their villages.

There is the firm belief that once a student has passed grade 10, he/she will be able to find a job, and that the investment in education will bring a minimum return. But the costs of supporting a child throughout secondary school are often prohibitive and the expected returns are either small or don't cover the initial investment. The father of 6, of whom two attend school, clarified:

To support my son who is now studying in Harar, we have to sell animals. He is now at the Teachers Training Institute (TTI), and the fees and living costs add up to 500 Birr per month. The salary for a primary school teacher is only 475 Birr per month. So can you say that education brings in money?!

Another father from the same village sells wood to be able to send his son to school, but said that it will be difficult after grade 7. "We should have schooling up to grade 12 around here. Some of the students are very intelligent. After 10th or 12th grade they score high marks. But they still cannot proceed to Awasa or Addis Ababa, because there are no funds for that. They remain behind without a job." He is the head of one of the 6 families (out of 100) from Awdaal village who actually send (some of their) children to school.

The situation around Diida Yabello is similar. Jero is the only one of his family to attend school, but doesn't know whether he will be allowed to continue.

Next year, they should add 8th grade here, and then I can proceed with school, otherwise not. 49 students are now in grade 7. I don't know how many will pass 7th grade; some students have more problems, if the families do not help them, and many drop out. One of my brothers left school last year in grade 5. He went to another district to dig gold and to earn money for himself. He wants to earn money to buy clothes and livestock. My parents agreed.

The mother of 7 year old Loko who attends Diida Yabello primary questioned where their educational efforts will lead: "What will Loko do when she has completed grade 7 here at the school? Maybe she can go to Yabello town, and then what? It will cost too much money for us to let her study further." With each higher completion grade, the chances for future employment are improved: "Even after the completion of grade 12 many do not have the means to continue onto

college or university. But finishing grade 12 is still better than having only grade 10, there is still a better chance of employment.”

Many students can only proceed as far as the level offered by their village primary school; parents wish this level were sufficient for their children to get a formal job, but know it isn't. A father of 5, who knows that the one child he is able to send to school will not be able to proceed beyond grade 6, said:

Students from grades 5, 6, and 7 should also have a chance to get a job. I don't know what kind of skills they have then, I have not been to school, and I have no idea about education. There also should be no fees, at least up to grade 7. We are farmers, so we only get money when it rains, once per year; there is no regular (cash) income, so it is impossible to send a child to town to study further.

A school teacher in the Yabello vicinity explained that the prospects after primary school are crucial for motivation and perceived relevance:

The drop in number of students has several reasons. Actual dropout is very low, the school has a good reputation; in the whole district it is the school with the highest number of students passing their exams. But the problem is that 8th graders after they finish here may have to go back to their villages. If they drop out or don't get jobs, they loiter around. Continuing education (or the inability to do so) is a major stumbling block also when it comes to motivation.

A teacher at the Dhoqqolle mission school added:

The expectation is mainly to get jobs and economic advancement, whereas the intrinsic value counts to a lesser extent only. The main motivation is money, i.e. the expectation to get a paid job in the future. Most important are the role models, teachers, government employees, office employees and NGO staff. But the step up to secondary is very difficult due to the expenses involved. And what can somebody expect who has finished 8th grade only?

3.3 Intrinsic values of education

But even in the absence or shortage of formal employment opportunities, there is still a practical and an intrinsic value to education. Respondents in all research locations who had children in school valued certain qualities of education that would enrich their children; these included the ability to read and write, to communicate with people outside their own tribe and to become more knowledgeable in general. The following is a sample of answers given in all research locations with regard to the value of education, other than acquiring formal employment:

“Even if they do not bring money back, they can help themselves, their families and their communities.”

“If they get educated, they learn to agree with other people, they learn languages, they can teach people other ways.”

“They can help to associate with other people.”

“Even those who only completed the lower grades may be helpful to the communities when they are able to read and write.”

“They learn about hygiene and tolerance towards each other. Here in this area there are different tribes and bringing children from different tribes together in school will help to break up tribalism.”

“Job or not, education can still make a difference: being able to read and write. Here in this village there is one woman who can read and write well, and we go to her if a letter arrives. If she is not around, we will find somebody else.”

“Learning to read and write is sufficient to improve yourself.”

“Before the children from here went to school, they were very stubborn, now they are obedient. They have changed their behaviour for the better”.

”Take my son: before he was trouble, now he knows how to behave. Education changes behaviour.”

“After birth, education makes, like a second birth.”

“If I am an educated man, I can see what to come; I can even see where to go. Education is like opening doors.”

Respondents also stressed practical skills that can be obtained through education and which are of relevance within the local context:

“They should teach some more practical things: one day my son asked me to dig a pond. There is always shortage of water, so we should know how to do that.”

“Last week we went to Dubluk to try to sell some cattle. There were Arabs there and people who could also speak English. They sold some animals but we did not. We could not communicate with the buyers. Therefore it would be good to have my children learn English, so they can communicate.”

“My son wants to be a doctor, but why not think to be a driver to start with?”

A focus group discussion with a group of villagers living close to Dhoqqolle gave insight into priorities and expectations of parents. Godana Alake, a village 10 km from the school, has about 90 inhabitants, of which an estimated 20 children between 7 and 14 years old and thus of school-going age. The main source of income is cattle, followed by sheep and goats. The villagers also have fields, but since the oxen died in the drought they cannot work the fields. They also lost 59 cows during the drought and only have about 100 left. Of the whole village, only 2 children attend the school, both of them boys. One is 20 years old and he is in 6th grade, the other is somewhere between 7 and 10; he is in 3rd grade.

We saw something good in them. They can read and write now, and can help us if there is need. There are no other literate people in this village. Before, we had to walk for 2 hours to find a literate person. For example, with the tax, and we can also ask for governmental aid. The government gave some maize before, but you have to apply for it. But apart from that, we don't find anything useful there at the school as far as the two students are concerned. The future for the children here is the cattle; children

need to take care of them, and there are no possibilities to go to school further. When they grow up here, they will be educated in the Borena tradition. There has been this consideration “if you give your child to education, you give it to the enemy!” Once children go to school, they change their ways. The students, once they leave, remain in town, and they don’t come back to the village. They are supposed to return here but they don’t. Each family here has around 5 children, and they are needed to take care of the different (sorts of) animals. There would be animosity between the families if some educated their children and others didn’t.

Soraa, 17 years old and from the neighbouring village, studies in grade 3. He started in grade 1 at the satellite school and then proceeded to the mission school at Dhoqqolle:

I came here because I really wanted to go to school, so I decided to study after grade 1. When I came here, my parents came after me they did not want me to come here. They do not know anything about education. They said “we are a poor family, we have nothing, and we cannot pay the fee or help you.” They discouraged me to come here and they still want me to leave school. I tell them both that education is good, that it can change lives. My youngest brother is also keen to come to school, but the others think that education is not important. My brothers take care of our livestock, 2 cows and 4 goats. My parents just want me to stay in the family. They say “we are poor. If we send you to school we have to sell something from the little we have. We cannot assist you.” Now I have to struggle to finish my education. But afterwards, I can help my family, I would like to finish grade 10 and then find work. I have to see my chances after grade 10, maybe I can continue to higher education.

When asked about how he is treated in the village and what people think about him now that he goes to school, he explained:

Even within the family, they don’t know what to do or say. They take education as a joke, as a poor alternative to work. Some of the boys here in the village are interested in education, but the girls are not. Their families prevent them. There is a big difference in the way in which people talk and act, they prevent their children from going to school, they say they wanted, but they cannot...they lie. In our community, people especially fear that the girls get pregnant. For the boys, they want them to take care of the cows. The cows are the most important thing to them. With the girls, nothing really happens, there are only rumours.

Soraa’s father, who does not want his son to continue with school, said:

In Borena communities, there is always work to do, also communal. There are the cows, the goats and sheep and the fields. It is important that there is unity in the community, and that means that everybody contributes to communal work. There are no others to help us and we need the children to help us. The other day, I got sick, and there was a message to go and help to dig a well for the community, so I could not go. I

want Soraa to leave school. Also, when the rainy season comes, we have to cultivate the land and he needs to help.

His mother also stresses the balance within the community:

The other problem is that people complain about it. Initially, we did not let him go to school, although now I sometimes wonder whether he should or should not continue. But still, the others in the village complain “he will be wise, and others say he will be the fool”. This leads to inequality within the community and it is better if he drops out. Children come back from school with nice and clean clothes, and people ask “where do you get the money from?” These things create a gap between people.

The notion persists that school going children are a burden to their communities and that they live the easy life at the cost of others. Soraa’s grandfather explained: “There is a proverb: Someone refuses to eat so that he does not have to work – if someone sends their children to school they need money, but the money needs to be saved for the family!”

However, the perception of education by the community and its consequences for the children can differ from village to village. In another village, about 10km on the other side of Dhoqqolle, the situation is different, but also here it is the perception of the community and not of the individual family which stands central. The mother of a school-going girl explained the outlook on education in her village:

Altogether, I have three children (out of seven) in school. The oldest boy is studying in grade 7 in Dubluk. After he started going to school, we even sent the girls to school. We came together here in this community and together we decided that our boy should go to school. 15 children from the village go to school. The community decides who will go, but with this decision, there is also an obligation: even if those children do not want to go and others do. Mainly children from families with many children send some to school, as they can spare them at home. Most people here are positive towards education. Even if education will not benefit the community, those educated learn to help themselves. There has been one person here from this village who has been educated, who is now working in a government office. This became a model for the students here. The decisions of the community are always binding. The fathers and mothers of the children then take care of the animals. There is one man here who has three boys, and they all go to school. Maybe at least one of them will come back to the village, maybe not. What will happen to Borena lifestyle when the young people leave, we don’t know, but we will see. The school fees are not much of a problem. Here, we know each other well. We know who can afford the fee and who can’t. As a last resort, if someone cannot pay, the community will help. There are two reasons why people don’t want their children in school, there is the money, and then there is the cattle. Some people go with the time, but many others do not want to change their ways; they look backwards. People here need some role models and somebody needs to take the lead.

Her daughter is 13 years old and in 4th grade at Dhoqqolle. She is happy to be at school and convinced of the benefits of education:

As an educated person, I can choose my way of life. If it is possible then I want to be a nurse, I want to be the assistant of a doctor. If I pass here, I have to go to Dubluk to continue. My brother is teaching at the satellite school in Chure, which is a 3 hour walk away from our village. They have grade 1 and 2 there now, and with the help of AFD, they want to extend it to grade 3 now. Before, there was a satellite school at our village, but they stopped. There are not many children going to school. Our families, who send us to school, send us on the road of life. But the other villagers say that those children going to school don't think of the cattle, the property, that they are behaving as if they have nothing to do. In don't agree.

Her 12 year old friend Adi firmly believes that schooling will take her further: "The other people depend on cows, like depending on wind: they pass. Education will remain. Education is difficult, because once you start you have to complete. That takes a long time and is therefore tiresome. My parents sent me here to learn something to change my life."

3.4 Incentives

In the absence of future prospects or the belief in the intrinsic values of education, certain incentives given to students or their families can also be a motivation to send their children to school. The most common forms of incentives are school feeding programmes. The school at Diida Yabello, for example, takes part in the World Food Programme's (WFP) school feeding programme, which incorporates 5 of Borena's Woredas. Schools are provided with a mixture of maize, grains and beans that is boiled into *ugali* and served at lunch. These meals are of high nutritional value and are valued both by parents and students. They provide the students with a meal substantial enough to get them through the day. In many traditional Borena villages, the staple food is Dargaaic (wheat) and Bardalla (a maize stew) that is eaten every morning and evening. There are no side dishes and meat is only eaten on special occasions. People, including the children, eat only breakfast and supper. Children going out herding animals take only a small quantity of water with them, and no food. During the rainy season, milk is drunk at home, but during dry periods or droughts, cows cease to give milk. Lunch is only provided for sick family members. The school feeding programme is therefore very popular as it provides children with a regular and additional meal.

