

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Causes of Early School Leaving in Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Regional State

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Abstract

This study was undertaken in view to: (1) Examining the status of early school leaving in Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region, and (2) Identifying the principal factors that interfere with children's persistence in primary schools of the regional state. The study, thus, adopted both qualitative and quantitative methods of inquiry in order to effectively address the problem of primary school dropping out in the region. Purposive sampling was used in selection of sample districts and involving respondents in securing qualitative data. Simple random sampling was employed in identification of respondents for the quantitative data collection. Analysis of qualitative data was carried out via thematic classification, categorical analysis, and contextualization. Simple descriptive statistics were employed for quantitative data analysis. Consequently, the study unveiled the prevalence of high rate of primary school dropout in the region. The main attributes of the dropout can roughly be classified into such three broad categories as household related, those of which associated to societal conviction and school linked setbacks. The study has also portrayed the way forward in tackling challenges of primary school dropping out across the regional state.

Key words: Dropout, early school leaving, educational wastage, external efficiency, gender, internal efficiency, Millennium Development Goals

Introduction

Achievement of universal primary education (UPE) is one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which were adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 2000. Facing the year 2015 as a timeframe for accomplishment, the target of UPE states that "children everywhere, boys and

girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling" (UNDP, January 2006). The target of UPE as clearly stipulated in the MDGs is not about ensuring universal enrolment alone. Rather, it underscores universal completion as an ultimate goal.

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Other things kept constant, one of the inherent barriers to achievement of UPE is early leaving of school by children enrolled. Beyond resulting in a sizeable wastage of resources, high rate of school dropping out is an inhibitor of attaining the desired end in this regard.

School dropping out, in definite terms, entails wastage as far as internal economic efficiency of a given education system's performance is concerned. Ensuring internal economic efficiency in education is construed as to have most students graduating within the preset duration of a given cycle (UNESCO 2009) or in other words "the optimal relationship between inputs and their corresponding output" (MoE, 1996:13). As for Monk (2009) efficiency in education is more than the utilization of minimum unit cost and includes attainment of the desired outcome from such an investment. Higher rates of school dropout and grade repetition are indicators of lack of internal efficiency.

External efficiency, on the other hand, emphasizes on the desirability of the graduates by the labour market. It starts to suffer when "pupils who complete the primary cycle but fail to gain the intellectual, social, cultural and ethical knowledge and skills that schooling should provide" (UNESCO, 2008:11).

School dropping out being one of the major hindrances of internal efficiency in education is a persistent challenge to education systems across the developing and developed world alike. The term 'dropout' refers to young people who leave school without gaining a high school diploma in the United States and Canada. A dropout may be named differently in different countries such as the one *not in education or not in employment or not in training or early school leaver* (Lamb, *et al*, 2011).

No matter how varying the names are, a dropout is the one who does not complete a specified program of education or training irrespective of the level of such provision. The meaning of school dropout is also explained through depicting its rate of prevalence. UNESCO (2009:44) defines it as "proportion of pupils from a cohort enrolled in a given grade at a given school year who are no longer enrolled in the following school year". School dropout in the Ethiopian context refers to the "proportion of pupils who leave the system without completing a given grade in a given school year" (MoE 1996:16).

Primary education in Ethiopia lasts for eight years. Official age of admission into grade one is seven. Hence, a child enrolled at age of seven is ideally supposed to complete his/ her primary grades at the age of 14. Nevertheless, it is not all of the enrolled children that make steady progress up to the specified completion stage. Some of them repeat classes and others leave schools early. Both situations amount to a considerable educational wastage which significantly compromises the internal efficiency of the education system performance.

Average dropout rate in primary school grades (1-8) is 13.1%, which hits its peak with 19.9% in grade one. The national average repetition rate in primary grades 1-8 is 8.5% (MoE, 2011). However, the national primary school dropping out rate seems to follow unstable trend that tends to decrease at one point in time and increase at another. Evidently, the average primary grades dropout rates were 12.4% in 2005/06 and 2006/07, ascended to 14.6% in 2007/08, escalated to 18.6% in 2008/09 and subsided to 13.1% in 2009/10 (MoE, 2011).

Education systems are not fully immune of dropping out. Students enrolled into a

certain program may quit proceeding with their learning for various reasons. Though all early school leavers share the name “dropout”, the reason behind their decision to abandon schooling could vary. Some factors that lead to early school leaving can have wider applicability while others remain personal and pointing at individual differences as well.

Poverty with its resultant inability to pay for schooling, however, is the most commonly identified determinant of access to and retention in education (Sabates, Ricardo, Hossain, Altaf and Lewin, 2010; World Bank, 2009; Jayachandran, 2002). More specifically, Hunt (2008) addresses the nexus between household income level and schooling as follows.

Household income is found to be an important factor in determining access to education as schooling potentially incurs a range of costs, both upfront and hidden. ... research suggest that children from better off households are more likely to remain in school, whilst those who are poorer are more likely never to have attended, or to dropout once they have enrolled. Hunt (2008, p. 7)

Jennings (2011) blames poverty and food insecurity for low participation and high attrition rates that characterize the Ethiopian education system. In such circumstances, according to Jennings, child labour becomes a coping mechanism through which the household depends on for survival. This ultimately leads to erratic school attendance and dropping out at last. Specific study conducted in Ethiopia ascertains that wealth disparity affects girls’ educational outcome than that of the boys’ due to parental reluctance to invest enough in their daughters schooling. Thus, “wealth appears to be a stronger correlate of primary school completion than primary school enrolment in Ethiopia. This is particularly true for girls” Chaudhury, Christiaensen and Asadullah (2006:9).

Another study that was carried out to investigate the underlying factors that limit females’ participation and persistence in education in the two largest regional states in Ethiopia, affirms poverty as main hindrance. Accordingly, 68% of parent respondents from Amhara and 53% from Oromia attribute their daughters’ early school leaving to inability to afford the direct costs of education. 73% of female dropout respondents from Amhara and 53% from Oromia also confirmed responses provided by parents (Nekatibeb, 2002).

Evidently, the World Bank has documented unprecedented increases in primary education enrolment across a number of African countries in the year following school fee abolition. The rate of increase in primary school enrolment was 11 percent in Lesotho, 12 percent in Mozambique, 14 percent in Ghana, 18 percent in Kenya, 23 percent in both Ethiopia and Tanzania, 26 percent in Cameroon, 51 percent in Malawi, and 68 percent in Uganda (World Bank, 2009).

