

Trip Report
Ethiopia, March 9th through April 3rd
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The focus of this trip was almost entirely on the changing roles of NGOs in education. I spent the first week in Addis Ababa, interviewing MOE, Ministry of Justice (where NGOs must register), and Ministry of Economic Development (where all donor programs are approved) personnel; USAID, SIDA, Irish Aid, and GTZ staff; and education officers from the national offices of Pact, Save the Children, and ActionAid. The second week was spent in the Southern Region where I worked with an Ethiopian researcher, who will be continuing the interviewing process until the end of April, to fine tune our data collection tools (I have sent the new sets of interview questions to Michel Welmond and Yolande Miller to help with the Mali research). We interviewed Regional, Zonal, and district education personnel, the Regional and Zonal staff members of the government development associations, local staff of the World Learning and Irish Aid projects, World Learning facilitators who work in the communities, and several School Management Committees. I spent part of the third week in Tigray, where I had long discussions with the Tigray Development Association and the Tigray Education Bureau, and then returned to Addis Ababa for interviews and meetings with the researcher and USAID.

History

A few International NGOs and local NGOs first began to appear in Ethiopia in the 1960s when the government was headed by Haile Selassie. During the rule of the Derg, from 1974 to 1991, the government discouraged NGOs because of their "western" ideas. Nevertheless, NGOs, along with the UN, played a major role in saving thousands of lives through the emergency relief they provided during the droughts in 1974 and 1984. In 1984, NGOs and the UN worked in the areas of the country controlled by the government, while the rebel held regions received emergency assistance only from their own local organizations, especially the Relief Society of Tigray (REST). This had consequences for the NGOs when the Derg was finally defeated in 1991 and the Tigray People's Liberation Front became a major power in the new government. REST's close ties to the new government lead to continued support; REST, with over a thousand employees, is now considered to be the largest NGO in Africa. The INGOs and other local NGOs were looked upon with suspicion by the new government and have been under tight control throughout the 1990s. Almost every government person with whom I talked described NGOs as spending money too freely, having too much overhead, and being, in general, out of control. It is felt that donors and the international offices supporting NGOs do a good job of monitoring the technical performance of NGOs, but that the Ethiopian government must assist in monitoring the finances of NGOs.

NGO involvement is important in Ethiopia. The country's history as a feudal monarchy followed by a brutal Marxist regime has left most structures of civil society stunted. Professional association, trade unions, the media, academia, and the private business sector were all ruthlessly suppressed by the Derg. By the time the government collapsed

in 1991, virtually all civil society entities had been co-opted or barred from meaningful existence. Gradually, in the last few years private business has grown, academic freedom is beginning to return, the media is slowly gaining credibility, and some professional associations are forming. In the last two or three years, the number of NGOs, especially indigenous NGOs, has begun to grow. Their capacity, credibility, and acceptance are just now beginning to blossom. They can play an important role in addressing the country's complex development problems, especially in education, while stimulating new linkages within the society. NGOs can provide relatively efficient mechanisms for development as well as provide channels for strengthening civil society, both of which Ethiopia desperately needs.

Major Barriers Facing NGOs

Every NGO mentions the registration process in Ethiopia as a major hurdle which they have had to overcome. To be allowed to operate anywhere in the country, each NGO must apply to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) through a complex and frustrating registration process. Even well financed INGOs with staff to devote to the process find that it takes at least one and a half to two years to become registered. In addition, each NGO must also be registered through the Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission (DPPC), the office through which all NGOs worked during the emergency relief in the 1980s – an equally tedious process. Registration must be renewed after one year at the MOJ and two years at DPPC. Even then, all the NGO has is permission to do a very specific task in specific districts; to change activities or expand into a new district requires re-registration. Many advocacy groups, such as the Ethiopian Human Rights Council, have been denied registration status. In addition, the MOJ can, without offering any reasons, declare a NGO de-registered, as had happened to twelve NGOs just before I arrived. Announcements are then made on local television warning people to have no interaction with these organizations.

A national policy designed to equalize the amount of funding each region receives has also created problems for NGOs, including the USAID programs in the Southern and Tigray regions. The policy stipulates that the amount of money brought into a region by any organization, such as a NGO, will be subtracted from the block grant, which the regional government receives. In other words, if an NGO brings a one million-dollar project into a region, that region will have one million dollars taken away from the funding which it receives from the national government. This policy appears to not always be implemented in recent years and is often negotiated to include only some of the inputs of a projects.