At the start of the new school semester in January 2006, the school feeding programme at Diida Yabello appeared to be non-functional. The reason for this was connected to the persisting drought: the flour mix for the school lunch is delivered by WFP through the education offices, and then distributed by pick-up trucks to the schools. The governmental cars were in short supply because of emergency programmes elsewhere. Another problem was that each student has to bring at least 2 litres of water to school every day for the preparation of the food. Because of the drought, nobody brought water and the school feeding programme did not take place until several weeks later. As soon as the school feeding programme was operational again the attendance increased notably, nearly doubling in the first few days.

In the initial phase of the fieldwork in East Hararghe, the Fadis primary school was visited as a comparative site. It is situated in a Kebele with one of the lowest enrolment rates in the whole country (officially less than 10%). The school now has 378 students; 231 boys, and 147 girls. The necessity for children to work and to help at home is given by many as the main reason why not more children are enrolled. Due to the drought, there is a severe shortage of water in the village, and there are only two hand pumps in the whole Kebele. The headmaster explains that “before the WFP started, the dropout was very high at this time of year, as fetching water takes a lot of time. Especially the girls have to stay home to take care of the younger siblings, when the mother is out to fetch water. Now this task is more often taken over by the elderly. Children also go to town to sell products and run messages”. A WFP food programme has been running at this school for two years, providing all students with a daily lunch. According to the headmaster, “before the programme started, students were never enrolled at the ‘normal’ age of 7; most were around 10 years old when they were enrolled”. He also commented that the attendance rates have improved greatly since the WFP began its project: “With the school feeding programme, more children come, and even if some drop out again, it is a start.”

Besides the school feeding programme that provides a daily lunch to pupils, there is also a UNICEF sponsored and WFP run programme designed to encourage girls’ education in the region. The programme includes distribution of cooking oil and flour: after 5 months, at the end of the 1st school semester, a school girl receives 8 litres of cooking oil, then 4 more after 2 months, and another 4 after 2 more months. According to the teachers at Diida Yabello, there has been a big increase in girls’ enrolment since the programmes started:

At the formal schools, the school feeding programme has been important, but also that girls get cooking oil. If the younger children are at home, they will disturb their mother, so if there is any kind of extra incentive to send younger children to school, they will send them as the children are often idling at home.

Also at Diida Yabello and Dharitto primary school, the number of girl students was said to be very high because of the WFP school feeding programme and the oil distribution. A teacher from Diida Yabello explained:

Before, the parents refused to send girls to school, now it is getting better because the government put some initiatives in place. Parents are getting more aware. Some do it for the (financial) benefit, but others start to understand the importance. Of course, the only time when all 192 female students are here at school is the week when the cooking oil is distributed. The week after, not even half of the students turn up.

When working at a nearby satellite school, this teacher’s experience was that most children never turn up: “We used one method: if the parents did not send their registered children to school, we would threaten the parents with legal consequences which never really helped. But to offer them something positive works much better.”



Milking the family goat



Herding the cows

Chapter 4

The Perception of Quality

There are students here in grade 5 who cannot even read simple sentences or write more than their names. Why should I send my children here? (Villager in Awdaal, who withdrew the only one of his 5 children who had initially been enrolled after grade 3)

Not only the perceived relevance within a rural context plays a role in the decision of whether to send a child to school or not, but also the quality of the education that is offered. As seen above, the promised benefits of education often fail to materialise and when school going children do not learn something that the communities see as important and relevant, or if children drop out without having achieved anything visible in comparison to their non-school-going peers, it discourages others. If the parents or other caretakers perceive that the school cannot provide children with basic and useful skills, they may decide that an investment in education is not worth the small return. Very poor school quality may thus discourage households from educating their children, and possibly encourage them to allow their children to work instead, or simply to stay at home, idling.

That the quality of education is often questionable has been pointed out in several studies and documents. The Ethiopian Ministry of Education conducted a national baseline assessment in 2000 on pupil achievement in grade 4 and 8 [World Bank 2005]. The students were tested in a cross section of the topics covered in the regular curriculum. For the grade 4 sample, the passing rate was 48%; it was 41% for the grade 8 sample. This is a national average, taking into account that the quality of education is often considerably lower in rural than in urban areas. The quality of education is impeded by several factors, among which the school infrastructure, the availability of textbooks and other teaching materials, the quality of teacher training, the motivation of the teachers, the size of the class, the teaching techniques, and the age structure of the groups. One of the first challenges is the often poor infrastructure of rural schools with crowded classrooms, insufficient furniture, a lack of toilets for the pupils, and a shortage of textbooks and other teaching materials.

Of the schools that were visited during this research, only the mission-run schools provided sufficient chairs and tables for the pupils. In other schools, students were either forced to sit on the ground, or on improvised benches made out of wooden planks balanced on the ubiquitous cooking oil tins found everywhere where food programmes are in place. Students complain that they have difficulties taking notes during classes because they don't have tables. Textbooks are also scarce and the official ratio in the governmental schools is around one textbook for 5 students; although this ratio is not even always achieved. Another serious shortcoming with regard to infrastructure is the lack or severe shortage of toilets for students, which especially affects girls once they reach puberty. Thatched roofs and half open classrooms do not pose too many problems during the dry season, but can prevent classes from taking place during the rainy season. Especially the

community-built satellite schools are affected. According to community members around Diida Yabello, where satellite schools are supposed to offer grades 1 and 2, the onset of the rains will result in the temporary closure of the school as the structures are in such a poor state that they cannot withstand the rain. While teachers lament the poor infrastructure at schools and especially the lack of teaching materials and equipment, the parents among the respondents generally did not perceive the infrastructure as the main constraint with regard to the quality of education for their children. As the vast majority of households in the research locations have little comforts in terms of (sanitary) infrastructure, furniture and other amenities, the demands on school infrastructure are modest. The challenging learning environment that children face at home, however, is another problem that can have a negative influence on children's school performance. Borena families, for example, usually share one or a maximum of two rooms, and there is little or no privacy for children to study. In general, the main room has a central fireplace, which is open and used for cooking. There is no chimney, and the smoke fills the hut and escapes through the thatched roof or the entrance door. This main room is used by the whole family, for cooking, eating, and so forth, and is also shared by some animals. Any additional room is used for both storage and as a sleeping place. Electricity is not available in these villages. Making homework or studying for exams is difficult or even impossible.

The major concern of parents, however, is the apparently low efficiency of teaching. Parents' judgment on the quality of education appeared to be related to their own educational background. In the first two research locations, the majority of adults were illiterate, and their (enrolled) children are the first generation of school-goers in the area. Their judgment on the quality of education was less related to the curriculum, or teaching techniques, and more to the infrastructure of the school and the discipline of the teachers. However, parents with an educated background tended to be more critical of the content of the lessons and the progression of their children. Especially around Awdaal, the majority of parents were extremely critical of the quality of the school. A primary school had existed in that region since the 1960s, and in contrast to Borena, a substantial proportion of the adults, especially the men, were literate. These parents directly measured the quality of the school, and therefore also the relevance of this education for their children, in terms of their academic achievements. To the great disappointment of many parents, children of grade 3, 4 or 5 had mostly failed to achieve functional literacy. In Awdaal village, right next to the primary school, only 6 out of 100 families sent (some of) their children to school. Parents said that they felt cheated because they believed the quality to be so low that it was hardly worth the effort. Several parents pointed out that some of their children attending grades 5 and 6 could not even read or write simple sentences, and that "the teachers are not there to teach their children, but to simply pocket the salary and make life as easy as possible for themselves."

4.1 Teachers' qualification and performance

The rapid expansion of access to education, envisioned by the Ethiopian government, is hampered by a shortage of qualified teachers. One consequence of the increasing demand for teachers is a compromise when it comes to training and qualifications. According to the official guidelines, to become a primary school teacher for grades 1-4, 10 years of general schooling and one year training at a Teachers Training Institute (TTI) are required. Teachers for grades 5-8 need to have 10 years of general schooling and an additional 3 years of training, graduating with a diploma from a Teachers

Training College (TTC). This diploma can also be obtained through a summer course, which takes two months per year and runs over four years; distance learning is also possible. In order to teach grades 9-12, teachers are supposed to have obtained a university degree.

In practice, however, a substantial number of teachers lack the required qualifications. According to a World Bank report [2005], nearly all teachers for grades 1-4 meet the qualification requirements, but this drops to 26% for grades 5-8 and to a mere 18% for grades 9-12. In contrast to the teachers of governmental primary schools, most satellite teachers have completed grade 10, but do not have any formal teacher training or a certificate. They receive a salary, but not as much as a qualified teacher would. Satellite school teachers are sometimes employed by the government and sometimes by the community itself. The money is collected and sent to the Woreda education office and then used to pay the teacher. The government finds itself in a dilemma: there are insufficient qualified teachers to meet the demand, but training teachers up to level requires time and resources.

The shortage of qualified teachers is pronounced in Oromia, and has led the authorities to admit paraprofessional teachers into service. The greatest challenge is to fill posts in remote areas. The shortage of teachers is a serious dilemma; it is hard to fill posts with sufficiently qualified candidates, but it would be disadvantageous to lower the qualification requirements. An English teacher at the mission school expressed worry about the falling standards:

The problem is because the teachers are not good, the results of the students are also poor. Lowering the standards in order to enable more students to pass, however, can have unwanted effects. Recently, the government has lowered the requirements to pass grade 8 as there are insufficient numbers of students in the colleges. But this also means that the overall quality is likely to decrease even further. Those entering the colleges will have a lower standard and will be less able to pass on knowledge.

A big problem is also that the more qualified teachers, with a diploma and degree, are frequently leaving the profession for more attractive non-teaching jobs. Also, teachers who perform poorly cannot be easily removed from their posts as replacements can often not be found.

The discipline and motivation of teachers was a serious concern in the schools that were visited. Parents and students alike complained that teachers regularly come late to school, or fail to come at all. It is also common for a school to be closed altogether for one or more days. Upon arrival in Diida Yabello, for example, the school was closed due to a scheduled “teacher training”². One week later, grades 1-4 were supposed to restart classes. On the first day of school hardly anybody turned up. 3 teachers and only about 25 students came. According to one of the teachers, “the students know that there are no classes on the first day of school because we are cleaning and preparing. It is a problem that the students will not come. The problem is that the students are not really

² This “teacher training” was in essence a political event. The training had no reference to the quality of teaching, but rather focused on bringing teachers into line with the governmental policies. The political situation at the time of the research was strongly influenced by the previous elections, the refusal of the governing party to concede defeat in key regions, and the efforts by the government to suppress dissenting voices.

interested and that the parents keep the children at home to help!” Another teacher explained: “It is the first day today, so the students are late, maybe they will come tomorrow.” This situation continued throughout the remainder of the week. When asked how this is usually handled, it was explained as follows: “When the schools are closed, the teachers will tell the students when to come back, and we will send a message to the parents when the students don’t come back tomorrow.” When parents were asked about their reasons for not sending their children to school, even though school had officially re-started, many commented that it made no sense since the teachers were not there anyway. Within the first two weeks of the new school year, students turned up in small numbers to discover that their teachers weren’t there, and would report back home that the others wouldn’t need to come. Even after the school opened all classes again, instruction time was very limited.