Hunt (2008) underscores poor health, malnutrition and lack of motivation to learn

as those individual factors that aggravate the problem of dropout. Sabates *et al.* (2010), point out that child labour, migration and poverty are determining factors that result in school dropping out. Alexander (2008) cited in Sabates *et al.* (2010) identifies school related factors such as teacher absenteeism, school location and poor quality education as causes for early school leaving. Armed conflict is another cause that disrupts school operations. Schools and schoolchildren are usually targeted by parties in conflict in breach of the law that protects civilians and civilian infrastructures. UNESCO estimates the number of displaced people to 43 million in 2011. The fact that displacement is a major barrier to education, the displaced are less likely to go to school (UNESCO, 2011).

Age of admission into primary school is also not out of scope as far as contributors to early school leaving are concerned. Sabates *et al.* (2010) argue that:

Problem of drop out for children who are over age is likely to occur after a few years in primary school and is particularly severe for older children... Clearly late starters will be over age. The older they become, the higher the opportunity cost of schooling in terms of the forgone income that is needed to cover for household needs, even if this income comes from non-remunerated activities within the household such as child care. Sabates *et al.* (2010:24)

Hunt (2008) holds same view with Sabates and others regarding contribution of age of a child towards giving up schooling before reaching the level of completion of a given cycle. Empirical research has also revealed that over-age learners accounted for 60% of the total primary school dropout (Hunt, 2008: 2).

In sum, causes that lead to early school leaving have multiple dimensions. Poverty is the most pronounced factor among others. A considerable number of factors have their roots in societal traditions. In some communities girl's education is not considered as worth investing in for her parents do not foresee enjoying the return in the future. The long standing justification is that 'why should we sow where the harvest goes to the in-laws'. This study, therefore, is carried out in pursuit of: (1) Examining the status of early school leaving in Southern Nations Nationalities and People's Region, and (2) Identifying the major factors that interfere with children's persistence in primary schools of the regional state.

This study has multiple significances. First, it informs local and regional policy makers about the state of primary school dropping out in the regional state. Secondly, it suggests viable remedies to avert the problem of early school leaving which amounts to educational wastage. Thirdly, it adds to the existing literature regarding study of school early leaving so that others can make reference to it in the interest of undertaking similar studies.

METHODOLOGY

Research design

The study involves both qualitative and quantitative approaches. A cross-sectional survey design was used to collect data at one point in time from samples selected to represent the population in the study location. Qualitative data were collected from variety of respondents in order to carry out concurrent analysis in view of checking congruence of data from one source with that of the other. Interview, focus group discussion and observation were the main tools of qualitative data collection. Quantitative data were gathered

through questionnaire administration and via direct access to official statistical records of the regional education management information system.

Data sources

Data were collected from primary and secondary sources. School principals, teachers, education officials, experts and beneficiaries including parents, children, community leaders and local administration council members were the major sources of primary data. School facility observation checklist was also employed to substantiate the data obtained from primary sources. Secondary sources of data were official records and reports regarding the case in point.

Sampling technique and sample population

The sampling procedure adopted was a multi stage sampling technique. First, the region was systematically classified into three categories based upon the dominant economic activities taking place in a given zone. Consequently, such three clusters as Agriculturalist, Agro-pastoralist and Pastoralist sectors were identified.

Following the classification, two zones known mainly for agricultural activity, two zones known for their agro-pastoral activity and one zone which is predominantly pastoralist economic mainstay were selected on purposive sampling basis. The selection of sample zones was made not only on mere basis of dominant economic activity in which the majority of the population is engaged in. Rather, from each economic category one better performing and one low performing zones in terms of primary school dropout rate were taken into account to be able to compare the underlying causes of such variations.

Two districts were also identified from each sample zone on the basis of better and least performance with regard to primary

school dropout rate in view to understand the nature of intra zone differences regarding the subject matter of the study. Three sample schools (one best performing, one moderately performing and one least performing) have been selected from each sample district in light of regional average primary school dropping out rate (*13.7% in 2003 EC*). This exercise gave us five zones, 10 districts, and 30 primary schools as a sample population of the study.

Random sampling technique was employed with regard to respondents of the questionnaire which involved school teachers, education officials and experts at different levels of administrative hierarchy. Participants of the focus group discussion which comprised community leaders, parent-teacher association members and local administration council members were selected by employing purposive sampling referring to their roles in the community.

In school children were identified on a random basis in order to ensure provision of equal chance of being included in the sample population. Out of school children were considered on availability basis for their destination was not easily traceable. Primary school principals were made involved via purposive sampling by virtue of their position that enabled them to speak about problems of school dropping out in their respective jurisdictions.

Accordingly, the number of questionnaire dispatched to schoolteachers was 180 (six questionnaires for each of the thirty sample primary schools). Additionally, a total of 30 (six to each of the five sample districts) questionnaires were distributed to experts and education officials. One hundred eighty-six of the dispatched 210 questionnaires were completed and returned. This makes the rate of return 88.57 percent.

A total of 30 focus group discussions (one at each sample school location) were

conducted. Number of participants in each of the focus group discussion were eight persons. The overall number of participants is 240 respondents. Each of the sessions lasted for 90 minutes. One hundred and fifty randomly selected school children (five from each sample school) have participated in the interview. Fifteen out of school youth were also interviewed. Their selection was made on the basis of availability sampling.

Data collection instruments

Interview (for in-school and out of school children), questionnaire (for principals, teachers, education officials and experts) and focus group discussion (with community members) items have passed through two stage translations. Originally these instruments were developed in English language. At the second stage, the instruments were translated into Amharic in order to make them convenient for Amharic speaking participants since this is the official language of the federal government and widely in use in SNNPR. Residents of the region have diverse linguistic backgrounds. Thus, the instruments had also been verbally translated into local vernaculars by trained native data collection assistants in order to effectively communicate meaning.

Methods of data analysis

The analysis was done mainly by employing qualitative approach for the larger proportion of field level data was of the qualitative nature. Frequency tables, percentage points, graphs and charts were used in the process of presenting the findings. Paired samples *t-test* scores were calculated in determining significance of gender related variations in terms of school dropping out rates.

Data obtained through interview: Data collected using interview were analyzed by

employing a mechanism that involves five phases. First, bracketing and phenomenological reduction of responses was done. Second, delineating units of meaning was made. Third, clustering of units of meaning to form themes was conducted. Fourth, summarizing and validation of each interview performed. Finally, extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary was carried out.

