



Munich Personal RePEc Archive

Education in Post-Independent Eritrea – A Brief Description

Rena, Ravinder

Department of Business and Economics, Eritrea Institute of
Technology, Mai Nefhi, Asmara, The State of Eritrea

February 2005

Online at <https://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/10326/>
MPRA Paper No. 10326, posted 21 Oct 2008 05:11 UTC

EDUCATION IN POST-INDEPENDENT ERITREA – A BRIEF DESCRIPTION

Ravinder Rena*

Abstract:

Education is an important pillar in the national economic development. It contributes to economic growth in varied forms. The educational system in Eritrea shows all the symptoms of prolonged neglect under colonialism and war. But education plays a key role in the development after independence. This paper discusses educational growth and development in post-independent Eritrea. It also analyses educational finances, and challenges for development in the country and thus provides some implications.

Keywords: Education, Eritrea, economic growth, human capital, development, production cycles.

I] INTRODUCTION:

Education is the prime creator and conveyor of knowledge. It helps man preserving and changing the society. It helps him in understanding, controlling and harnessing the forces of nature. It assists and accelerates economic growth. It transmits, creates and modifies traditions and customs. It shapes the human behavior (Ravinder Rena, 2002). It helps to humanize the individual, who, in an exploitative society, is under constant pressure and influence of the dehumanizing forces generated by the exploitive order. It is an indispensable, intricate, profound and sensitive human activity. It is an integrative process in social life.

Eritrea is located in the Horn of Africa, bordered in the north and west by Sudan, in the south by Ethiopia and Djibouti, and in the east by the Red Sea. It has an estimated population of about 4 million and a total land area of 124,320 sq kms, stretching from 18.22' to 12.42' degrees longitude. Its annual population growth is estimated at 2.9 percent. Eritrea has nine ethnic groups and six administrative zobas (provinces/regions). Eritrea's coastlines extend about 1200 kms, flanked by coral reefs and 354 islands, including the important Dahlak Archipelago

Importance of Education:

Education is important because it promotes the knowledge, skills, habits, values, or attitudes and understanding of the people of the country. Education indeed helps people to become a useful member of the society. It also helps the people to develop an appreciation of their culture heritage and live more satisfying lives. The most common way to get an education is to attend schools/colleges/university. This benefit has become increasingly important because social changes today take place with increasing speed and affects the lives of people of Eritrea.

*Assistant Professor of Economics, Department of Business and Economics, Eritrea Institute of Technology – Mai Nefhi, Post Box No7956, Asmara, the State of Eritrea, North East Africa, Email: dravinderrena@gmail.com, ravinder_rena@yahoo.com.

Education in Eritrea is more important today than ever before. It helps the people to acquire the skills they needed for every day activities as reading news papers, magazines to understand more about the outside-world or managing their money. It also gives them the specialized training they may need to prepare for a job or career.

Education as Investment:

Education is now universally recognized as a form of investment in human beings, which yields economic benefits and contributes to a country's future wealth by increasing the productive capacity of its people (Woodhall, 1992:11). Investment in Higher education can be a key contributor to country's economic growth.

Education, like other forms of investment in human capital, contributes to economic development and raises the incomes of poor just as much investment in physical capital, such as transport, communication, power, irrigation (Psacharopoulos and Woodhall, 1985: 3). It is true, of course, that education itself can lay claim to being an important contributor to economic growth and thus a legitimate petitioner for more investment funds. In order to grow, an economy must have not only ample amounts of developed human resources of the right sort but also favourable institutional, social and political environments. What we earn will depend on what we can learn. According to the survey conducted by economists in the USA, it was found that a college graduate will earn 70 per cent more than a high school graduate in their first year of work (Ravinder Rena, 2005a :115-18). To the extent that education helps furnish these human and environmental prerequisites, undoubtedly, it can be considered a "good investment in economic growth."