A mother of 2 schoolchildren at Diida Yabello complained: “The absence of teachers is a big problem! The school is functioning, but the teachers don’t teach here. It is a general problem with schools in this area.” Other parents added that they don’t want to send their children to school when the teachers don’t really teach them anything anyway. Families who live close to school see the teachers arriving late or leaving early. When teachers do not show up, the children remain home. Students coming from further away have to walk up to one hour only to sometimes find that their classes were cancelled. As most families have to make a conscious effort to send (some of) their children to school, irresponsibility by teachers seriously threatened their motivation. “We have to do our work, our duties. Why are the teachers not doing what they are supposed to be?”

Teachers in all research areas clearly suffered from low morale. It was worst at Diida Yabello where it the headmaster himself who was mostly absent; this resulted in a large proportion of the teaching staff taking liberties. During informal interviews and focus group discussions with teachers, several reasons for low morale and motivation were discussed; the general lack of employment opportunities in rural areas is a major reason. Becoming a teacher is often seen as the only or easiest way into formal employment. But teachers’ salaries are low and there is not much social prestige attached to the job of a teacher. Rural areas have the additional disadvantage of offering extremely limited infrastructure. Those with the minimum level of education needed to qualify for teaching jobs usually hope for a more lucrative and prestigious career. The starting salary for a primary school teacher is as low 450 Birr (around 45 Euro) per month, not enough to support the family that has made the teacher’s education possible in the first place. The school in Diida Yabello, for instance, is located 16 km away from the town of Yabello, and it is not possible to travel all the way with public transport; the teachers have to walk the last 4 km. Personal transportation is way beyond what a primary school teacher can afford. Of the teachers working at the Diida Yabello school, most lived in town and travelled each day. Only the two (unmarried) female teachers lived in a shared unfurnished room within the school compound. The two teachers live there without running water or any other facilities. Similar living conditions were faced by the teachers living at the school in Awdaal (East Haraghe). Some teachers travelled daily by a bus that connects Gursum with the main road, while other teachers lived in small rooms within the school compound. This type of accommodation is not suited for a teacher with a family, but renting a larger house is not feasible with a teacher’s salary. The majority of teachers expressed discontent with their financial situation as well as with their social standing. In interviews with teachers, many openly admitted that they became teachers only because they were unable to get another job. The

majority also stated that as soon as they were able to find another job they would leave without hesitation.

Another aspect of the problem is that assignments to certain areas and schools as well as promotions are not perceived to be based on performance, dedication and experience. A teacher from Yabello expressed his discontent with the following words: “Teachers and other government workers are not being paid according to their education or the job being done, but because of party membership. The government’s main concern is about their party members, not about making education better!” Teachers in Awdaal also complained about the lack of promotion and career opportunities: “Even after many years and with a good experience you cannot get a better salary. Good work is not honoured and it is sometimes better to find different work if you want to advance yourself.”

The following comments represent the most common reaction from teachers:

“There is no prestige in the profession of the teacher. It is not a very good job. The pay is poor as well, and the communities don’t respect us very much.”

“Here in Gursum, teaching is the least job. There is no respect for teachers, it is a neglected occupation.”

“There are no criteria to join a TTI, and it is the last option and the last choice.”

“It even happens that teachers are being beaten or threatened by older students. Teachers are very demoralised”.

“There is a general lack of respect for teachers, and the salary is tiny! A TTI teacher only makes 475 Birr per month.”

“I don’t like teaching, it is a bad job.”

Observations in the classroom showed that the teachers who did come to school did not necessarily take their work seriously. At Awdaal primary, teachers are accused by parents of sitting around outside and chewing chat with the village chief and other elders, instead of teaching their classes. Some teachers were seen going into the classroom, writing assignments on the blackboard and having the students copy them. After half an hour, they checked the answers, noted the marks and dismissed the students.

At the mission school, the situation was much better. Even though the school is situated in a very isolated area, the facilities are good, both for students and for teachers. The teachers receive a higher salary and they live within the mission compound, often with their families. They live in well-maintained rooms, have water and electricity and access to good meals provided by the mission. Both the discipline and the quality of the lessons are strictly controlled by the priests who run the mission. A teacher who had previously worked at a government school said:

Even though the school follows the same government curriculum, the quality here is better. This is because the rules are stricter: the teacher goes to the class and teaches; they don’t go out and walk around. Here, the teachers cannot walk off, and this is also why the students prefer to study here. And also we live on the mission compound; we have rooms and good facilities.

4.2 Age structure and passing of grades

A major challenge for both students and teachers is the large age disparity within the classroom. The regular starting age is 7 years, but in practice students are often considerably older. The difference in age between students of one class was observed to be as high as 7 years. In the second grade in Awdaal, for example, the youngest students were 8 and the oldest 14 years old. In grade 4, students ranged in age from 9 to 16 years. In other schools, the situation was similar. A teacher of the mission school explained:

6 or 7 years old is considered to be too young by many parents, and they usually never pass to the next grade. The classes are very mixed with different age groups together. The older children, being more vocal are the ones who will get to talk in class and the ones to practice and to learn, they are more mature. First enrolment of children is often when they are 8-10 years old, sometimes even older. Then they have a greater chance of passing. Sometimes younger children are sent as well, especially when they are not needed for other tasks at home and when the school is very near.

The relatively late enrolment age has two major reasons. The first is related to the distance to school. Often children of the age of 7 or 8 years are seen as too young to walk several kilometres to school, thus they are kept at home until they are older. This often seems to be at odds with the workload that younger children are asked to bear at home; even children as young as 5 and 6 years old are expected to help herding the families' livestock. In addition, children are often only allowed to attend school when one of the other, usually younger, siblings can take over a particular task. This means that first enrolment is often as late as 10 or even 11 years old. Another factor is the child's own motivation. As parents were often found to be less than supportive of their children's education, especially if it conflicts with the workload assigned, it takes an older and more mature child to insist on going to school. Then there are the repeaters and re-admitted students; the former consisting of students who sat for examinations, but failed and therefore had to repeat a grade. The latter group is made up of students who dropped out during the school year and did not sit the end-of-year examinations. The comments made by teachers about the difficulties with teaching such diverse classes were matched by observations in the classroom. It was observed in several classes that the older students tend to dominate the classroom and that younger and shyer students find it very hard to keep up.

In order to deal with the influx of new students, there is a policy in place letting students in the lower grades (1-4) pass automatically on to the next grade, regardless of their actual performance. At the end of grade 4, they sit an entrance exam for grade 5. As this is for many students the first examination, the dropout between these grades is considerable. Teachers, parents and students themselves were divided over this issue. Many teachers recognised this policy as a necessity to prevent overcrowding in the lowest grades. As many students would have to repeat one of the first grades, the numbers in a particular class could exceed a size that can be handled by a teacher. Teachers see grade 1 as often the biggest challenge for students as it is their first contact with formal education. By pushing students to proceed through grades 1 to 4, only those students who are bright and very motivated stand a chance at getting into grade 5. Several teachers spoke of an automatic selection process, whereby the weaker students are left behind early on. In discussions

with teachers, it emerged that while the majority agrees that the policy is good in theory, it creates a lot of problems and inequality in practice.

In the lower grades, each class is taught by one teacher in all subjects, and only from grade 5 onwards do teachers give specific subjects. If a teacher has a relatively lower qualification, fewer skills or low motivation, the students will stand a very small chance to pass their examination for grade 5. There is a severe shortage of teachers here and if one teacher doesn't function well, there is no way to replace him or her.

In the school year 2006, out of 30 students who sat the exam at the end of grade 4, 10 failed and could not proceed to grade 5. According to Awdaal teachers, 20 out of 50 students failed the exams at the end of grade 5. In Awdaal officially, and according to the register, all students passed their examinations.

According to a female teacher from Awdaal, "girls are brought up to be silent and obedient. They are often too shy to speak up in the classroom. They also have a lot less time to do their homework because they have to help more at home than boys. If they simply have to proceed up to grade 4, they are often not able to succeed in passing the exam for entry to grade 5." A teacher from another school relates similar experiences but adds that any education the children receive is better than nothing:

Students pass each grade between 1 and 4, regardless of their grades; they automatically pass their exams. Even if students do not learn how to write things down, they will learn something for themselves. For example, when students learn about regional science it also contains cultural issues. They can learn simple things and they learn about discipline and tolerance. When there are 80 children in one class they have to learn to be tolerant. In the village they know the time by the sun and the shadows, here in school they can widen their general knowledge.

4.3 Language

In Ethiopia's decentralised education system, the regional language is the main language of instruction in primary schools, while English and Amharic are introduced as second languages. From secondary school onwards, all instruction is solely in English. But the level of English at primary school level is very low. The vast majority of primary school teachers interviewed for this research were themselves not able to fluently communicate in English. While English, however low the levels of mastery, still carries a certain prestige, many students showed no particular motivation to learn Amharic. According to the teacher of a mission school:

Mainly English and Amharic should be taught at school. Oromia is the largest district, and the Oromo language has been pushed, but it does not make sense. It creates second-class citizens and is a divide and rule tactic. There is hardly any literature in Oromo, and English and Amharic books will be inaccessible. English teaching here is of extremely poor quality. Books and exams merely demand multiple choice, students don't have to form sentences, they never get to practice speaking. Even the teachers are not fluent and some don't even know the basics!

Also around Gursum, on the border with the Somali Region, language is an issue. As in Borena, the initial language of instruction is Oromo, then English as second language and then Amharic. The vicinity to the border and the economic orientation of the area lead many respondents to believe that teaching Somali would be of added value.

The poor quality of English instruction becomes a serious problem for those students who proceed to secondary school. From grade 9 onwards, English is supposed to be the language of instruction for all subjects. In practice, however, the level of English is so low that the majority of students cannot cope. They cannot read their textbooks and struggle in the classroom. According to a former teacher who has taught both at primary and secondary school level, “between grade 1 and 6, there are not many problems, the real problem starts in grades 9 and 10, when English becomes the medium of instruction. In grade 10, there are general national examinations, so these grades are very important. The teacher suggests that English should be introduced from grade 7, progressively. Otherwise, he thinks “the step in grade 9 is far too big”.

4.4 Community involvement

Among the numerous strategies drawn out to address enrolment and retention of children in primary schools are initiatives to enhance community involvement in educational matters, such as School Committees (SC) and Parent Teacher Associations (PTA). At all schools that were visited, both a PTA and a SC were said to be in place (mostly the terms were used to refer to one and the same group), and the headmaster and/or teachers claimed to be in regular communication with the parents concerning their students and the community at large. Students were said to be carefully monitored and problems carefully followed up on. Non-attendance and dropout were supposedly registered, the causes investigated and the problems sought to be solved. The headmaster of Diida Yabello, for example, when asked about non-attendance and dropout at his school, explained: “This is looked at every week. After one week, we start to follow up and check with the children and their parents. We will advise the parents, and ask the students to come. But after one month of absence, a student is considered as being a dropout”. When checking with other teachers, attendance registers and talking to parents, there appeared to be a large gap between theory and practice. Non-attendance is acknowledged by other teachers to be a major problem. Following up on this is practically impossible as the catchments area of the school is too big and teachers do not have sufficient time to visit all villages.

When asked about why the school remained non-functional for the first 2 weeks of the new term, the headmaster of Diida Yabello said:

The smaller children wait for the older ones to go to school. They know that there are no classes on the first day of school. This absence is a big problem and there will be a meeting in the village, where the parents are told to send their children to school. There are two main problems: firstly, the students are not really interested and motivated, secondly, the parents keep them at home to help in the household.