Data obtained through observation:

Analysis of data obtained through observation has involved three stages. First, each episode of observation was transcribed and verified for accuracy. At the second stage data were quantified by counting instances of such particular prevalence. Finally, comparison was made to pin point differences and similarities between various observations.

Data obtained through focus group discussion:

Preparation of themes of the discussion was carried out following completion of each session of the focus group discussion. The process involved compiling information from audiotapes and field notes into one aggregate format, which serves as basis for the analysis. In tape-based analysis careful listening and re-listening of audiotapes in order to prepare an abridged transcript. Note-based analysis was guided by review of field notes, the debriefing session, and summary comments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of the respondents

Data were gathered through observations using observation grids, questionnaire, focus group discussion, interview and through access to official statistical reports obtained from the Bureau. The questionnaire involves both close-ended and open-ended questions. The following is the personal information about the

respondents who took part in completing the questionnaire.

Table 1: Respondents’ Demographic Profile

Item	Dawro		S. Omo		Walayta		Sidama		B.Maji	
	Ct	100%	Ct	100%	Ct	100%	Ct	100%	Ct	100%
Gender:										
a) Male	28	74	24	65	29	78	28	70	26	76
b) Female	10	26	13	35	08	22	12	30	08	24
Age:										
a) <26	9	24	20	54	9	25	10	25	11	32.4
b) 26-35	17	45	15	41	09	25	17	42.5	14	41
c) 36-45	8	21	2	05	10	28	8	20	7	20.6
d) 46-55	4	10	00	00	7	19	5	12.5	2	05.9
e) >55	00	00	00	00	1	3	00	00	00	00
Level of education:										
a) <Dip	06	16	15	41	03	09	12	30	18	53
b) Dip	22	58	17	46	26	74	22	55	12	35.3
c) Degree	10	26	5	13	6	17	6	15	04	11.7
Years since holding current position:										
a) <6	16	44	37	95	9	25	17	42.5	23	67.6
b) 6-10	11	31	2	05	15	43	12	30	6	17.6
c) 11-15	03	08	00	00	01	03	06	15	02	05.9
d) 16-20	02	06	00	00	03	09	03	07.5	03	08.8
e) >20	04	11	00	00	07	20	02	05	00	00

Table 1 above captures personal information about the respondents. As the first item indicates, the majority of the respondents were males. This is because the opportunities for male and females have not been equal in the teaching personnel deployment. The number of female participants both in teaching and educational leadership posts has constituted

a maximum of 35 percent only in south Omo out of the selected five zones and 10 sample districts.

Under item 2 of the same table, the age of the respondents was considered. Based on this 69 percent in Dawro, 95 percent in South Omo, 50 percent in Wolayta, 67.5 percent in Sidama and 73.4 percent in Bench Maji were less than or at the age of

35 years during the data collection period. Particularly, the education personnel deployed to the pastoralist zones of South Oms and Bench Maji were in their relatively younger ages when compared to the situation in other zones.

The 3rd item refers to the level of education of the education personnel and as the data shows, for Dawro zone, the majority (58%) were diploma holders and considerable proportion (26%) were with first degree. For South Omo, the majority (46%) were diploma holders while 41% were below diploma level. For Walayta zone, the vast majority (74%) were diploma holders and 17% were with first degree. In Sidama 55 percent had diploma level of qualification and 15 percent were first degree holders. So as the data revealed that 41 percent and 53 percent of the education personnel in South Omo and Bench Maji zones had level of academic qualifications less than the minimum standard set forth. The wider implication of being under qualified may mean under achievement in the position one holds.

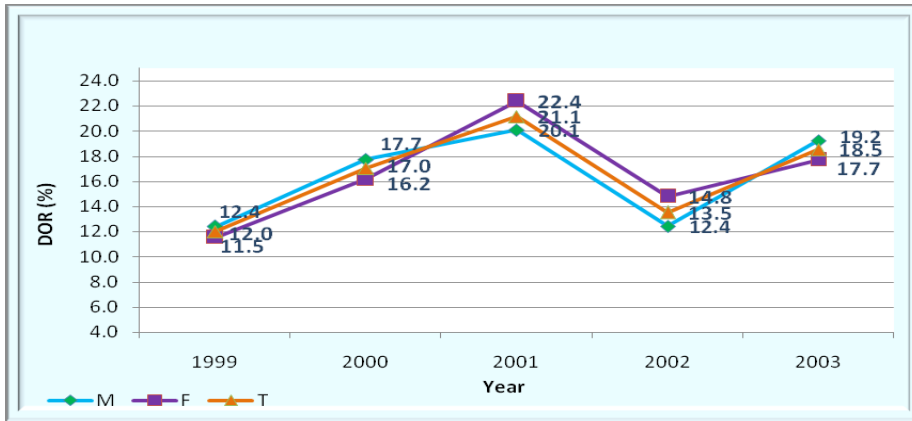
Item 4 of Table 1 refers to years of service in the current position. As the data indicated in the table above, 95 percent of the staff in South Omo, 67.6 percent of the staff in Bench Maji had only six years or less experience in their current position. Relatively the proportion of new entrants into the profession was in a better condition with Dawro, Sidama and Wolayta. Percent of educational personnel with few years experience was 44, 42 and 25 for Dawro, Sidama and Wolayta respectively. This shows that the education personnel in pastoralist areas were largely less experienced.

Prevalence of primary school dropout in SNNPR

Dropout rate is the proportion of last year's students who become out of school this year. High dropout rate signifies higher rate of resources wastage due to early school leaving prior to attaining the desired level of educational attainment. The regional primary school dropout rate during the last five consecutive years seemed to be less predictable. As can be observed from the figure hereunder, an average primary school dropout rate in 1999 (2007 GC) was 12 percent (12.4% among boys and 11.5% among girls). In 2000 (2008 GC) the average rose to 17 percent (17.7% among boys and 16.2 % among girls).