Education and Economic Growth:

It is true, of course, that education itself can lay claim to being an important contributor to economic growth and thus a legitimate petitioner for more investment funds. In order to develop the economy of Eritrea, the country must have not only adequate amounts of developed human resources but also favorable institutional, social, cultural and political environment. To the extent that education helps furnish these human and environmental prerequisites, which education unquestionably can be considered a good investment in economic growth?

Education contributes to economic development only indirectly and only after a long lapse of time, due to the long "production cycles" involved. But some education, such as work-oriented training programs related to real employment needs and opportunities can have a prompt and substantial payoff in terms of early economic growth.

Education contributes to economic growth in varied forms. Education contributes directly to economic growth through differential productivity of human capital. But production of human capital involves long bad times (Shri Prakash & Sumitra Chowdhuri, 1990). In Eritrea, educational expenditure is expected to conform to a predetermined growth path in so far as educational expenditure is believed to depend uniquely up on the spending power of the country. As the spending power on education, increases and it may increase

the country's economy more than proportionately. The spending power hinges up on national income and its growth. The educational expenditure may be adopted and interpreted to cover both absolute and relative educational expenditure and their growth. At low stages of economic development, low income does not allow educational expenditure and their growth. At low stages of economic development, low income does not allow educational expenditure to expand beyond a limit. As the economy moves along its development path, the consorting influence of low income gets expenditure up. So, educational expenditure expansion path may believe to be shaped and guided by the development of the economy or society in general and the growth of income in particular.

Education has been able to play a key role in the development of Eritrea, thanks to the enormous investment that the government has made in the education sector in a sustained fashion since independence. All-round education developmental programs in the country are notable. In recent times, the rate of growth of investment in the education sector has been increasing.

Education For All:

In December 1948, the United Nations adopted its Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article-26 states, "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages... Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit" (United Nations, 1967). After Independence, the government of Eritrea adopted the goal of "Education For All". And efforts are underway to achieve this goal by the year 2006.

II] EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND OF ERITREA:

The educational system in Eritrea shows all the symptoms of prolonged neglect under conditions of colonialism and war. At the time of independence in 1991, 84 per cent of the existing 190 schools were rated to be in serious disrepair. The remaining 16 per cent were far from providing a satisfactory learning environment (Petros Hailemarium, 1998:130). Disparity in the geographical distribution of schools was sharply marked. For instance, the number of secondary schools and students in the highlands was much higher than those in the lowland areas of Eritrea. Today, more than 829 government and non-government schools are functioning; however, most of these schools need lot of improvement, expansion and/or replacement (Ravinder Rena, 2005b).

Eritrea is still undergoing a process of rehabilitating educational institutions and services that were devastated during the long war. Decades of long conflict have led to the accumulation of a huge backlog of primary-age children who missed schooling. At the time of liberation, gross enrolment rate (GER) at the primary school level stood at 30 per cent. However, it has increased considerably since independence.

III] EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA:

Since Independence, the government of Eritrea has embarked on a wide-ranging program designed to revitalize and develop the collapsed economy and to promote its long - term growth. The overall vision of Eritrea's future progress is ultimately based on human capital formation, with the education and health as key inputs (Government of State of Eritrea, 1994).

Education has been able to play a key role in the development of Eritrea, thanks to the enormous investment that the government has made in the education sector in a sustained fashion since independence. All-round education developmental programs in the country are notable. In recent times, the rate of growth of investment in the education sector has been increasing.

In Eritrea, over the last ten years, there has been a phenomenal increase in enrolment. The number of schools at all levels (Junior, Middle, Secondary and Technical) increased from 293 in 1990-91 to 1000 in 2002-2003. During the same period students' population increased considerably from 208,168 to 5,00,000 while the numbers of teachers increased from 5,286 to about 10,000. Eritrea has one University, one Commercial College, Teacher Training Institutes (TTI), and a number of other Technical and Vocational Institutions (Ravinder Rena, 2004:6). One of the remarkable developments in the education sector of Eritrea is opening of Eritrea Institute of Technology- Mai Nefhi and Orotta School of Medicine (both started in February, 2004). Further, different colleges like: Agricultural College - Hamalmalo, College of Marine Science and Engineering-Massawa, College of Economics and Business -Halhale, College of Social Sciences and teacher education- Mai Nefhi, and other professional colleges are established in the country during the academic year 2004-2005. Besides, University of Asmara has started Post Graduate Programs in English, Economics, Geography, Agriculture, etc.,

Table - 1 Elementary, Middle and Secondary level- Teaching Staff –Gender level and by region 2001-2002.