One of the younger teachers of the school admitted that “there is not much interaction between teachers and the community. There is the PTA, the school committee, but we don’t really interact with them. There is no discussion on education issues. The community is not concerned with the

running of the school and we don't really have time to visit the parents." Even if parents of children with poor attendance are contacted, those without any children in school are mostly neglected altogether. Despite claims to the contrary by education officials, there are no structured efforts to engage parents of children who are not enrolled in school. There is also a certain paradox in the way in which parents of non-school going and school-going children are approached. Families who do enrol their children, but keep them at home every now and then, as well as those parents who withdraw their children altogether, are more likely to be pressured than those who do not enrol a child at all. There is an official procedure for parents who fail to send their enrolled children to school, according to one of the teachers at Diida Yabello. "Officially, the parents are talked to, then the school council sends a letter to the Kebele elder, but this never happens."

The SC has a number of duties, rights and responsibilities, as summed up by one of the committee members at Diida Yabello:

- We call the children to school and make sure that they attend once they are enrolled; and we check on attendance.
- If there is a fight or a conflict, teachers call the school committee to solve the problem.
- Sometimes teachers don't show up, the committee is supposed to address the issue. We should then notify somebody from the government.
- If a teacher is absent without excuse more than 3 times in a row, their salary can be withheld.
- If a teacher is absent frequently, they can be transferred.

There are 5 people on this SC, and they only meet when they can all be present. One of the criteria for being on the committee is to have at least one child at school. The director of the school is also a committee member. He explained that the committee meets irregularly and that the meetings often concern other community issues rather than just educational matters. "Once per week, the committee members (ought) to come together. But at the last meeting, we only talked about the water problem, as the school was closed."

Another committee member talked about the low enrolment:

Here, there are a lot of children who don't go to school. We try to tell them to send their children to school. People say that they need their children to help at home. When people are poor, they do not have the money to buy exercise books and other things. Uniforms, clothes, shoes, books, all are a problem. I do not know exactly how many children do not go to school here, a lot, they either dropped out or were never enrolled. But over the last 7 years more children are going to school.

None of the committee members at Diida Yabello are in a position to persuade other parents to enrol their children, as none of the members send all their children to school. As already shown in previous chapters, if children are sent to school at all, only some children of each family attend school while the remaining children take over the household tasks. The families of the committee members are no exception in this respect.

The lax attitude of many teachers and their regular absences are of course noted by many parents of school-going children. In theory the SC (or council or PTA - as these terms are used to refer to

the same institution) should be in a position to ensure quality and discipline at the school, but it turns out to be very difficult in practice. According to a father of 2 school-going children:

Yes, in theory there is the school council (PTA) to keep in touch with the school, but it is ineffective. 2 persons from our village are in the council, but they can't act, the rules are difficult to implement. The first problem is at the school; there they do not listen to the council. Also the headmaster himself is on the council and if he doesn't do anything the others can't either. The second problem now is the water. Because of the drought, life is so difficult that people don't have time and energy to deal too much with the school.

Another villager added, with regard to absence of teachers: "the director is supposed to register the names of those absent and report them to the education office in Yabello, but the director is absent himself much of the time, so it doesn't work. The teachers get money to teach, if they don't they should be held responsible." A village elder explained that 4 teachers already had to leave the school here because of problems with absences. He doesn't understand why the problem persists: "Diida Yabello is a relatively good posting for teachers. But still, many teachers just kill their time in class".

It is recognised that the committee has little or no leverage to address things of importance: "The committee has limited power. And then we all have our work to do and one committee member left to another place, so the committee is not functioning very well at the moment." It is a problem of power relations within the community and of connection up the line to the education office. Controls by the education office hardly take place and the villagers, including the committee members, know that travelling to the district office and filing a complaint would be both costly and most likely in vain.

Similar problems were found at Awdaal primary. Also here there is a PTA/SC. It consists of 7 people, who have supposedly been elected by the community. According to one of the members, there are discussions on education issues every 2 weeks.

We also see how to keep the school. The guard is being paid 100 Birr to look after the school, and to prevent the cattle from eating the grass here. Even the teachers' houses were constructed by the community under the coordination of the PTA. The PTA exists of 5 members of the community, the school director and one of the female teachers. We discuss dropout and non-attendance with the families; if the parents have good reasons to keep their children home, they are not pressed, and otherwise we will push the families to send their children to school.

Practically, however, the school committee acts mainly as a group where funds are gathered to maintain the school infrastructure and to pay additional expenses (such as the guard). And also here, parents with grievances do not find their problems addressed in a satisfactory manner. Absence of teachers seems to be a lesser problem here, but there is a strong dissatisfaction among parents about the quality of education and the results obtained. Especially parents who have been to school themselves (which was a much higher proportion than in Borena) were very disappointed with the achievements of their children. Several parents related how they had filed complaints with

the director and even with local authorities about the behaviour of some teachers. Teachers were accused of just handing out an assignment to the students in the morning and then sitting outside with the village chief and other men spending the morning chewing chat. Other teachers would leave early or just sit in the classroom wasting time. Teachers were also accused of being incompetent. In response, some of those parents who had filed complaints were asked to contribute extra funds for school maintenance. A father of two school-going children explained how he was subsequently threatened by one of the committee members who also happened to be the area chief: "I was first told to pay a small 'fee', and then they demanded that I shut up and stop complaining, otherwise they would report me to the authorities as a trouble maker."

Many community members see the school committee as an extension of existing power relations and not as an institution which represents the community and can influence and improve education for their children.



Yaldis, showing off his goat

Chapter 5

Obstacles

5.1 Tradition and gender

“People think that once children are educated, they will have not value their communities.”

This quote was made by a village elder during a focus group discussion in a village near Dhoqqolle, and many of those present agreed. In rural Ethiopia, school enrolment and attendance is the exception rather than the norm, and current school-going children are often the first generation of learners. This poses challenges for both the children themselves as well as their families. In the Borena research villages the vast majority of parents are illiterate; exposure to outside influences is limited and communities place a very high value on their traditional way of life. Life centres on livestock and farming, and many priorities are set accordingly. As said by a village elder, “the most important things here are cattle, cattle, cattle. Selling them is almost impossible. People have a personal relationship with cattle, and they are usually not sold, certainly not to finance the schooling of a child.” It is only done in situations of great emergency and also then only reluctantly. Families not only see cattle as their source of wealth, but also as a source of prestige. Furthermore, people have strong emotional relationships with their cattle. Selling a cow in order to finance the education of a child is unthinkable for most families. “Modernising” influences are viewed with certain suspicion, especially where traditional gender roles are concerned. The so-called social or cultural distance from village life to school is substantial, which has an effect on children as well as the general involvement of parents. For children, the challenge is to deal with very different sets of expectations at home and at school. A teacher from the mission school stressed the big gap between traditional life and modern influences as follows: “Formal education is rather incompatible with Borena way of life, with tradition and culture”. The statement of a father from Dhoqqolle is also illustrative: “The boy in school may turn his back on the Borena tribes and culture. He will not be ‘our’ boy anymore.”

Tradition also means a strict adherence to gender roles, which tends to be more rigid for woman and girls. In terms of educational opportunities for girls, the traditional roles and responsibilities often stand in the way of enrolment or successful completion. A variety of studies have been carried out to unearth the root causes of this gender disparity [see for example: UNICEF 2002a; Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 2004]. While national statistics suggest a narrowing of the gender gap in educational opportunities and achievement, evidence from the field shows that the difference remains marked. If the overall enrolment at a school is taken into account, the disparity

appears to be modest. But while the lowest grades of primary schools often show a balance or even more girls than boys enrolled, this situation changes dramatically in the upper grades. Once girls reach puberty, there is an increasing chance of dropout. Depending on the age of initial enrolment, this mostly happens between grade 3 and grade 6. The before-mentioned studies list a number of reasons leading to this imbalance:

- Early marriages
- Family's reluctance to invest in girls education (scarce resources)
- Fears of pregnancy
- Loss of prestige
- Difficulty to find a match for marriage
- Work (typical female tasks)

Early marriages, even though officially discouraged, are still very widespread in rural Ethiopia. In reaction to campaigns launched by the Ethiopian government and national and international NGOs, the majority of respondents in the research villages claim that early marriages are a practice of the past and that the "awareness" has spread that it is better to wait longer before marrying off the daughters. In practice, however, early marriages persist and in both research areas girls were still married as young as 12 or 13 years old. Early marriages are traditionally seen as desirable as a younger girl can get a good match and are more easily manageable. With increasing age, the bride price is likely to fall and the risk increases that a girl wants to make her own choice of partner.

A mother from Diida Yabello explained with regard to her daughter: "18 years is considered to be the latest possible age for a girl to get married around here. After that she is too old to make a good match. Because children are enrolled rather late around here, a girl is easily getting into marriage age while still at school. So what is the point?" A teacher from Diida Yabello confirmed that this attitude persists:

Here there is a problem with girls, even now that the government has pushed girls' education and more are enrolled. Still girls' education is not accepted, and going to school is seen as potentially dangerous. Not education itself, but that it can spoil the girls. The problems are the parents. One girl is in grade 6 and an illiterate boy wants to marry her. She does not want to marry him, the parents push but she refuses, saying she wants to learn. There is a general reluctance to send girls to school. Shortage of hands is a problem (work), culture is another.

This difference in social standing between an educated and an uneducated person, and the consequences for the traditional gender roles, is a factor that worries parents. The following comments were made in a focus group discussion on this subject:

"There is a problem for girls. If she went to school, an uneducated man will never ask to marry her. She may despise him, not respect him enough. That is the main problem."

"Here in the Borena communities, there are not many boys who went to school. Therefore it is not good for the girls to go either. No one will ask them for marriage. Someone who lives simple will not ask an educated person for marriage. If the status is equal, then there is no problem."

“Somebody who did not go to school will not have desire for a girl who went to school.”

“Even if I have many cows and other things, and my daughter is educated, no one will desire to marry her. So we see that as something bad.”

“The problem we have here is that the girls have to get married whether they are educated or not. When they are educated, they cannot get married, as they will always have disagreements with their partners.”

“In our community if a girl gets pregnant, even if she can get married afterwards she has to marry a Guji (another tribe in the area). She cannot be part of Borena community anymore.”

The father of the only school-going girl in the village tried to make a case in favour of education: “I have a girl who goes to school, and there are also boys who go to school, so why shouldn’t she find a husband? Why would there be the refusal to marry? The man here has a daughter which is in school, and she is engaged. Both are students and they can marry each other.”

But the inequality in status bothers the majority of the villagers: “There are not that many boys and girls. An educated person can only marry an uneducated girl. Their status is not equal.”

The fear that an educated girl will defy her parents’ wishes and become “loose” was voiced by the majority of parents: “The man marries a woman, not the other way round: marriage is a passive part on the woman, and a too self confident and educated woman is not desired by many men”. An 18 year old school boy affirmed that this attitude forms the major obstacle to education for girls:

10 years ago, traditionally, girls should not go to school, because maybe she will run away before marriage, and there is less parental control if she goes to school. Also now, when parents send older girls to school, they will meet boys of the same age, and many parents do not want that. This affects girls’ education greatly. When a girl is above the age of 14, the community (and also the girls themselves) feels uncomfortable about it, because everybody expects “sexual problems”. Therefore the family is reluctant to send girls to school.