In 2001 (2009 GC) the average dropout rate has mounted to 21.1 (20.2 and 22.4 for boys and girls respectively). Unlike the previous two years girls have outnumbered boys in school dropping out during this particular year, 2001. Though the dropout rate persist not to be reduced to a single digit score, a significant decrease was exhibited in 2002 (2010 GC). The average dropout rate has declined to 13.5 percent from the previous year's average of 21.1 percent. Even then, more girls (14.8%) than boys (12.4%) have quitted their schooling during this year of noteworthy improvement. The final year of comparison 2003 (2011 GC), however, revealed a different picture of primary school dropout rate. The average has ascended to 18.5 percent (19.2% for boys and 17.7% for girls) from 13.5 percent in the preceding year. This kind of ascending-descending pattern may make the effort to control dropping out from the school tricky.

Figure 1: Regional Primary School Dropout Rate Trend from 1999-2003 (2007-2011GC)



Source: SNNPR Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012

These recent data, however, lack consistency with one of the earlier reports released by the bureau in 2009 in regards to primary school dropout. For instance, the 2012 report presents that the average primary school dropout rate was 12 and 16.2 percentages in 2007 and 2008 respectively. But the 2009 statistical data (see page 7 of this report) put the average dropout rate for the above specified years (2007 and 2008) at 9.4 and 10 percentages

correspondingly. This kind of discrepancy may seriously affect the credibility of the information being delivered by the education management information system.

This study makes use of the 2003 EC (2011/12) data to assess the degree of primary school dropping out in the sample districts as well. The table here below contains numerical details by primary education cycles, gender as well as by sample zones and districts.

Table 2: Primary Dropout Rate by Cycle in the Sample Districts (2011 Data)

Zone	Woreda	Dropout Rate								
		Grade 1-4			Grade 5-8			Grade 1-8		
		M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Bench Maji	Guraferda Ferda	10.1	13.6	11.6	23.9	17.1	19.4	7.5	7.8	7.6
	Menit Shasha	26.0	28.2	26.4	27.6	32.1	29.1	26.1	28.8	26.7
Bench maji zone		20.2	20.2	02.2	15.0	10.6	13.3	19.0	17.9	18.6
Dawro	Gena Bosa	4.9	4.3	1.3	9.8	9.1	9.5	3.3	6.3	4.8
	Tocha	8.7	9.8	9.3	10.5	8.7	9.7	9.5	9.4	9.4
Dawro zone		4.0	7.9	5.9	7.7	8.0	7.8	5.5	7.9	6.7
Debub Omo	Dasenech	12.5	8.9	10.2	15.4	12.8	13.3	15.5	14.7	15.3
	Nnangatom	35.9	54.8	43.7	28.2	43.4	30.4	22.6	30.5	21.8
Debub Omo Zone		14.9	15.8	15.3	11.4	12.1	11.7	13.9	14.9	14.3
Sidama	Boricha	27.3	27.6	27.5	33.2	36.0	34.6	29.2	30.1	29.7
	Dara	9.9	19.0	14.1	6.1	12.0	8.5	8.7	16.9	12.3
Sidama Zone		20.3	21.7	21.0	15.0	17.5	16.1	18.5	20.5	19.4
Wolayta	Boloso Sore	16.5	18.6	17.5	10.0	19.8	14.6	14.4	19.0	16.6
	Damot Woyde	3.6	12.2	7.9	7.8	10.5	9.1	5.5	11.4	8.4
Wolayta Zone		12.9	14.9	13.8	6.0	9.6	7.7	10.4	13.0	11.6
Region		14.5	15.6	15.0	10.9	12.3	11.5	13.3	14.5	13.8

Source: SNNPR Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012.

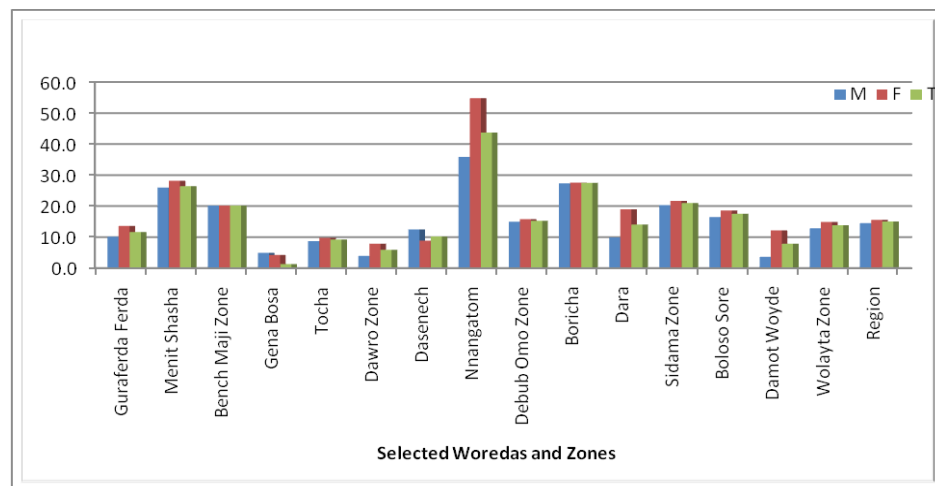
Table 2 above depicts data on primary school dropout rates across the ten sample districts in SNNPR. The data evidenced that primary school dropout rate is at its highest level when seen in comparison with both the national and regional averages. Alarming high primary school (grades 1-8) dropout rate was exhibited in Boricha district of Sidama zone with an average of 29.7 percent. This rate is greater than the average dropout rate even in Sidama by 10.3 percent. The rate has escalated to more than double of the regional average of 13.8 percent. Menit Shasha stood in the second place with an average dropout rate of 26.7 percent and followed by another pastoralist district Nyangatom with 21.8 percent.

Ranking of districts based on their performance related to prevalence of school dropping out may give us a general overview that covers up significant particulars. More critical issues may start to manifest when one deals with a detailed analysis of grade level and gender specific patterns of early school leaving. For

example, 35.9% of boys and 54.8% of girls in grades 1-4 have quitted their schooling in Nyangatom district during the 2011/12 academic year. Of course grades 5-8 were no exception as far as the problem of high dropout in Nyangatom is concerned. The dropout rate at upper primary grades was as high as 28.2 % among boys and 43.4 among girls in the above specified period.