A third obstacle for NGOs can be the Development Associations, which exist in four regions, often called "GONGOs" – government non-government organizations! These organizations were formed with the support of the government; they are primarily funded through the contributions of their ethnic membership and through government project funds. The USAID program in Tigray is implemented through the Tigray Development Association (TDA), a relatively rich, due to contributions of over 200,000 members, and powerful organization. In the short time that I was in Ethiopia, I heard of three case in

which projects begun by NGOs were turned over to Development Associations by the government. Two involved savings and loan programs, which the government declared to be an area where INGOs should not operate. The third was the case of a Tigraian woman who began in milling program for women with an associated kindergarten in the Southern Region. The Regional government decided that they did not need an “outsider” to run a program in their region and moved the project to the regional development association and found funding for it from local businesses.

A problem brought up by both NGOs and government personnel involves the lack of technical expertise in the organizations through which NGOs must operate, the MOJ and DPPC. The MOE and regional Education Bureaus are not involved in approving the NGO activities and often not even aware of NGO educational activities. This means that the NGO programs cannot be included in national or regional planning, which leads to overlap and a lack of coherence. And it also prevents the work NGOs are doing in education from being perceived as filling defined roles, which complement the government educational efforts.

Positive Signs

The number of NGOs registered with the government has grown significantly in recent years. There are over 300 NGOs registered in Ethiopia; more than one half of these NGOs are Ethiopian and about 30 of the NGOs are working in education.

Redd Barna has begun an alternative education programs in the Amhara Region. The head of the Regional Education Bureau there is one of the officials who, with support from Pact, traveled to Bangladesh to study the BRAC program. He came back committed to alternative approaches and has worked with Redd Barna to negotiate a new curriculum for alternative schools which will meet the national curriculum standards and will guarantee that graduates of programs using this curriculum will be admitted to government school. This curriculum is currently being discussed on a national level and may soon be adopted as a national standard.

A condition built into the Sector Investment Program in Ethiopia required the MOE to investigate the possibilities of alternative education. Members of the Planning office carried out this research and produced six case studies of alternative education programs, five of them run by NGOs. Doing the research themselves converted them all into “true believers” in alternative approaches. During the presentation of this research a few weeks before I arrived, enthusiastic comments were made by MOE officials about the need to embrace alternative approaches to education. The feeling is that, given the nature of the government, these comments would not have been made without the approval of higher authority.

To combat negative perceptions about NGOs, NGOs have worked together to create a Code of Conduct, essentially a statement of operating principles. Its adoption in 1999 by the NGO sector appears to have sent a positive signal about the ethical underpinnings of NGOs, provided evidence of NGO ability to impose self-regulation, and increased

collaboration among NGOs. Media portrayal of the NGO sector has undergone a transformation from negative coverage or disinterest to frequent, positive portrayals of NGO activities. During the last week while I was there, the local television station presented an entire program on NGOs in Ethiopia.

The USAID program implemented by World Learning in the Southern Region is extremely popular and well accepted by the government, although it had an extremely difficult beginning. It's story illustrates a process that I hear repeatedly from NGOs. Initially the project was designed to use local NGOs to work with the School Management Committees to improve school management, girls access and persistence, and community involvement. The first surprise was the government's refusal to allow money to be channeled through local NGOs. Then the regional government stalled for almost a year before allowing the program to begin, and then only after an "incentive fund" has been set up by USAID to help offset the loss in national funding which the region would suffer when the project began. During the first few years of the project, unannounced Regional Education Bureau staff members would show up unannounced at school where the program was operating to secretly check things out. But the reports were always positive and, gradually, the government, members of which were always included in the various workshops and training events, began to see the program in a very positive light. Now the regional government is beginning to worry that it will end. Almost all NGO that I have talked to describe the process of their acceptance in a similar manner: demonstration to the government that they were doing good work, which eventually leads to acceptance. The decentralized, federated nature of Ethiopia's government may be increasing ethnic tensions and camouflage where real power resides, but it does allow for greater involvement of the decision-making members of the education system in local programs due to the close proximity of regional governments.