When asked if problems have actually occurred, most respondents admitted that this fear is often not founded on experience within the community. During a focus group discussion with women, there was a general agreement that the gossiping and rumours alone can prevent parents from enrolling or keeping their daughters at school, as the communities are very tightly knit.

If a girl wanted to do something, she could do that anywhere. But the community thinks that she only goes to school to meet boys. None of this is based on facts, there have not been any incidences in the villages here, but that’s what the people in the communities think, and it is very offensive when people start gossiping like that.

It is not only the male family members who discourage school enrolment of girls. Also the women are reluctant:

Girls are always married when they are 14 or 15 years old. The woman's tasks are learned while they still live with their families. There they learn all they need to know for married life. If someone wants to marry; they tell the parents that they want to marry their daughter. The boy/man is always the one who takes the initiative. The girls can refuse a proposal, but they do not say so. She has then to leave the village to find somebody else and cannot stay with her family.

A father from a neighbouring village cluster expressed similar worries:

There is this attitude, if girls go to school, they get pregnant. This is the main fear of parents. Another issue is that when they go to school, and they come back to the village nobody will want to marry them, because she has associated with boys already. There has been no actual example here in this village, but it happened somewhere else.

Whether there actually have been cases of early pregnancy or not, the mere association with boys of their age once a girl reaches puberty is seen as problematic:

Girls don't go to school because they sit together with male students; it is not good in the eyes of many parents. When girls herd cattle, they stay among themselves; they don't mix with the boys. It is also a matter of the division of workload for the girls. Getting water and firewood is always done by girls.

A father summed up the general attitude:

There is the opinion that girls will misbehave when they go to school. The boys behave differently. Traditionally, when girls are sent out to herd the cows, they do not play or mix with the boys. But they also do not get any information (sexual education) on what can happen if she stands around with boys, she will be beaten by the parents! It is better to die than to misbehave and to be dishonoured.

Those parents from traditional communities sending their daughters to school do so in defiance of tradition, and social norm. A mother of a 13 year old school girl summed up the difficulties:

It is more difficult to send girls to school than boys. Girls are needed for so many tasks at home. Borena keep the good reputation of the girls, and at school, girls will associate with boys, and then can get pregnant and then will be outcasts. Anything can also happen in the forest, but if a girl is fetching water or firewood, herding cattle, she doesn't remain out for a long time. There is still the family control. At the school there you cannot control them. There is more risk at school than in the village and the surroundings are much safer here. We love our boys and girls equally but we worry more about the girls.

Her daughter's attendance has drawn a lot of criticism from her neighbours: "Girls should get married in time; that is the tradition! If she passes 20 and she is not married, people will think 'maybe there is something wrong with her'. Girls should not choose what they want to do."

A 13 year old school girl from Dhoqqolle was very outspoken about traditional constraints regarding girls going to school:

People say ‘she is misbehaving, betraying our tradition’, they are complaining about so many things. We are always hearing these rumours, no one comes directly to us to say these things, and the comments are always indirect. But even when they talk like this, I keep quiet as if I accept what they say. I just don’t put into practice what they say, I ignore it! About the boys, when they come from school back to the village, people say that they are only looking at the girls in the school. For the families, as I see it, it is much better to send the girls to school. The girls are separated from the families, but after marriage they leave their parents anyway. First, they should go and prove themselves. There is not so much pressure on the boys; they are freer to do what they want. Girls at home do the same amount of work as the boys, but the girls cannot stay with their families, girls cannot have property, and that is the advantage for the boys. Girls only can have an advantage of marriage. They get animals when they get married, but if there are problems or separation, the problem remains that the women do not own anything. In Borena communities, there is always the fear that a girl will get pregnant early, before marriage. Then she will be an outcast, she will be set aside from everything.

This girl actually reaffirmed some of the rumours about pregnancies at the boarding school in previous years:

Yes, it has actually happened here in Dhoqqolle. In total, there were 6 girls here at the school that got pregnant. There are not many options left then for a girl. Either she will have to go and marry a Guchi³. Actually one of the girls who got pregnant still lives outside the mission gates all by herself!! But these things happened some years ago, and there haven’t been any problems since then.

The teachers at the school admitted that there were some problems 3 years ago: “There was no sexual education at all, and not at the school. That is one of the reasons why we now have female teachers here as well. It is impossible for a male teacher to address these issues with the girls. Now the ‘moral education’ has started and so the situation is better.”

The social pressure and public opinion within the community plays a paramount role in the decision to send a girl to school or not. To illustrate this clash between modern education and traditional roles, a group of men related an incident that had taken place a few months earlier:

There is a ceremony in which the sheep are taken around the enclosure of the cattle. There was one girl here who is in school. The community chose her to take part in the ceremony. But then other people said: ‘she combs her hair, and she does not respect

³ The Guchi are another tribe living in the area, a little looked down upon by the Borena, and said to be easier in their morals and ready to accept a girl which has been pregnant.

our tradition, so she cannot take part in the ceremony'. They have seen that she has changed. They have refused to let her participate.

Combing hair or wearing trousers is repeatedly named as a sign that school-going girls changed their way of life and turn their back on traditional ways. Traditionally, Borena girls and woman wear their hair in styles according to their age and status. The traditional braids are not always worn by school girls, and not having braided hair is scorned by the community. One of the practical problems is that the braids are frequently treated with butter or fat. In the classroom, this leads to a strong smell and attracts flies. It is therefore strongly discouraged by teachers. Similarly, "wearing trousers" refers to any non-traditional clothing. The skirts worn by school girls are long and very modest but they are not traditional and are therefore referred to as 'trousers'.

11 year old Adi is one of the few children and the only girl of her village attending school. She recounted the general attitude in her village:

The older people always complain about education, and that it spoils girls. Girls wear "trousers", they change their hairstyle. They change the traditional ways. That's why people especially discourage girls to go to school. Traditionally, the girls wear neck ornaments, but when they go to school, they leave them (they are too dirty), they start combing their hair instead of wearing the Borena braids, they wear other clothes. People say 'you are destroying our culture'. The people have complained to me, they say that I changed to be a man, and that I do not behave like a girl anymore. I still fear these things.....But I would like to look for a job later. I want to be a teacher or work in an education office.

Also in East Haraghe, parents showed concerned that education might spoil the girls, make them less obedient to marry the man that has been chosen for them. Parents voiced concern that going to school past the age of puberty would increase the chance that a girl would meet a boy she falls in love with, and run away with him. When discussing marriage with parents, most claimed that the times have changed and that girls are now married off at an older age, between 15 and 20 years. In practice, however, many girls are married at a younger age, sometimes as young as 12 years. Girls themselves said that "often adults talk one way and then act the other. They will all say that girls shouldn't be married off young, but then they push them into marriage." One of the reasons given in favour of early marriages is the fear that girls could run away with somebody and lose their virginity. Also the fear of HIV has being cited as a reason to marry girls early, to avoid them getting into trouble: "due to the HIV problem, we are glad when the girls marry early; it is much safer for them than going to the cities".

13 year old Dabo, who was attending grade 5 at Dhoqqolle, was firm with her beliefs about marriage, and her parents were supportive of her and said that will not give in to the community's pressure:

No, I don't want to get married until I finish school. When I turn 15, my family will expect me to get married. But I will not, I can say no! I don't think it is good to get married at the age of 15, because you cannot even look after yourself at that age. Then you get married and give birth to children yourself.

The Woreda Education Office at Yabello has a female officer who is responsible for girls' education. She also emphasised that early marriage, in combination with a high workload and poverty form a major obstacle for girls. She used to teach at the school at Diida Yabello, in 1999, at which time there were only 4 girls attending. She stressed the importance of the policy to employ female teachers:

One problem is the low number of female teachers available. When I was in training, there were not many female students. There was a lot of pressure from males, pushing the girls. Girls tend to have or get an inferiority complex. There has been some change, but it is still more challenging for girls, it is still a problem. After school, the girls will have to work more and can study less than the boys. The employment of female teachers is supposed to boost both the girls' confidence, both in the classroom in general. Female teachers also serve as role models.

When I was teaching there, one female student was married during vacation time, and we went to see her, and then went to the Woman's Affair Office. The girl was 16 years old and was studying in grade 2 when this happened. Her husband wanted her to drop out of school and to work. She wanted to continue with school, and after many discussions with us her father decided that she could stay at school. Now she is in grade 7. Things got better over the last years. Previously, parents thought that the girls would run away before marriage if they go to school. Now more parents hope 'if I send my daughter to school, she will help me in the future'. They observe the females in NGO and government offices”.

Adi studies in grade 4 and is the oldest of 7 children, the others are 8, 6, 5, and the two youngest are 1. She is the first and only child of her family to go to school, but she says that next year one of her sisters will also start attending. She is a boarding student and goes home only on weekends. It takes her 2 hours to walk the distance. In total, there are 4 children from her village attending school - the other three are in grades 4, 5 and 6. Before she was enrolled one of her cousins (son of her fathers brother) came to the village to teach the alphabet. He had studied in a school in Mega. “He told us that a person who cannot write his name is a fool.”

There are other girls from my village who should have gone to school, but the families decided that they should not go after all. I tried to talk to them, but they tried to convince me to LEAVE school. They say that education is not good. If I asked them why, they only said 'we don't want to learn.' I don't know why they say this. But when I think about it, some girls got pregnant before (not this year). They have fear of such things. I told them that even those who do not go to school can become pregnant. I want to complete school, and I have to fulfil my plan.

5.2 Access and poverty

One of the obstacles in Ethiopia, preventing children from receiving basic education in rural areas, is a shortage of schools [Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia 1994c]. In sparsely populated (semi-) pastoralist areas the distances between schools are too great to be covered by foot, while schools in more densely populated agricultural areas often face severe overcrowding. In the

research areas, many children walked more than 3-5 km to get to school, with some children walking as far as 10 km. Public transport is non-existent in most places, and walking is then the only option. Where some form of public transport is available it is often too expensive. As the vast majority of schools lack boarding facilities, the distance to the nearest school is often a prohibitive obstacle. One of the research sites had the only primary school within a radius of more than 40km, and in this area less than 5% of children were enrolled. In villages 15-20km from the school, none or only one or two families sent children to school, and these children were boarders. Access to school is further impeded by the necessity for families to move livestock to locations where sufficient water and fodder can be found. Sometimes the livestock is brought to other locations by the adult male members of the family, while other family members remain behind in the villages. Another common practice is to place (school-going) children with relatives in the village and close to the school, while the rest of the family moves to another area where pasture and water resources are more readily available. But according to teachers and local officials, each year children drop out of school temporarily or permanently and move together with their families. Around Diida Yabello, several families had already relocated to other areas as the watering sites around the villages had dried up. Even if the families relocate within the same area, the daily walk to school can become too cumbersome for the children.

As part of the effort to increase access to education, so-called satellite schools have been set up in rural areas where the long distance to the nearest primary school make it impossible for children to attend. These satellite schools offer grade 1 and 2 at the most. They are located within the catchment area of an existing primary school and are administratively tied to it. The schools are basic structures which have been set up with the help of the communities which they serve. Apart from offering improved access, satellite schools are also supposed to operate more flexibly than the full-scale primary schools in terms of schooling hours; and for children who have to herd animals in the daytime there are supposed to be night classes. According to a representative of an NGO which supports one of the satellite schools, “the schedule of the satellite school is determined by the community, according to the need of the students and the parents.” Some also offer adult literacy classes. The satellite school in Olgabesa, for example, around 10km from the Diida Yabello primary school, was set up because the other primary school is too far away. 90 children are enrolled, but only around 50 children come every day. The other 40 children have migrated with their families (120km away) because of the drought.