Region	Grade 1-5			Grade 6-7			Grade 8-11			Total		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Anseba	713	415	1128	185	11	196	105	6	111	1003	432	1435
S. Red Sea	110	33	143	25	0	25	17	0	17	152	33	185
Debub	1353	854	2207	382	29	411	296	21	317	2031	904	2935
Gas Barka	1062	384	1446	177	14	191	110	11	121	1349	409	1758
Maakel	888	1017	1905	492	118	610	695	98	793	2075	1233	3308
N.Red Sea	499	170	1169	91	5	96	51	9	60	641	184	825
Total	462	2873	7498	1352	177	1529	1274	145	1419	7251	3195	10446

Source: Ministry of Education, The State of Eritrea Various Statistical Bulletins.

In 2000-2001, academic year enrolment in elementary education increased by 1.0 per cent as compared to 1999-2000. The enrolment of girls in elementary education in 2000-2001 also increased by 1.0 as compared to the previous year, whereas the enrolment in middle and secondary education increased by about 3.0 per cent and 7.3 per cent respectively.

The number of schools and enrolment in pre-primary education has increased by 1.1 per cent and 4.6 per cent respectively and the number of teachers has increased by 7.8 per

cent. The number schools by level in elementary has increased by about 1.8 per cent, in middle about 8.4 per cent and in secondary schools by about 13 per cent, whereas the number of teachers in elementary, middle and secondary has increased by 7.0 per cent, 5.0 per cent and 13.5 per cent respectively.

The Gross National Accessibility to schooling in 2000-2001 was reported to be 5.1 per cent, 56.6 per cent, 43.4 per cent and 27.2 per cent in pre-primary, elementary, middle and secondary education respectively, whereas, enrolment in elementary and special education has decreased by 4.7 per cent.

In technical schools, the enrolment has increased by 40.0 per cent while enrolment in adult literacy programs increased by 10.6 per cent and the number of literacy program centers increased by 9.8 per cent.

Table –2 Gross Enrollment and Ratio: Secondary Level During The Period 1991/92 –2002/03.

Year	Population 14 -17 Years Age			Enrollment in Secondary Level			Gross Enrollment Ratio %		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
1991/92	210,515	110,133	100,382	27,627	14,281	13,346	13.1	12.9	13.3
1992/93	217,998	114,293	103,705	31,531	17,141	14,390	14.4	15.1	13.8
1993/94	225,344	118,144	107,200	32,756	19,432	13,324	14.5	16.4	12.4
1994/95	232,603	121,753	110,850	36,728	22,097	14,631	15.7	18.1	13.2
1995/96	239,805	125,167	114,638	39,188	23,713	15,475	16.3	18.9	13.5
1996/97	246,964	128,427	118,537	40,594	24,262	16,332	16.4	18.8	13.7
1997/98	253,097	131,066	122,031	41,615	25,198	16,417	16.4	19.2	13.4
1998/99	268,460	138,652	129,808	47,533	29,777	17,756	17.1	21.4	13.6
1999/00	272,871	139,459	133,412	59,626	37,533	22,093	21.8	26.9	16.5
2000/01	282,140	144,338	137,802	63,951	40,355	23,596	22.7	27.9	17.1
2001/02	292,355	149,903	142,452	70,183	45,129	25,054	24.1	30.1	17.5
2002/03	-	-	-	68,857	45,870	22,987	-	-	-

Source: Ministry of Education, The State of Eritrea Various Statistical Bulletins.