Emerging Problems

When I asked government personnel whether or not they saw NGOs competing with the government for donor funds, I almost always received a blank look and vague answer. During my discussion with the education team at USAID before I left, I confirmed my impression that the government has not yet considered this possibility. So far they see NGOs as supported by their own funding supplied through contributions. USAID is the only donor currently using NGOs to implement a part of its education program in Ethiopia. But SIDA, Irish Aid, and GTZ may all follow suit in response to the frustrations they have encountered in directly funding education programs through the government and the increasingly acceptance of NGOs. The new BESOII will increase the size of its program which will be implement through NGOs. At some point the perception of NGOs could shift to competitors for donor funding.

Educational standards are areas where NGOs and governments have frequently experienced conflict in other countries. As mentioned, the curriculum standard for alternative schooling currently being negotiated will make it easier for NGOs to insure that the graduates of their alternative education programs will be accepted into government schools. The danger may be that the guidelines are so rigid that they

discourage experimentation with curricula, and the ability to experiment with approaches is one of the primary advantages NGOs can offer. Standards for school construction have already surfaced as a serious problem in the Tigray component of the USAID program. School Management Committees receiving the largest incentive grant frequently planned to use that money to construct additional classrooms or libraries. The Tigray Education Bureau would not permit local construction building, insisting on cement block construction for all school buildings. TDA supported the government's decision and petitioned USAID to allow them to award fewer, but larger, grants in order to enable communities to construct buildings which met government standards. USAID resisted, arguing that buildings were not what the program was to have been about anyway, and School Management Committees were discouraged from planning school construction with their grant money. The educational standards for teachers have not yet surfaced as a problem in Ethiopia. Unemployment is high and graduates of 12 years of primary and secondary school can be found in most Ethiopian communities. Once these applicants have received teacher training through an alternative education program there has been little resistance to their acceptance as a qualified teacher. However, when alternative education programs have provisions requiring a given percentage of teachers to be female, then standards become a program as women with 12 years of education can only rarely be found in rural communities. The solution to data has been to use male teachers rather than reduce the educational standard.

Comparing the World Learning and Tigray Development Association Projects

USAID in Ethiopia asked that I begin, as part of this research, a comparison of the two components of their program which are implemented through NGOs. Both projects began with the same design: improvements in educational quality, girls' participation, and community involvement through building the capacity and motivation of School Management Committees. In both projects, School Management Committees received training and on-going mentoring as they develop strategies for addressing these goals, translated their strategies into proposals to secure incentive grants of increasingly greater amounts, and implemented the plans they had created. One project was implemented by the Tigray Development Association (TDA) in the Tigray Region, the other by World Learning (WL) in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region.

Everyone told me that almost from the beginning the two projects had clearly been different due to the cultural, historical, and political differences between the two regions, the two NGOs, and the relationships of the two NGOs to the regions. The Tigray region is ethnically unified, has been united further by the long struggle to overthrow the Derg, exercises great power in the current government due, in part, to its role in that struggle, and is tightly organized throughout the region by an extremely efficient hierarchical structure of political representation. The Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples' Region is rather like its name, a region composed of 45 ethnic groups held together by little more than the administration boundaries of region, zone, and district. TDA is closely associated with the regional government in Tigray, considers itself to have equal power, and even uses some of its funds to support projects of the Tigray Education Bureau. WL is a US International NGO with no previous involvement in Ethiopia.

Basically, for TDA, “community participation” means contributions of money and/or labor by the community and “improvements in quality” involve physical inputs to the school. For WL, the goals are for educational quality and girls’ participation to be improved through increased school ownership, management skills, and teacher commitment and for communities to achieve a greater voice in decisions made about their school, as well as greater involvement through their contributions.

Several concrete differences in how the two programs have been implemented demonstrate the mechanisms through which these factors play a role. Perhaps the clearest indication of the differences in the two programs can be seen in the criteria used to award incentive grants.

TDA determined that there was enough money available to give the first level incentive grants to 600 rural schools in the region, to give the second grant to 400 of those schools, and award 200 schools with the third level of grant. The first level grant was simply given to all schools which met the TDA criteria for being sufficiently rural, needy, and densely populated. The criteria for the second phase grants consisted of things such as community school relationship, effectiveness of members of the School Management Committee, content and feasibility of the proposed plan, conditions at the school, and community resource capacity. Schools were rated on these criteria in competition with one another by TDA and Education Bureau personnel. The criteria for the largest grant included the those used for the second level of grant plus indicators of change such as improved enrollment rates, reduced dropout rates, and reduced repetition rates. The focus of the program has been on getting the money to the schools and rewarding the highest performing schools, the competition among schools being seen as desirable to stimulate increased community contribution.