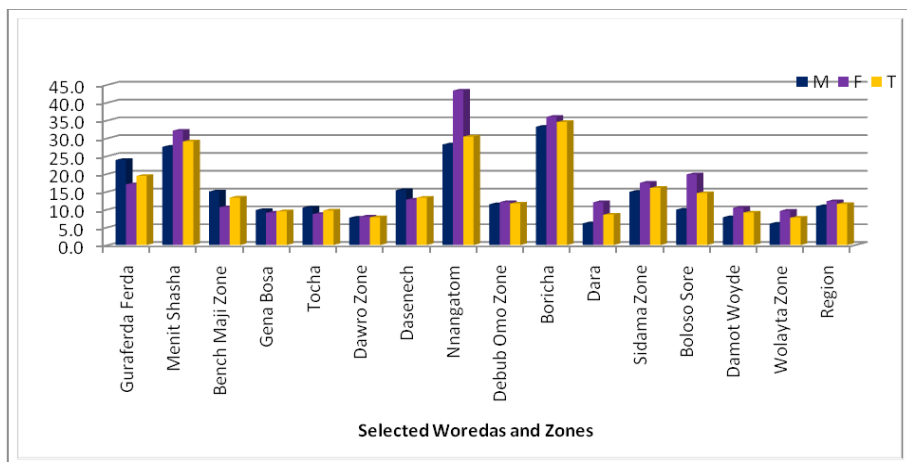
School dropping out from grades 1-4 in Boricha (27.3 for boys and 27.6 for girls) was found to be one of the highest with exception of almost no difference between boys and girls. Boricha has also exceptionally high rate of upper primary grades (5-8) dropout with 33.2% for boys and 36% for girls. Alike the case in Nyangatom and Boricha districts, primary school dropout rates in Menit Shasha were 26% among boys and 28.2% among girls in grades 1-4. The rate has increased to 27.6% among boys and 32.1% among girls in grades five through eight. The situation is visually expressed via the following graphic representations.

Figure 2: Lower Primary Grades (1-4) Dropout Rate in Sample Districts



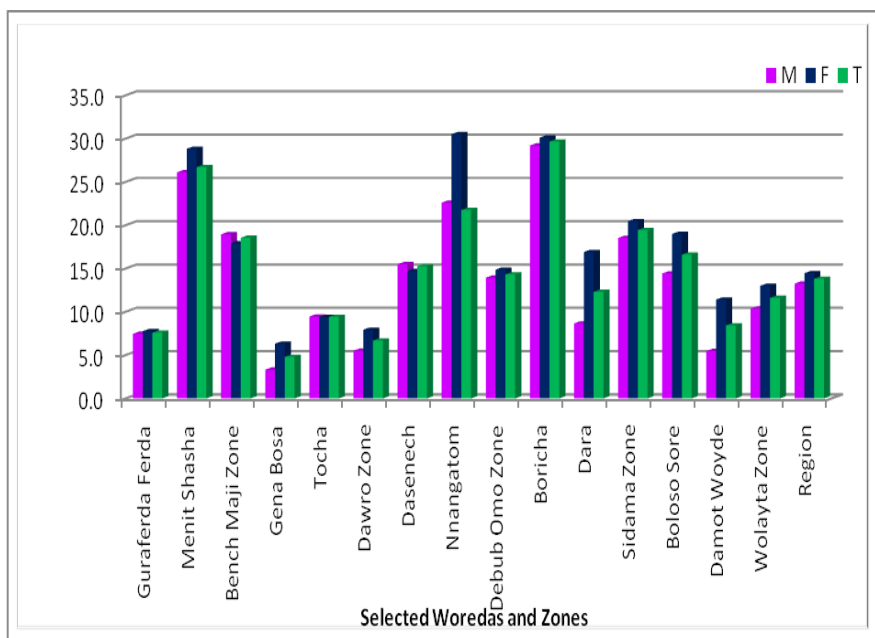
Source: SNNPR Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012

Figure 3: Upper Primary Grades (5-8) Dropout Rate in Sample Districts



Source: SNNPR Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012

Figure 4: Primary School Dropout Rate across grades 1-8 in Sample Districts



Source: SNNPR Education Bureau, Education Statistics Annual Abstract, 2012

As a matter of course, a test to determine whether there exists statistically significant variation between boys and girls regarding

early school leaving was also carried out. Scores of the paired samples *t*-test are displayed as follows.

Table 3: Paired samples *t*-test scores on school dropout rate at primary level

	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 bmm - bmf	1.83333	2.28983	1.32204	-3.85493	7.52159	1.387	2	.300
Pair 2 dawm - dawf	-2.20000	1.80831	1.04403	-6.69210	2.29210	-2.107	2	.170
Pair 3 som - sof	-.86667	.15275	.08819	-1.24612	-.48721	-9.827	2	.010
Pair 4 sidm - sidf	-1.96667	.55076	.31798	-3.33482	-.59851	-6.185	2	.025
Pair 5 walm - walf	-2.73333	.80829	.46667	-4.74124	-.72543	-5.857	2	.028

As exhibited in table 3 above, the paired samples *t*-test result for sample districts in Bench Maji and Dawro zones show *p* value greater than 0.05. Yet the *t*-test result for South Omo, Sidama, and Wolayta zones indicates the *p* value less than 0.05. In reference to 0.05 level of significance, therefore, we accept the null hypothesis for Bench Maji and Dawro and reject the null hypothesis for South Omo, Sidama, and Wolayta groups. That means, there is no significant difference between males and females in dropout rate by education cycle for Bench Maji and Dawro groups. The test shows significant difference for South Omo, Sidama and Wolayta zone administrations.

Causes of primary school dropout in SNNPR

School early leaving can be an outcome of multiple factors. Social, cultural and/or economic aspects either in combination or

independently can interfere with children’s persistence and steady progression in education. As a backdrop to the prevailing problem of school dropout in the SNNPR, thus, the study tries to surface some broad spectrum of determinants that limit participation and persistence of children in education as perceived by parents, children, school teachers, principals and district level education experts. Analysis of data from different sources was treated in accordance with category of themes pursuant to objectives intended to achieve. Following are some essential remarks made by education personnel regarding factors that either limit children’s access to education in general or hamper their persistence in school system in particular across the study areas.

The first part of the questionnaire completed by teachers and education experts contained identification of major

social and economic roles of children; barriers to children's enrolment and regular attendance; and practices having disruptive effects on children's schooling. Consequently, deployment to on farm activities (weeding, bird watching and harvest); cattle tending; taking care of household chores; running petty trade and accompanying or representing parents in social events such as wedding, mourning, and local holidays were depicted as the pronounced roles of children.