Note the statistics above with regards to the gap between female and male students between 1991 and 2003 this is discussed in chapter on gender equality in education.

In 2000-2001, it is observed that the national enrolment of the girls and boys increased by 2.2 per cent as compared to the previous year. However, the participation rate of girls is found to be still lower than that of boys. Nevertheless, the enrolment of female students in technical schools increased significantly by 129 per cent.

III] FINANCING OF EDUCATION IN ERITREA:

The Government of the State of Eritrea has been concentrating on the educational development of the country since Independence and it is responsible for the major share of all expenditure on education. The amount allotted for the development of education in the country dramatically increased from 35 million Nfa in 1992 to 287.3 million Nfa in 2002. Although at this stage it is not possible to precisely estimate the percentage of GNP spent on education, it would suffice to say that the government's investment has been enormous. Furthermore, education is free at all levels including the higher level. While the University of Asmara, Asmara Commercial College, the Skill Centers, Technical Schools, TTI, Eritrea Institute of Technology - Mai Nefhi, Orotta School of Medicine etc., are all owned by government, there is a need to encourage a cost-sharing mechanism. The Government is trying to encourage private sector involvement in the running of schools at different levels, but as of now there is a low participation. The

private sector in 1996-97 accounted for 13 per cent of enrolment and in pre-primary education, which is entirely run by the private sector 3.4 per cent of children, is enrolled.

IV] EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES IN ERITREA:

The challenge of educational development in Eritrea is a daunting one. Although there has been an enormous increase in demand for schooling and a corresponding growth in enrolment of those able to enter the formal education system, repetition and dropout rates are high. This is explained by the poor quality of education being received by children and in terms of limited learning achievements. The quality of education has been assessed with regard to what is taught, how it is taught, to which children and in what kind of setting. Most schools in Eritrea suffer from poor learning conditions; dilapidated or partially completed buildings; insufficient desks and text books; overcrowded classrooms; few or no learning materials; poorly trained or unmotivated teachers (MOE, May 1996: 5-8). The most urgent of these challenges remain the need to increase access of school - age children to primary schooling opportunities. The other major challenge is the need to retain those already enrolled, and to ensure that the school system has the ability to offer those enrolled good quality education. There has been a significant upsurge in the demand for basic education in the post -Independence years.

Current Educational Policies and Issues:

Since independence, the Eritrean government has been making strenuous efforts to address the needs of national reconstruction as well as the wider needs of the Eritrean economy. Within this framework, educational planning has assumed a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it is aimed at rehabilitating school structures and facilities destroyed during the war, on the other; efforts are being made to expand the school system and to lay a firm foundation for the provision of relevant education.

The principles underpinning these strategies, which have been affirmed in the declaration (Provisional Government of Eritrea, 1991) of Policy on Education and other government documents (MOE, 1996 and 1998: 1-2) include:

i] Promoting basic education for all; ii] Extending equality of educational opportunities; iii] Ensuring that education makes a substantial contribution in ensuring the education reconstruction, national unity and the promotion of the social values of the people; iv] Developing scientific, technological and artistic skills; v] Using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in primary schools; vi] Adopting English as the medium of instruction in post-primary institutions; vii] Motivating communities to play an ever-increasing role in the management of education by strengthening links between the school and the community; viii] Encouraging the provision of education by the private sector; and ix] Providing continuing education through formal and in-formal channels to achieve more literate and skilled population.

Education and Human Capital in Eritrea?

In a young nation - Eritrea, human capital formation plays a commanding role in activating the process of socio-economic transformation. The formation of human capital is tremendously influenced by the standard of education made available by the

educational institutions in Eritrea. The general masses find it difficult to assign due to weightage to the educational expenses in their family budgets. This may be ascribed to their low disposable income. Against this background, some social scientists as well as the social reformers have been found criticizing the privatization of education. No doubt, they criticize in a right fashion but the mounting cost on inputs has made it difficult for the educational institutions to maintain financial balance and deliver goods. A number of educational institutions in Eritrea are now facing the stage of financial and other crises. They are not in a position to make available to the users world-class services, as all avenues for the generation of internal resources have been very limited. Ultimately, the parents are the vast sufferers in Eritrea.