WL’s focus has been on leading and School Management Committees, communities, and school personnel through a learning experience, the incentive grants being used to motivate them to participate in this experience and provide something to actually manage. Criteria for receiving the first level grant include School Management Committee members meeting to prepare a strategic plan and holding an open house for the community to explain their plans. The second phase grant is awarded after meeting criteria such as establishing a code of professional ethics for teachers, establish basic learning standards for students, and develop a clear plan to recruit and keep more girls in school have been met. Initially the third level of grant was decided, as in Tigray, by competition among schools according to their achievement, with the addition of a requirement that schools had to have secured additional funding from some source other than WL. Currently WL has decided to provide stage three grants to all participating schools who have met the criteria.

A second concrete difference which can be recognized between the two projects lies in the types of activities planned and implemented by the School Management Committees. All of the activities for which TDA schools received grants involved physical improvements to the school structure. While most of the grants to WL school also involved improvements to the school structures, there have also been a large number of

awards which focus more closely on quality of education and girls persistence. These included activities such as community monitoring of teacher and student attendance, providing tutoring for struggling students, establishing girls' advisory committees, providing awards for girls' academic achievements, enforcing a code of conduct among teaching staff, and paying for in-service teacher training.

Another difference exists in the composition of the School Management Committees in the two regions: in the Southern region the committee is generally composed of one political representatives, the head teacher, a teacher who represents the Teachers Union, and two or three elected parents; in Tigray there are more community position, but almost all are filled by appointed representatives of organizations such as the Women's Association, the Farmer's Association, etc. Ideally, the School Management Committee should provide a link among official administrative systems, teachers and members of communities. Due to the presence of teachers and political representatives on the committee, its ability to provide a forum within which community voices can be heard is already limited, but membership in the Tigray committee, due to additional appointed political representatives, shuts out any opportunity to hear community opinions

Interviews with:

Kevin Mullally, USAID/Ethiopia, HRDO
Tassew Zewdie, USAID/Ethiopia, Education Programs Manager
Aberra Kannan, USAID/Ethiopia, Monitoring and Evaluation
Lissam Johaes, USAID/Ethiopia, G&D Officer
Getagum Dender, USAID/Ethiopia Pact contract
Zewdu Desta, Ministry of Education, Planning and Project Dept.
Fisseha Mammo, Ministry of Education, Planning and Project Dept.
Demelash Megersa, Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation, Education Director
Hailu Kassa, Ministry of Economic Development and Cooperation, American Desk Officer
Berhana Berke, Ireland Aid, Education Officer
Orlaith McCaul, Ireland Aid, Evaluation Team
Ayede ?, SIDA Education Officer
Gisla Burkhardt, GTZ, Project Director
Leslie Mitchell, Pact Ethiopia, co-director
Tsegaye Chernet, Pact Ethiopia, co-director
Kedir Ali, Save the Children Ethiopia, Education Program Manager
Dunham Rowley, World Learning, Chief of Party
Agregay Mersa, World Learning, program manager
Amelewende Alemayelu, World Learning, School Development Agent.
Mamo Ketu, SNNP Region Education Bureau, Director
Aynalem Tsegay, SNNP Region Education Bureau, Planning and Projects
Kebede Sima, SNNP Region Education Bureau, Head of Curriculum
Wondemagerge Kassa, SNNP Region Education Bureau, Non-formal Education
Wollassa Lavisso, Sidama Development Corporation, Director

Mendaye Shallamo, Sidama Development Corporation, Community Development
Daniel ?, Sidama Zonal Education Office, Director
Nigussie Hamesho, Awasse Woreda Education Office, Education Support Officer
Ayele Anjello, SNNP Regional Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Commission
Brulenes Argaw, Director of Tula Primary School
Musie Sheshemo, Direction of Edo Primary School
Johnson Odharo, BESO, Teacher Training
Tom Tilson, BESO, Chief of Party
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