Need for child labour

Three major primary school enrolment restraining attributes and those leading to erratic attendance were also uncovered by the schoolteachers and experts. Household level need for child labour was the unanimously rated barrier to schooling across the study location. The second determinant was identified as exploitative child employment with cheaper pay. Marginally paid child labour was reported as a common encounter during harvest seasons in predominantly cash crop areas. Coffee, grain and khat harvest periods were characterized by mass school dropout for children are hired by large farmland owning persons or traders who acquire crops while on the field and manage the harvest afterwards. A traditional gold mining activity in Dima (a location in Bench Maji zone) area that attracts boys at their late adolescent ages was also identified as a contributing factor to early school leaving for male students in Bench Maji and the Neighbouring Dawro zones.

Lack of local role models who attained higher level of education to identify oneself with was also indicated as another factor that increases the likelihood of school dropout. The latter factor places its influence in much greater intensity among pastoralists than the agriculturalist and agro-pastoralist communities as learnt from discussions with key informants. In fact

this situation is not unexpected one so long as pastoralists are the most underrepresented segments of society in terms of access, retention, and progression in education.

Child labour is the most intricate factor that prohibits children either from enrolling or remaining intact in schools. The demand for child labour comes from multiple actors. In the front are parents. Parents may prefer to keep a child out of school either due to their inability to pay the direct costs of schooling or due to quick cost-benefit analysis of school going and labour contribution of the child to the family wellbeing. In the latter case, parents deploy children to take care of household chores or assign them in a petty trade or casual labour market to support family income. Focus group discussions across the sample districts in Bench Maji, Dawro, Sidama, and Wolyta with some exception in South Omo have very clearly affirmed this reality.

Children's own decision to abandon school and engaged in income earning activity is another dimension of the challenge. The out of school and/or dropouts especially from such cash crop areas as Bench Maji, Dawro, Sidama and Wolyta usually resort to petty trade activities including roadside retails of coffee beans, spices, fruits, khat (popularly called Ch'at) and variety of agricultural and handcraft items in view to self-support. These children, however, do not realize that they were transacting their possible better future to ephemeral and marginal gains of each day. Some of the dropouts depend on market days and urban settings to look for the unpredictable livelihood earnings. Above all, these children are very vulnerable to rights violation and substance abuse.

The third dimension of child labour goes to an exploitative practice of child recruitment to seasonal deployment of children for

extremely low daily pay rate. Coffee bean picking, khat cutting and grain harvest were the dominantly cited areas of child labour exploitation on the expense of their schooling in all the cash crop growing sample districts except Desenech and Nyangatom in South Omo zone administration. Dima traditional goldmine location in Bench Maji zone and large scale agricultural activities in Gambella were also indicated as attractions to the grown up boys in Dawro and Bench Maji zones that interfere with their education. Some drop outs have also joined the informal sector being shoeshine, running traditional barberry even under a tree shed and sideway snack supply during local market days.

Parents in Boloso Sore district, for instance, have complained about school fee of 15 Birr per child and periodic contributions requested by schools as determinants of keeping children in schools. Desperate need for child labour among the poor households is another serious interfering factor to children's enrolment as well as retention in school. Child labour is a common denominator across agriculturalists, agro-pastoralists and pastoralist communities irrespective of their difference their means of production, social and cultural contexts. Poverty and its resultant need for child labour for family survival were identified as problems that affect both boys and girls altogether with of course some variations in the intensity of labour contribution between girls and boys. Clearly, girls shoulder greater household labour responsibilities than boys do.

Furthermore, identification of factors that contribute to primary school dropping out among boys and girls was made through subsequent focus group discussion sessions with communities residing in the vicinity of the sample schools. It was also tried to examine whether same factors contribute to

boys and girls early school leaving. Consequently, poverty and/or lack of parental support and indifference towards females' education were among the frequently cited as common determinants of school dropping out among both sexes.

Poverty as a determinant of school attendance

Parents have explained poverty in two ways as interfering with their children's education despite their willingness to allow children proceed in education. Primarily, children from poor household either never enrol or quit schooling shortly after enrolment due to the direct cost of keeping a child in school. The direct cost, as noted by participants of the study, refers to expenses mainly on meal and stationeries. Parents also complained over periodic cash contribution requests made by the schools. In addressing this particular aspect parents underlined that "authorities tell us that education is free. But it is not. Schools require us to make contributions of different kind. We contribute for school renovation, additional classroom construction, fencing, desk purchase and similar others".

Indirect cost of education is another challenge to keep children from poor household in school as learnt from remarks made by parents and children alike. Parents from lower economic strata were of the opinion that they prefer to benefit from the immediate labour contribution of children than anticipating gains of education which demands long years to come to fruition. Furthermore, educated unemployment is setting bad precedence among participants of this study as learnt from the focus group discussion sessions with community members. Of course, it is natural that no one can be interested to invest in anything else without calculating the return. Where costs of education exceed the anticipated benefit, which would be tough if not

impossible to convince parents to send children to school or retain them in school.

While discussing about school dropping out with parents and early school leavers, both sides blame each other. Parents complained about their children's disobedience, demanding material interest and reluctance in class attendance. The dropouts, on the other hand, pointed at lack of proper parental support during their school days. Thus, they get attracted to daily labour activities or petty trade on the expense of their schooling. This trend is a commonly noted problem across cash crop areas such as Sidama, Wolayta, Dawro and Bench Maji.

In Boricha and Daara districts of Sidama zone children were deployed to on farm and/or off-farm engagements for nominal daily average wage of eight Birr for about 10 hours of work a day. Khat harvest is the major area of child labour attraction in the above mentioned sample districts in Sidama zone. Khat traders and their brokers target young children for two reasons. First, children have no strong bargaining power and accept any lower offer as fixed by the merchants. Secondly, children obey the employer's instruction with no or little challenge as compared to adults.

It was also learnt that children were involved in roadside petty trade with high vulnerability to traffic accidents particularly along the highway stretching from Hawassa to Dilla. It is a common experience to be surrounded by a group of children shouting "khat...khat...banana...banana...pineapple... pineapple... mango... mango...coffee...coffee" and many more variety of things if one stops for a while. Items they sell range from fruits, chicken, charcoal to other household tools like kitchen knives, and locally made grain pounding and grinding materials.

Most of these children are underage to officially assume their business responsibility and at their right age to be in school.