VJ CONCLUSION:

Education contributes directly to economic development but only after a long time- lapse, due to the protracted "production cycles" involved. But some education, such as work-orientated training programs related to real employment needs and opportunities, can have a more immediate and substantial payoff in terms of early economic growth. In Eritrea, education has to be regarded as an 'investment' or more significantly as a 'crucial investment for national development and survival'.

Although, the overall government contribution has been increasing for the last decade, it has not been able to keep pace with the rapid rise in enrolment and escalation in prices. Often inadequacy of financial resources leads to poor infrastructure and physical facilities, low investment in research and development, and has an adverse impact on the quality and efficiency of the education system. It is to be noted that the Government has been providing free-education to the people, particularly to the weaker sections of the society. But it does not mean that the affluent sections of the society in the country are allowed to avail the subsidized or cost free services meant for the deprived sections of the country Hence, the cost has to be recovered from the affluent sections of Eritrean society to provide better education to its compatriots.

The government of Eritrea has been realized that the previous educational system under the Derge regime was intentionally designed to reinforce the colonial ideologies and political machination. Besides, it understood that the overall vision of Eritrea's future progress ultimately based on human capital formation, with the education and health as key inputs. Therefore, the government has embarked on a wide-ranging program designed to revitalize and develop the collapsed educational system. In order to meet the challenges of the 21st century and to acquire a competitive edge, the education system of Eritrea has to be transformed to make it more socially relevant, information and technology- orientated, increasingly diversified, and of high quality.

REFERENCES

- Government of Eritrea (1994) Macro Policy Document, Asmara: Government of Eritrea.
- Ministry of Education (1996) Eritrea: Quest for Education, Asmara: Government Printing Press.
- Ministry of Eritrean Education- Various Reports and Statistical Bulletins.
- Petros Hailemariam (2000) "The Challenges of Educational Reconstruction and Transformation in Eritrea" in Teame Mebratu; Michael Crossley; David Johnson (eds.) *Globalisation, Educational Transformation and Societies in Transition*, UK: Symposium Books, pp.127-136.
- Provisional Government of Eritrea (PGE-1991) Declaration of Policy on Education, Asmara: Government Printing Press.
- Psacheropoulos, G. and Woodhall, M.(1985)*Education for Development: An Analysis Of Investment Choices*, Washington, D. C.: The World Bank Publication.
- Rena, Ravinder (2002) "Financing and Cost Recovery in Higher Education: A Study with Special Reference to Private Colleges in Andhra Pradesh", *Finance India Journal*, Vol. XVI, No. 2, pp. 662-666.
- Rena, Ravinder (2004) "Educational Development in Eritrea", Asmara: *Eritrea Profile* (A Weekly Bulletin of News and Views) Ministry of Information and Culture, Vol. 11, No. 12, (1st May,) p.6.
- Rena, Ravinder (2005a) "Financing of Education in Eritrea – A Case Study on Zoba Maakel", Albany (USA): *The African Symposium*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp.113-128. (An On-line Educational Research Journal - A Publication of the African Educational Research Network) http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/aern/Aern_Journal_Sept05.pdf
- Rena, Ravinder (2005b) "Eritrean Education – Retrospect and Prospect," Nairobi (Kenya): *Eastern Africa Journal of Humanities and Sciences*, Vol.5, No.2. pp.1-10 (A Biannual Refereed Journal Published by the Faculty of Humanities and Sciences, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa).
- Shri Prakash and Sumitra Chowdhury (1990): Determinants of Educational Expenditure in India, *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, Volume 4 No.4 (October).
- Woodhall, Mureen (1992, III Edn.) *Cost-Benefit Analysis in Educational Planning*, Paris: UNESCO- IIEP.

* * * * *