A visit to another government-approved catholic primary school near Yabello shed more light on the effort of introducing satellite schools in remote areas. The mission school at Dhadeem offers classes for grades 1-8, both for the surrounding villages and as a boarding facility. One of the teachers commented:

The satellite schools look good on paper. There are some satellite schools established in the vicinity of our school, but the functioning is not that good. There is a lack of will and commitment, and never any follow-up on policies. The enrolment for the lower grades at Dhadeem have also dropped, ‘supposedly because of the satellite schools’ but actually that is not true as the numbers of students in the satellite schools do not match those missing at the regular ones.

Boarding primary schools are not common, and where they are available, both the fee and the fact that children cannot assist their families outside their schooling hours make them a difficult option for parents. At Dhoqqolle, the boarding fee is only 100 Birr annually, but many families claim that they are unable to meet these costs. But practically, several arrangements have been found between the (mission-run) school and the communities, whereby either the parents or the students themselves if they are older, assist on the school farm instead of paying the fee in cash. A father of 2 school-going children said that there are always ways: “Sometimes father Renatus will give the families agricultural work. Or the girls will bring firewood to the schools and receive money for that.” For the boarding students, all meals and other expenses are covered. That is not necessarily the case in all schools with boarding facilities. Another government-run school which was visited offered dormitories but no meals in addition to the WFP school lunches, leaving potential boarders to fend for themselves. Understandably, the number of boarding students is very small.

The Kebele of Gobsa lies within the catchment area of the Dhoqqolle mission school. There are around 215 people living in this cluster of villages. The Kebele is situated about 10km from the mission school, at the end of a rough dirt track. The only way to reach it is on foot or by 4-wheel-drive. According to estimates made by villagers, around 120 children of school-going age (7-14) live in the cluster, of which only six attend the mission school. There used to be a satellite school for grade 1 only, but it was shut down 6 months ago. The local authorities said they closed the satellite school because there were hardly any students enrolled, and that demand was insufficient. The villagers in turn claimed that they would not or could not send their children to the satellite school for just grade 1, because they would have to either walk 2 hours every day to get to the mission school once they passed grade 1, or go further afield to a boarding school: “If the school is here, maybe most children can go in the daytime, others can come in the evening after they looked after the animals. Sending them away is too costly.”

Asked about the future for the children who do not go to school, the village elder replied:

They are looking after the animals; they are left without going to school. Some families only have 1 or 2 children, and the families need them to take care of the animals. Other families are very poor! The problem is a scarcity of money and property. They started grade 1 here, and the children can stay with us, eat with us and drink with us. The only solution is that there needs to be a school here, grades 1-4 or 1-6 so that they can learn something.

Enrolment in Gursum Kebele lies around 35% of the school-going-age children. The headmaster of the local primary school believes distance to be the main reason for their low enrolment rates: “The Kebele is too big, especially many of the younger children cannot walk here.” When it was pointed out that the furthest village in that particular catchment area is only 2 km away, it was explained that “it is too difficult terrain, and there is a deep gorge that children cannot pass on their way to school.” Neither parents nor children themselves, however, named the distance to school as a major problem; besides, even areas with schools within walking distance have relatively low enrolment levels.

Poverty is more often the factor named by families to explain why their children are not enrolled. Even though the fees are relatively low, many families are subsistence farmers and have an

extremely limited access to cash income. The little money that is available is often reserved to buy other necessities, such as clothing, candles, and medicine. Income is also irregular and dependent on the season. During the times of the year when income is scarce, loans are not available. In Borena, people's wealth and income depend on their livestock and crops. Cattle play a central role in both the cultural and the economic life of Borena and families also keep sheep, goats and sometimes camels. During the time of the research, the prolonged drought in southern Ethiopia had led to severe problems for families to feed and water their livestock. Cows had ceased to give milk, restricting both the income and consumption for families. While the costs of education are relatively low, a minimum amount of cash is still necessary. There is a 10 birr annual fee per student at Diida Yabello, and parents have to purchase clothes, shoes, pens, exercise and textbooks for their children. The drought affects all aspects of life and it can affect school going children in several ways. In general, Borena families do not own many assets beside their animals and children often only own one set of clothes. While school uniforms are not used in rural primary schools, parents are expected to send their children in clean and "decent" clothes. 7 year old Loko, for example, is attending 2nd grade in Diida Yabello primary, and has one dress for going to school. It has to be washed in the weekends or in the afternoons so that she can reuse it the next day. Whenever her mother does not have sufficient water to wash the clothes, she chooses to keep her daughter at home rather than send her to school in dirty or torn clothes. According to her, buying a second set of clothes is out of question.

Also the fees and contributions which have to be made at school, however small, become a burden for the family. Due to the lack of water and fodder, the cows hardly give any milk and families have to buy milk in town for the smaller children. Loko is the only one of 6 siblings attending school. Her mother is too worried to invest more in the education of the other children, as they are now living from their meagre savings. Loaning facilities in the villages are limited. There is an "Ukup", a cooperation of families where each family puts a fixed amount of money into a common "account" either weekly or monthly. In times of extreme need, that money can be disbursed, but only few families participate and families readily admit that this traditional saving scheme basically serves those who have some funds to spare to begin with, thus excluding the poorest families. There is a government programme in place, called the "safety-net programme" where the poorest families in a village are registered for governmental support. But there is a lot of disagreement on which families should be included. Families without livestock are certainly (considered) poor, but according to villagers, most people are equally poor and should therefore all be able to claim governmental support.

In all research locations, poverty was named by parents as the major obstacle preventing children from attending school. But there was little difference observed in terms of wealth and income between families sending their children to school and those families who did not. Sometimes, especially in Borena, those families with comparably more assets, i.e. more livestock, were actually more likely to keep their children at home to assist with the various tasks. During a group discussion in a village near Dhoqqolle, the assembled villagers explained: "mainly of the poorer people have sent their children to school. The rich man has much more livestock and therefore has more work to do and needs the children to help." This practice also has a historical dimension: "During the time of the Derg, the rich people paid off the government, so they would not have to enrol their children. During this time, each school had to enter a minimum of 50 students each year into grade

1, and the schools had to fulfil this quota. If they did not fulfil the quota by voluntary enrolment, they then would take the children of the poorer people”.

A so-called wealth paradox [see for example: Kielland & Tovo 2006] whereby the poorer families send their children to school while wealthier families have a higher demand for assistance at home and thus keep their children out of school, was to some extent observed in all locations. As there are few if any employment opportunities for children in rural Ethiopia, most demand for child labour comes from the own household. Those with fewer assets will consequently also have lower “opportunity costs” when sending their children to school. This was much more evident in Borena than in East Hararghe. More wealth in Borena generally means more livestock and more work traditionally assigned to children. Around Gursum, wealth originates from cultivation and trade, mainly of chat. Families with a large surplus of chat rely on (female) family members to sell the perishable goods on the market.

In some cases, economic hardship can translate into opportunity. A young man from Diida Yabello, who re-enrolled, described how the major drought that hit the area several years previously proved to be good for school enrolment: “For the students, it was a blessing that the cattle died in the 1999 drought because otherwise they could never have studied! I myself had to drop out because my parents wanted me to look after the cattle. But now I study in grade 7. The peak in new and re-enrolment came in that year.”

5.3 Child work

Low school enrolment and attendance rates, as well as high dropout numbers and the prevalence of child labour are often associated with each other, and the causality can work both ways. According to Admassie [2000] and Anvig [2001], schooling of children competes with labour intensive work, especially in rural communities. The demand for child work or labour in rural Ethiopia stems mainly from the own household. Activities by children in the research areas include herding livestock, assisting with weeding, ploughing, harvesting, running errands, fetching water and firewood, assisting with household chores, minding younger siblings and buying or selling goods in the market. The work load fluctuates throughout the year with the changing seasons and weather patterns [Cockburn 1999, 2002]. During the dry season, herding becomes more time-intensive as the grazing grounds provide less fodder and the herds have to be taken out further from the villages. Water becomes a problem as the ponds nearby the village dry up and water has to be fetched from as far as 5 to 10 km away. Then, with the beginning of the rainy season, work on the fields is intensified.

Most of the work is assigned strictly according to age and gender. From the age of 5 years onwards, children are deemed old enough to help with simple household chores, and tending to smaller animals such as goats and sheep. When they get older, children are required to take care of the cattle and help with work on the land, such as planting maize and harvesting. The collection of firewood and water, assistance with cooking and other household chores, as well as looking after siblings is also done by children, especially girls [Mull 2005]. According to the Ethiopian Rural Household Survey 1994 [Admassie 2000], more than 60% of children aged between 5 and 7 years old are already engaged in household work, and observations in the research sites matched these findings. The regular school-starting-age in Ethiopia is also 7 years, but children factually enter primary school at various ages, often between 8 and 10 years old, due to these working

commitments. If one child within a household goes to school, tasks have to be reassigned. Woldehanna et al. [2006] identified a negative relationship between birth order and schooling, finding that younger children pay for the education of their older siblings. In rural areas, this “payment” takes the form of taking over the tasks of the older siblings, freeing up their time for schooling. Thus, if a family is willing to send a child to school, this child may have to wait for a younger sibling to reach an age at which these tasks can be taken over. Because the work is organised according to both age and gender, it also means that some children within a household will not get a chance to go to school at all. A mother of 5 children explained how the work is divided: “Girls fetch water and firewood, and they sweep the huts. Boys take care of the animals. Girls from the age of 10 onwards can take bigger responsibility, and boys start to help their families when they are around 7 years old.”

Yaldis, for example, is 9 years old and takes care of his families’ cattle. Yaldis has two brothers, aged 2 and 5, as well as 3 sisters. Only one child, his youngest sister, aged 6, goes to school, where she attends grade 2. The girls fetch wood, water, help at home and cook food. When we first met Yaldis, he was grazing the cattle together with another girl of the same age who was also responsible for a herd. When they can, children from one village join forces and watch over their animals together, mainly to fight boredom; Yaldis usually goes herding together with his friend, the 10 year old Dabo. 15 cattle are owned by his father and mother and he says that “when I grow up, the cattle will be mine”. Yaldis started herding when he was 6, “together with someone like an older brother, but who was actually not my brother but an older boy from another village”. It is a common practice in Borena that a family takes in a child or youth from the outside. It is like “hiring” somebody but there is no direct payment involved, at least not in cash. The boy (who takes the place of a son they may not have, at least not of the right age) will eventually obtain one or more animals in exchange for his services. He may tend to cattle of more than one family at the same time, and he is treated as a member of the family/clan, in a live-in situation. He will be given a calf to raise for himself in return. Yaldis’ family also owns sheep and goats; they are herded by his 5-year old brother “who is now old enough to look after them”. It is impractical to herd cows, goats and sheep together. Cows move around at another pace while grazing and they need to be taken further from the village to find sufficient fodder. Goats and sheep, however, are taken out grazing together and they are kept closer to the village. That, and the fact that goats and sheep are much more easily to control than cattle, puts the responsibility for cattle on the older children and on the younger ones for goats and sheep. Yaldis says that he likes herding because he feels that it is important to help his family: “it is important for us to stay around our parents. They are getting older and if we all leave now (to school), who will take care of them?” He likes the animals a lot, but he also sees the downside of herding:

In the beginning, it was difficult. During the first month, I was not used to being hungry and thirsty for the whole day, but then I got used to it. You are out all day, no food, and little water. Sometimes I feel sick and get a headache from being in the sun too much. And the cattle don’t know and respect you well, so it is hard work. Now it is much easier!