All children who were randomly picked and interviewed during data collection were either school dropouts or the never enrolled ones. They all attribute their failure to attend school to poverty and lack of support from family. One of the informants, a 17 year old boy, whom we met at his petty trade location in Quma'to kebele of Daara district, said that:

School going is a luxury to me and friends of mine who vendor here at the roadside. My parents are economically poor. They cannot afford to support my education. I need money to buy exercise books, pens, pencils, and clothing. Where from can I get this money unless I work? It is clear that the school timetable and my work schedule do not go along. I have to abandon one to take care of the other. Though I like education, I cannot help it. When I am at work my schooling suffers. When going to school, I suffer. Let my schooling suffer. I think, man can live without education but not without food.

It is established fact that poverty severely determines the likelihood of poor children's access to education. Beyond limiting access, it also places a significant challenge on academic progression and performance of children from poor households. Yet effective education remains a single most important way of social and economic upward mobility of the poor.

Indifference towards girls' schooling

Thirty focus group discussion sessions (one at each of the sample school location) have been carried out with community members with the aim to underpin data from other sources by the underlying community attitude toward girls' education. Customarily, all the focus group discussion sessions were held following a clear introduction of the purpose and after consent was obtained with respective participants. The first question posted to the focus group discussion participants in this regard was "what does the community expect from education of a son?"

The summarised response from all the sessions discloses that the community members were of the opinion that tacitly favouring boys' schooling than that of girls' in terms of anticipated outcome of education. In earlier days, as uncovered by participants, they had relatively larger size of land possession both to support their household needs and to share mainly with male offspring while he attends the age of majority and upon preparation to form own family. As the population size increases, however, individual landholding gets continuously decreasing. Shrinkage in household land possession is now becoming a critical problem among community members particularly from Sidama and Wolayta as learnt from the respondents. Thus, parents seem to be determined to send their sons to school in pursuit of joining the labour market out of which they would make their living.

"What benefit do you expect from educating your daughter?" was the following question to the participants. Educating girls has multiple benefits as underlined by the community members. First, educated women, according to the respondents, can manage their family in a better way than their uneducated counterparts. They care for their spouses and children through maintaining hygiene

and disease prevention. Secondly, educated woman would get employment opportunity so as to enable her family lead a better life. Nowadays, as noted by FGD participants in Wolayta, Sidama and Dawro zones, men are getting attracted to marry a woman with some education than the illiterate one.

The departure point here is that the anticipated benefit from educating boys seems to be granted a better value than the benefit to be reaped from girls' education. The outcome of females' schooling is equated to serving her future family and supporting the spouse. Yet, the outcome from boys' schooling portrayed as having a far reaching positive impact over the lives of his parents.

The third question was about gender preference for schooling. Community members were asked whether they prefer between boys and girls to send to school. In response to this question, the participants seemed to be fair and equal opportunity providers. At least in principle, they insisted on to say that "we offer equal opportunity to both our female and male children since they deserve to be treated equally". However, the practice proves to the contrary. During the focus group discussion sessions, community members were exchanging views on this particular matter. The dominant traditional norm that marginalizes female participation and persistence in education has manifested itself while participants nodded in agreement with the following remarks made by a 57 year old father at Fulasa Aldada kebele of Boricha district.

To be honest, we all understand that both boys and girls are our offspring. However, we prefer to educate our sons if we obliged to choose between the two. You may ask us 'why?' The answer is quite clear. Sons have nowhere to go. They

usually remain around us even after marriage. The case with girls is different. They stay with us only until they turn to the age of 16 or 18 or so. Their usual destination is with their in-laws. Girls can also have a chance of getting married to a wealthy husband. But a rich woman never prefers to be a wife of a poor man. That is why we like to prioritize boys' education than that of the girls'.

Families give priority for their sons' education than that of their daughters' for they consider educating boys as later age insurance. Of course, this view is consistent with an assertion made by Amanuel and Mulugeta (1999:4) regarding viewing boy's education as an "investment in security for old age".

Peer pressure as an instrument of deterrence for school going

Pastoralists in Dasenech and Nyangatom use various mechanisms to discourage boys from school going. These mechanisms can roughly be classified into persuasive or punitive forms. The initiative to employ either of these two approaches solely rests with parents. Execution of the strategies, however, subjected to two separate entities namely, parents and fellow older boys in the community.

Parents are at the very forefront of shaping children's perception to consider education as none value adding exercise in the lives of pastoralists. They follow different approaches to this end as learnt from interviews conducted with the out of school and in-school children alike. Primarily, parents persuade adolescent boys to boycott classes by a means of promising a better entitlement to goats and cattle. This is mainly done in view to make a boy busy by taking care of his possession that is closely linked with a change in the boy's prestige. Knowing that cattle ownership

symbolizes commanding social reputation, parents systematically use such an offer to boys in influencing them to abandon schooling.

The second persuasive strategy being used by parents is involving a boy in decision making and expanding his sphere of responsibility in familial matters. Such an increase in responsibility usually stimulates a boy to aspire for more autonomy and self-assurance in the move to ascertain self-efficacy and proof of social worth. Lobbying made through relatives and friends about worthlessness of school going during one's youth hood is the third persuasive strategy that parents follow in order to get older boys quit education.

The punitive measure is the one that is taken by fellow youth to deter an older boy from pursuing education. The approach involves serving a boy with initial strong warning and blackmailing followed by physical assault whereby the warning is not positively responded to. This practice is known as *Kabana* both among pastoralist communities of Dasenech and Nyangatom. *Kabana* refers to a self-appointed youth group that penalize the grown up boys for attending school. For *Kabanas* school going after adolescent age is a wasteful practice. Rather boys of this age need to assist their fathers and simultaneously learn from them the way as to how they become effective pastoralists in their adulthood.

In addition to household responsibilities, pastoralist boys are also supposed to be defenders of the interests of their respective communities particularly during the time of conflict. A *Kabana* leader whom I met at the delta of river Omo has to say the following in firmly denouncing benefit of schooling; "If educated, boys will migrate to urban settings in search for jobs. If that is to happen, we will be left helpless and unable to defend ourselves from enemies.

Jungles are best places for us to learn what we need most than spending days stranded between walls”.