Regarding his own education perspectives, he first said that when he grows older then maybe his younger brother can take over the cattle herding and he will go to school. But he did not seem too keen: “I do not like to go to school, I like to be with the animals, and it is a good life!”

Dabo is 10 years old, and unusually for a girl, she tends to her families cattle. She started by looking after the families goats, but now is responsible for the cattle. She has 2 brothers and 4 sisters. One brother is older, the other younger than her. Out of her 4 sisters, only one goes to school, now in grade 8 in Yabello. Her family is relatively wealthy according to the norms of her village: they own cattle, camels, goats and sheep. Her family is considered as one of the wealthiest families in the village. When asked whether she prefers to go to school or to herd the cattle she said: “I am happy herding cattle, I don’t want to go to school.”

The village of Liban Karayyoo where Yaldis and Dabo live consists of 12 families, and there are around 100 children. At 6 a.m. most children leave the village, either to go out with the cattle, goats and sheep, or to fetch wood or water. Out of these 100 children, only 14 children go the nearby primary school. One of the mothers explained that “the parents are interested in sending their children but it is impossible because of the work load.” No family sends all of their children to school, but only those who are not needed to assist the family. The head of the Liban Karayyoo village, for example, has 9 children, 4 boys and 5 girls. Out of these, 1 boy (aged 20, grade 7) and 2 girls (aged 10 and 16, grade 2 and 5) go to school. One son has married and left the village, the other children help at home and with the cattle.

When asked for reasons for non-enrolment a village elder from Dhoqqolle explained: “The people here in this area have by now a good idea about the importance of learning, but there is too much work to be done, and the children are needed to help. The children have to herd the cattle/goat/sheep or to help with household chores, especially now with water fetching.” And “if a family has only one daughter and one son, in that case nobody will go to school, the girl helps at home and the boy with the cattle. If there are more children, maybe some can go to school.”

Children’s household activities are not easily combined with school, as they often take up the whole day, and are dictated by the seasons. But villagers also point to another problem that makes education and the children’s tasks rather incompatible: “Once children go to school, they may refuse to help at home on days when they are free. School children stand up against their parents and may refuse to help. Also parents will not ask them to help anymore.” A father of 7 children who lives in Dhoqqolle, said:

Children here have a big responsibility: the livestock, the fields, everything! The two boys who go to school do not do anything! In the village there is unity. If a responsibility is assigned, everybody takes on his duty. We divide the work for the village. The main responsibility of children is to take care of the cows, woman fetch water and firewood, while the men cultivate the land.

According to 17 year old Guyo, who was attending grade 5 at Diida Yabello, parents clearly prefer their children to work rather than attend school:

Parents do not believe in education, they say ‘you go and watch the cows’. My parents did not want me to go to school, because they think it is not important. My parents

don't want me to learn, but to farm the land. Now my brother, aged 21 works on the land, and outside school hours, I help my brother. Also my sisters are working: they fetch firewood and go to the market.

The work load fluctuates throughout the year, and during each season some particular tasks are more important or time-intensive than others. During the dry season, as well as when the expected rain fails to come, fetching water becomes a main task. As Kielland & Tovo [2006:66] observed, "water is perhaps the most fundamental problem of African households.....In many places water sources are a long distance from the consumers - especially in the dry season when cisterns, ponds, wells and rivers tend to dry up." Indeed, fetching firewood and water constitutes a substantial part of the household workload, especially for woman and girls. The water sources are scarce and often far away from the villages. Around the Borena villages where research took place, drinking water had to be fetched from as far as 3-5 kilometres. An adult woman carries as much as 30 litres at a time, and children up to 10 or 15. The time investment is substantial: fetching sufficient water for the household can take as much as 4-6 hours per day. Younger girls either have to participate in this heavy work or otherwise remain home to take over other tasks while the mother is absent.

The lack of water sources close to the villages not only contributes to the high workload, but it can also result in students dropping out of school altogether. A teacher from another primary school near Yabello expressed concern that many students would not return after the vacation: "Even before the vacation many students had dropped out due to the drought, because all children have to help at home. Dropping out happens either because the children have to help at home or because the families move away. 20 students have already dropped out."

The rain pattern governs the life of the rural communities, and thus enrolment and attendance. A village elder explained:

The next two months here are going to be very labour intensive. It is the rainy season and that means sowing time. At that time, students drop out of school to help their families. Boys work in the fields, the mothers go to market to sell the produce and the girls have to stay at home to look after small children and do the household chores. Our way of life depends on the rain. When the rains come, all else becomes secondary. Then the children stop going to school.

Around Gursum, herding animals is not as time intensive as it is in Borena. Here, families own very little livestock and focus more on agriculture. There are many activities that children are engaged in, especially girls. A representative of a community organisation explained:

Girls are very active in this area; they are made to work a lot. This is a border area, and there is a lot of smuggling and trading going on, and girls are moving around. Trading is done especially by girls. The men and the boys spend much of their time chewing chat, and staying at home. Men also have to plough the fields when the time is right. Girls are more communicative, they are better traders.

The villages around Awdaal are relatively close to the school, are more or less equally distanced from water sources, and do not differ greatly in terms of wealth and source of income. But school

enrolment fluctuates greatly within this area. Down towards the river valley, animals and especially monkeys threaten the crops and therefore the fields have to be protected around the clock. From this particular village, virtually no children attend school. Another nearby village does not have such problems; the fields do not need to be guarded all the time, and more children attend school.

Even though the traditional gender roles in Ethiopia give men far more decision power than women, women still play an important role regarding the chances of a child to attend school. While the father will often have the last word of whether a particular child will be allowed to attend school, the support of the mother or the lack thereof is of crucial importance. Being already burdened by a high workload, the assistance of the daughters may make an important difference for the mother. As the highest workload is assigned to woman, it is usually the mothers who want their daughters to remain at home instead of going to school. In the case of Roida, for example, it was her mother who raised the objections against her attending school. Roida is 15 years old and lives a few hundred meters from the school. She is the youngest from her family, with 2 older brothers and 1 sister. One of her older brothers studies in grade 11 in Harar, the other brother trades in oxen. Her sister is married already; she never went to school. Roida now studies in grade 2. She said:

My mother kept me home to help, and otherwise I would be in grade 7 now. My mother wants me to look after the cows. Only because my brother really pushed my parents, and some officials from the Kebele also talked to my parents am I now allowed to go to school. Even now, my parents don't support me, and it is my brother who does.

When talking to her mother, it became clear that she feels overburdened with the household and all the responsibilities: "Now that Roida goes to school, it became much more difficult for me. The work remains the same, and I have less help." Before and after school, Roida still has to assist her mother, and sometimes she has to skip a day at school if her mother asks her to do so.

Romia is 14 years old and goes to grade 4 in Awdaal primary. She is one of 7 children. Even though her family is one of the better-off in the village, she explained that her family does not have the means to send all their children to school. Her older sister got married at the age of 13. One of her brothers also goes to school and the youngest is only 3 years old. There are 6 female and 15 male students from her village at Awdaal school. Romia dropped out of school once before because her mother wanted her to help at home, but then re-enrolled later. Her family has 2 cows and 3 goats and owns a large plot of chat, which is their main source of income. She explained that the choice of who would go to school and who could not, had to do with several factors, such as birth order, personal interest and particular workload. Her 12-year-old brother, for example, has the responsibility to help the father in the field. He helps his father ploughing the field or even does it by himself when his father is busy chewing chat with other men from the village. This work is always done in the mornings. After that, he feeds and waters the oxen and then watches over the fields like a "scarecrow", keeping birds and other attend. Also Romia has to help at home, but her work can be done before and after school. Romia described her tasks:

After school, there is a lot of work to be done. I have to fetch water, and run errands, such as taking tea out to the field for my father, the traditional tea, which is prepared with coffee husks and milk. Girls are obliged to help at home, they are not given time to do any homework and study. Women don't have much power. Boys chew chat, and

then they can study much better. Girls who go to school do not chew. It is ok for boys to start chewing chat when they are 13 years old. Girls have to be at least 15 years old -then they are woman, and often married.

Romia's parents explained: "The problem is that we don't have the means to send all the children to school. Out of 7 children, only 3 are learning". Her mother expressed preference for Romia to discontinue her education after grade 6. The mother explained how they decided which child would be allowed to attend school:

Romia can help at home and do her work at any time. But the boy helps his father in the fields. In the morning around 10am, it is time to plough the fields, the boy often does the work, his father chews chat. After that, Amin feeds the oxen and then stays in the fields as a scare crow in the millet field. The other fields, maize, millet, chat, tef and peanuts have all to be taken care of. The main season is from April to November, and then most of the work needs to be done.

5.4 Re-organising work

While parents often argue that they simply cannot send all children to school due to the high workload within the household, community workers and teachers often blame ignorance of the parents or simply convenience: "Children are kept at home so that the adults can avoid the full work load." Re-organising the workload is possible but requires a combined effort from the household. 17 year old Jero thinks that it is easily possible if the community sticks together: "Children shouldn't be kept at home to help. Parents should get help from their neighbours. My 25 year old brother takes care of the family cattle. Together with the neighbours, the families take turns to take care of the calves and the goats. This is also the usual way of dividing the work for families with few children. Of course it depends on good neighbouring relations." That it is possible is shown by the following example.

The family of 11 year-old Adi cultivates land and they also have livestock. She explained why she is able to attend school:

Because everyone in the village is related to each other, the care of the animals is shared within the village. My father and my grandfather have many children who can help them. There is the perception that children live a good life in school, herding and working is much more tiresome. Even though life here at the school is more difficult, I would like the other children to come to school as well.

Adi was actually an exception in the village because she attends the mission school in Dhoqqolle. Her mother explained what this means for the work organisation within the household:

Now that Adi goes to school, there is more work for me. And Adi's younger sister who is now 8 years old, looks after the calves. Now I give the baby in the care of somebody else and I go myself to get the water and the firewood. There are many people here in the village and we can help each other out.

But asking neighbours or relatives outside the core family for assistance is not done easily and counters the cultural notion of work division and mutual responsibilities. The choice always discriminates one child or the other, as exemplified by the comment made by a mother of 5, with one child in school: “If you want to send one daughter to school, then the other one has to take care of the goats.” A man from Dhoqqolle explained:

Boys need to look after the cattle. If a man has two boys, one will be herding the cattle. If the family sends one boy to school, they will miss a working hand. If I only have one boy (of the right age) and if I send my boy to school, your boy has to tend my cattle. They may also want to send their boy to school. They will not be equal.

This notion of equality came up during many interviews in the villages around Dhoqqolle. Dividing the workload is not just a matter of necessity within the household, but is also influenced by what the community at large sees as appropriate.

Kabale (13) studies in 6th grade, and is a boarding student at Dhoqqolle. 9 children from her village attend school. She has 6 siblings, and two of them also go to school; one studies in grade 7 in Dubluk, the other one finished 10th grade, and is now back in the village. Her other siblings cannot go to school:

Since we go to school, the others cannot, they take care of the cattle and help at home. My oldest brother (aged 25) is trading in livestock; another one takes care of the cows, calves and goats. The other villagers will complain if a family sends all their children to school, because then others have to take over the work. I would like to stay in school until it is completed and then later start working.

11 year old Melesse attends grade 3 in Dhoqqolle. She started in grade 1 at the extension school at Gobsa, which is now closed. She became sick for some time and had to stop studying there. After that she started again in grade 1 at the mission school. They were 57 students at the extension village school, and only 4 continued to study here with her. Her father has two wives, and she has 5 brothers and 3 sisters. Her older brother aged 14 stays with the family in the village and takes care of the cows. The oldest sister is 16 and already married; she went to school before marriage and then dropped out. Another of her sisters was “given” to relatives to help in their household, so she left school as well. She was given to them to replace the daughter of the family who got married. Her sister passed grade 2 and was supposed to go on to grade 3, but was married before she could proceed. Melesse is a boarding student, but also spends as much time as possible in her village. She has friends both in her village and at school. “Now my friends here in the village are taking care of the calves and cows. But they ask me about school, how the education is, and they encourage me to keep it up. I want to stay in school. It is only education that can help the life of somebody.” Asked if her friends in the village would like to attend school, she said:

I don't think they will come to school, because they are helping their families. But some children were crying when they were prevented from coming here. My father said: “I wanted to go to school but I could not.” He could not go because there was nobody to assist him. My father says that if possible, he will send the other two

children to school as well. We have some animals, but not many. When I go back home, I take care of the goats. If I am not there, a cousin takes care of them. When I go, we do this together.

5.5 Migration

Labour migration by children and youths was mainly encountered in East Hararghe. Girls are more likely to move, as pointed out by the head of a local women's group:

More girls than boys migrate, because there are more work opportunities abroad for woman than for men. The woman/girls leave by themselves, nobody takes them away. They get information from others who have returned, who came back wealthy. But there are also middle men. Girls start to migrate from the age of 13 or 14 years onwards. They are then old enough to migrate, but also old enough to understand how hopeless the situation here is in fact, and that they will not be able to escape the poverty when they stay here. Most of the girls return after a while to assist their families. Those heading to Yemen and the other Arab countries usually emigrate through Somalia/Somaliland. It is much easier to leave from there. Most girls come back soon, because the work and the life there is not that good. Girls work as domestics, cleaning, cooking, looking after children and doing other housework. There are also big risks involved for the girls. On the journey, especially those who leave to Yemen by boats, there is the danger that the boats sink, which happens because the boats are small. Then there is the problem of sexual abuse at the place where they are working and living; there is nobody there to protect them. Also countries deport those working illegally, once they are caught.

From the area around Gursum, but also from Jijiga, which is the nearest town to the Somali border, many young girls and women migrate to Arab countries. There is a big population pressure in this area, as families have many children. Other villagers confirm this trend, and most families have at least one relative or neighbour who has migrated, either temporarily or permanently. "The standard of life in the rural areas is very low, and many girls migrate to other places. Popular destinations to seek work are Djibouti, Somaliland and, if possible, Saudi Arabia. People here speak Somali (in addition to Oromo), so it is easier for them to migrate east." The headmaster of Awdaal primary explained:

Most dropouts are due to drought, and take place in April, the driest time of the year. Many girls then leave to Djibouti. Not many families migrate as a whole, but some do. Mainly children and youths leave by themselves. The boys start leaving this area when they are about 15 years old. From grade 4 onwards, students drop out en masse to go to Djibouti (which is about 400 km from here). They go through middlemen in the neighbouring district.

Conclusion

Ethiopia is still facing huge challenges on its way to achieve universal primary education. The current net enrolment rate stands at 57.4%, and the education sector is characterised by a large rural-urban disparity, as well as a serious gender gap. Access to school is one of the problems that needs to be overcome, a problem that is especially pronounced in rural areas. But in all researched areas, schooling was available and, theoretically, within reach of the vast majority of the population. Nevertheless, only a small proportion of families opted to educate their children. Besides various obstacles, the perceived (lack of) quality and relevance of education played an important role. The motivation to send a child to school is related to what individuals or communities see as the purpose and benefits of education. In rural Ethiopia the majority of children do not attend school, which also means that there is no social norm established. Sending a child to school entails defying convention and tradition, and is thus a conscious decision that is related to certain expectations of what education can provide. It is therefore rather a question of why a child should be sent to school rather than why it should remain with the family at home. Staying at home, even if the child is not required for labour, is presently the normal thing to do.

Of those parents sending one or more of their children to school, the overwhelming majority see education as a potential path leading to employment in the formal sector. A family member with a paid job means a secure income benefiting the whole family. Such a future is becoming increasingly important due to the decimation of livestock, regular droughts and increasing population pressure on limited resources. The expected future financial benefits of education serve as a major motivational factor. But the benefits, if they are being realised, depend on the level of education and the employment opportunities in the respective area. When talking about the relevance of education as well as the expected returns, it is important to bear in mind what the likely termination grade of schooling of the particular child will be. One of the problems with primary education in rural areas is that the last grade at the village school is often the termination grade as well (children do not commonly travel farther a field to continue higher education). Education in the village primary school is only affordable because the child can remain living with the family and can still assist with household and/or farm chores; however, sending a child to another school for further education is far more difficult and costly (direct, indirect and opportunity costs). Many village schools offer education only up to grade 6, and thus a level of education of only limited use for proper employment. In the eyes of many parents, grade 10 is the minimum level of education that can pave the way for formal employment.

In the absence of opportunities for further education and training and the resulting lack of employment prospects, traditional values appear to weigh far heavier than the perceived benefits of education. The benefits are only theoretical and the decision to stick to the old ways then appears as a rational decision. Awareness campaigns on education focus on the economic benefits of education, and this is generally reflected in the expectation that students and parents voice. The problem is that those benefits often do not materialise, at least not in the short term or in the expected manner, which easily leads to frustration, disillusionment, and consequently non-

enrolment or dropout. The lack of successful role models is also an important factor. In (clusters of) villages where at least one person has succeeded to make a career and has contributed something to the family or the community at large, the motivation to invest in education is likely to rise.

Most of the school-going children in the research areas were first generation learners and their parents did not always have a clear idea about what their children were exactly supposed to be learning at school. When parents raise questions about quality, they are not so much related to the curriculum or the teaching methods, but rather to the visible outcomes such as the ability to read and write, the ability to continue with further education or training, and/or to subsequently find employment. Another major indicator named by respondents for the quality of education was the discipline of the teachers. The low motivation and morale of the teaching force, manifested in frequent absence, coming late and leaving early as well as “passing time” at school, is a very worrying trend. The majority of the interviewed teachers mentioned a feeling of being underpaid and neglected. The directness and openness with which some teachers voiced their discontent shows how serious this issue is. Teachers lament the low prestige that their profession carries, which is reflected by their low salary. Many of them became teachers because they didn’t have any other training or employment options, and the teaching profession was a last resort. Meanwhile, lack of supervision at all levels enable teachers to get away with serious neglect of their duties. Control mechanisms within the school are not functional, and school inspection by independent officers does not take place, at least not in a structural way.

The quality of the education has a direct bearing on the judgment of children and their parents. If it cannot possibly contribute to real improvements of the lives of children, their families and communities, enthusiasm will be difficult to generate. Since many of the parents themselves have never gone to school and do not have much understanding of what should be taught and how it should be taught, the most basic indicator for quality is the amount of time that a teacher actually teaches. Unfortunately, many teachers fail to utilise their time and other resources to full capacity. Since education has not yet been accepted as a social norm, the work avoidance by teachers has far-reaching consequences.

The formation of school committees and parent-teacher-associations is supposed to improve communications between the schools and the communities, enhance enrolment, attendance and retention, as well as address the accountability of the teaching staff and the quality of education. School committees and parent-teacher-associations do exist. In practice, however, these goals are rarely attained. The committees and associations, if functioning at all, mostly fail to provide a platform on which teachers and community members can openly address challenges and ultimately improve the education opportunities for their children.

The obstacles to education coming from within the communities and families concentrate around three major issues: poverty, tradition (including traditional gender roles) and the high demand for child work within the household [Admassie 2000]. In Borena, the traditional economy, including the traditional division of labour, has a strong influence on school enrolment and attendance. The enrolment of one child depends on whether the respective work tasks which are traditionally assigned to children can be taken over by another member of the household, usually a sibling. A reorganisation of the workload would free children of their work burden. Such reallocation of work

is possible in theory, but very difficult to achieve in the short term. It is hampered both by limited resources and deep-rooted traditions. Changes occur where the traditional modes of livelihood are under threat, as exemplified by the sharp increase in enrolment at a school in Borena after a severe drought had led to an extreme decimation of livestock, freeing children from their herding responsibilities.

Poverty is an obstacle most often invoked by parents as being the major obstacle to education. Even though the fees are small, they can still be substantial for very poor families. In a subsistence economy, the ability to absorb economic shocks such as a harvest failure and loss of livestock is very limited. Cash income is very scarce and any additional investment that fails to bring short-term returns is very unattractive. Having to buy pens, exercise books, clothes and shoes for school-going children can effectively prevent parents from sending their children to school. In some such cases, in the context of poverty and food insecurity, incentives such as school feeding programmes help to attract and retain students.

Nevertheless, sending a child to school does not depend entirely on the relative wealth of a family. In a number of cases, the poorest families did send their children to school, while the better-off did not. The motivation and determination of both the parents and also the children themselves proved to be far more important than their economic situation. Especially the motivation of children is not to be underestimated. Even when parents do enrol their children, they often lack the time to supervise regular attendance, let alone assist their children in their learning efforts. Motivation and determination of a child are therefore crucial for success at school. In all research locations, children were encountered who even went to school in defiance of their families' wishes. Those students, both male and female, had struggled to convince at least one family member or influential community member to support their ambition. In all research locations, examples of this successful "agency" were found, and these students also served as role models to others. This is especially challenging for girls as they also have to break through traditional gender stereotypes.

Apart from the higher workload for females, general notions of gender roles often prevent girls from pursuing their education once they reach puberty. Early marriages are still very common, even more in East Hararghe than in Borena, and many families fear that education might "spoil" their daughters and lessen their chances of a "good match". While many parents worry about their daughters individually, the social pressure and public opinion within the community plays a paramount role in the decision to send a girl to school or not. Sending a daughter to school easily exposes a family to criticism and gossip, and successful role models for girls' education become very important. The decision by the government to employ an increasing number of female teachers has helped to encourage girls' enrolment, but especially in the higher grades, a large gender gap persists.

It will not be possible to provide education for all marginalised and "hard-to-reach" groups of children in Ethiopia through a "one-size-fits-all" policy. Economic and cultural particularities and realities differ substantially and any attempt to reach more children and achieve higher enrolment and retention, will have to take these economic and cultural realities into account, either by accommodating or by altering them. Tasks assigned to children, either out of necessity or tradition, are a major obstacle to enrolment. While certain activities could be combined with education,

many of those tasks are, by their duration, intensity or nature, not compatible with regular school attendance.

While problems of access to primary schools still need to be overcome, the quality of education has to be addressed in such a manner that more parents feel that the sacrifices they have to make are justified. The poor quality of education, particularly the poor motivation and morale of the teaching force has to be addressed. The PTAs as they function today, embedded in the power relations, have failed to address this issue. In a country where education has not yet sunk in as the social norm, the laxity of teachers only helps to maintain the social distance between school and illiterate villagers. For them the quality of education is determined by the active presence of teachers.

As long as education continues to be propagated as an investment from which a financial return should be expected, the relevance in a rural context will be limited. Even where primary schools are available at the village level, the lack of secondary schools makes that investment in education questionable in the eyes of many parents. It is important to bear in mind what the purpose of (basic and primary) education is supposed to be in general as well as in a particular context and to what extent it will be accepted by the local population. As long as education is seen as an investment rather than a right, and success is measured by employability only, the relevance of primary education as such remains very limited. Due to the apparent lack of direct benefits of education, traditional considerations outweigh attempts to promote the importance of schooling.

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