It is common that peer groups influence choices and behavior of an individual towards good or bad direction. The *kabanas* usually go off the limit of influencing in their prohibitive acts of boys’ schooling. *Kabanas* organize themselves in a group of five to eight youth members. If the group believes that a certain older boy is attending school (which the *Kabanas* regard it as age inappropriate act) or a certain father complains about his son’s school going, the case for intervention is said to be well established. Thus, group members carrying light sticks march towards the said boy and abduct him to the off-road location. There, they warn him not to go to school anymore and tell him the grievous consequences of probable failure in observing their instruction. If the boy defiantly persists to attend classes, severe penalty awaits him ahead. Same group with intense anger will come to the boy and flog him with sticks prepared to this very purpose. Older boys, therefore, obey an instruction given by members of their peer group in fear of flogging and the resultant slander. The one who is beaten by the *Kabana* group is also ostracized as a coward and disgraced person.

CONCLUSION AND THE WAY FORWARD

Learnt from findings of this study dropping out from primary schools in SNNPR was not only in its highest rate of prevalence but also characterized by an unpredictable pattern. The situation is said to be precarious for it swings between falling at one time and rising at another. School dropping out was commonly experienced phenomenon even in contrasting social, cultural and economic contexts such as among agriculturalists, agro-pastoralists and pastoralists. Regardless of differences

in social or cultural or economic activities, poverty, the need for child labour and interest in bride price were commonly reported factors across the varied communities. Seasonal mobility and recurring conflicts were identified as endemic causes of early school leaving among the pastoralist population.

Attitude towards female education in general and academic performance in particular seemed to be not well nurtured. Teachers in school label females as incompetent as reported by female respondents. Parents feel not at ease to send their daughters to school for they underestimate the potential of females in being successful in their study. Male students in the school perceive females as subordinates than equals. Sadly, females themselves become victims of the stereotype and accustomed to echo the same tradition.

Attainment of the MDGs in education, as we have been discussing across this report, entails universal completion of primary school. Even though the region is achieving a better result in approaching the universal primary school enrolment, the prevalence of two digits dropout rate coupled with poor students’ progression in the system places a significant challenge in achieving the globally sought after goal. Following are some of the remedial actions in view to alleviate the persistent problem of primary school dropping out in the SNNPR in light of the preceding findings.

Providing guidance and counselling services: It was learnt that both in-school children and dropouts had no clear career orientation and lack vivid mental picture of their destiny through education. This situation was pervasive among the rural children who were mainly from illiterate parents. Schools may be considered as better places to acquire such inspirations.

Of course, a schoolteacher who is prepared to teach subject matter may perceive the counselling task as a difficult engagement. However, children need to have guidance to help them get focused and to be far sighted about benefits of education. This task can be accomplished through school principals after providing them with short term training about fundamentals of educational counselling and career orientation. If properly instituted, the guidance and counselling services may help to address the problem of abandoning education for the sake of momentary financial gains resulting from seasonal daily labour wages and/or petty trade engagements for subsistence.

Arranging for regular academic support:

One of the causes of dropout is poor academic performance that discourages especially older children to easily give up the race. Schools can remedy such a problem through arrangement of regular tutorial classes for those students who seek additional academic support in order to improve their scores and enable them to progress in schooling. The academic support scheme can be carried out by teachers in the school during the school days. It can also continue over the weekends through coaching of senior, able and volunteer students at the venue where the local community regards convenient and safe. Of course such engagement in student-to-student coaching preferably be done between students who have kinship ties and residing in the same surroundings. Schools can tackle the possible counterproductive effects of such deployment of senior students by fixing a time limit of such volunteer service so that the volunteering student may not suffer shortage of time for his/her own academic and household responsibilities. Thirdly, schools and the local community may make arrangements to conduct tutorials and revision classes through deployment of

university students who went to their locality for rainy season vacation. This practice, in addition to contributing to improvement in academic performance, may help the children to aspire for pursuing his/her education to the highest possible level.

Improving rural school facilities:

Children get excited to go to school where and when they feel that schools are attractive places to stay in. Schools in the region have two distinct aspects in this regard. Some rural schools are modestly child friendly in their organization and others are not. Poor classroom condition, absence of separate toilet facilities for boys and girls, absence of water scarcity and lack of proper and enough playgrounds coupled with shortage of sport materials were the major concerns of children while commenting about their school situation. Therefore, such schools may make their priority renovating the school facilities to make them child friendly.

Seeking partnership with higher learning institutions:

There are seven universities situated across different zones of the region. The Universities are Arbaminch, Dilla, Hawassa, Mizan-Tepi, Wachamo, Wolayta Sodo and Wolkite. In addition, there are also four Colleges of Teacher Education (Arbaminch, Bonga, Hawassa and Hossana) providing teacher training programs exclusively to the region. This large number of higher learning institutions created immense but untapped potentials to mitigate some of the problems that primary schools of the region are facing. Context responsive remedies can be devised in order to address problem of primary school dropout and ranges of other challenges through close partnership with these higher learning institutions. Areas of partnership can take the form of undertaking joint research projects (action and full-scale system diagnostic studies)

and tailor-made capacity building trainings for zone, district and school level leadership. These institutions can also contribute to improve the overall situation of primary schools via their focused and meaningful outreach (community service) programs.

Internalizing the benefits of education:

There were tendencies of community members to superficially trying to comply with what the government orders them to do. But everyone needs to internalize that issues pertaining to education are concerns of each household. This may call for more sensitization about the benefits of education through the use of educated local role models' campaign. The sensitization campaign may have twofold purposes. First, it helps to raise parental awareness of benefits of education. Second, creates opportunity to pastoral children to learn from experiences and achievements of educated local role models. The process of campaigning through the use of educated local role models also helps children to identify themselves with the exemplary figures and get inspired to proceed with their education despite the constraining circumstances.

Adopting suitable school setup:

Designing a school structure that better responds to the mobility needs of the pastoral communities is another essential consideration. The less flexible school timetable and capital intensive formal school buildings rarely satisfy the learning needs of pastoral communities. Innovative and simple school structures like tent schools which can easily move from place to place while the community migrates may be worthwhile. Since pastoralists mostly follow defined routes of mobility between wet and dry seasons, adoption of mobile school structure would be beneficial to tackle the problem of school abandonment while mobility becomes a necessity.

Promoting more meaningful community involvement: Schools are there to serve the community where they are established in and whom they are established for. Therefore, the community as a proprietor of the school needs to be involved in strengthening it. In this context, community participation should not be equated to labour, material and/or financial contribution as usual. It needs to go beyond 'contribution' and reach the level of involvement. The roles of education and training boards as well as that of teacher-parents associations have to be internalized and be fully implemented in order to address the problems high rate of dropout.

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