

**Full length Research Paper**

# Universal Basic Education: Exploring the Challenges of Access and Equity in Some Primary Schools of Oromiya Region

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**Abstract**

Universal primary education has been critically affected by a number of challenges. The main purpose of the study was to investigate the challenges of universal basic education provided in the primary schools of selected districts of Oromiya region. In so doing, descriptive survey method was employed. Teachers teaching primary classes, primary school directors, and pertinent experts from districts education offices were used as a source to secure relevant data. Simple random, available and purposive samplings were employed. Questionnaire, observation and interview were the main tools of data collection. Both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were employed. The findings showed that socio-economic problems and cultural issues are the major obstacles for access and equity. Besides, lack of provisions of adequate classrooms, materials and equipment supply, acute shortages of professionally skilled and competent teachers, and promoting effective partnerships with parents were the main challenges of primary education organized in most primary schools of the studied districts. In conclusion, primary education organized in primary schools in the studied districts had been a neglected branch of education. It had never been considered as an integral part of formal education. Conversely, the issue had not yet received due attention and support it deserves. Thus, conveying ICT-based curricular materials, enhancing parents', administrators', education leaderships' and teachers' awareness towards access and equity, organization of classroom, materials and equipment, assignment of qualified teachers, in-service training for teachers and strengthen the linkage between parents and primary schools could be recommended.

**Key Terms-** Access, Equity, Oromiya, Universal Basic Education

**Introduction**

Education is renowned as the key to sustainable development (Samrawit, 2015), peace and stability within and among countries, making it an indispensable means for effective participation in societies and economies of the twenty-first century (UNESCO, 2000). Recognizing the crucial position of children in the future of the society, basic education becomes a point of common concern in both developed and developing countries. Assumptions about its importance have led to rapid expansion of primary school and in quality of facilities and services (Temesgen, 2016). The degree of realization of the right to primary education is not only dependent on the government policies and measures but is also influenced by the practical matters within the society. For instance, the parental attitude towards education influenced by educational background, occupation, social and cultural condition not only precludes children from their basic rights but also adversely affect accessibility and equity of education in general (Adham, 2011). Further, financial and social constraints also present a challenge for the realization of the right to primary education. Hence, it can be said that there is a significant difference between the norm and the reality of primary education. For Africa and Ethiopia, the right to primary education, in addition to being fundamental human right, the elements of good quality, accessible and equity of education are recognized as an important foundation for economic growth and instrument in attaining other objectives of development.

In recognition of this reality, access and equity of primary education that were very minimal have now shown noteworthy changes that confirm the recognition of the primary education as human rights (OEB, 2015). Further, due to the governments various sustained efforts in the implementation of international principles and target set, Ethiopia has graduated from being one of the lowest scoring states in enrolment to having the potential of achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE). The framework of the ETP, the series of ESDPs have also brought significant changes on the educational system of Oromiya region by focusing on quality, efficiency and equity in access for primary education. The government has undertaken positive measures including the consideration of pro-poor

policies and initiatives such as teachers training, construction of schools, girls' education, Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP), School Feeding Programs (SFP), Alternative Basic Education (ABE) and non-formal education (NFE).

Despite progress and achievements in the education sector, evidences show that the general literacy rate in Ethiopia remains low as it did not reached the target set to achieve UPE by 2015 (OEB, 2015). In Oromiya, accessibility of primary education is mainly seen in light of construction and expansion of schools which brought a positive impact. Accordingly, Oromiya is one of the states (being administrative state) making positive truck in achieving universal primary education in Ethiopia. On spite of the better resources and construction of schools, other aspects of education mainly quality, lowering repeaters and dropout has remain to be a constant challenge in the regional. In addition, inclusion of vulnerable children primary education delivery is also major challenges to attainment of the ESDP V i.e. right to universal primary education. This paper explores the policy, legal and practical challenges of the right to primary education and its influence on accessibility and equity in primary education in Oromiya region.

### Materials and methods

To get relevant and sufficient information on research problem, mixed research design (quantitative and qualitative design was used). To this effect, a descriptive survey method was employed as an appropriate methodology. The method was selected because it could investigate adequately the challenges of preprimary education provided in the primary school classrooms in selected districts of Oromiya region so that the intended purpose would be achieved.

#### Data Sources

The main source of data for the study consisted of teachers teaching preprimary, primary school directors, and pertinent experts from districts education offices. In addition, preprimary classrooms and outdoor play areas were used as a source to secure relevant data. Moreover, relevant national and regional education policy documents were used as cornerstones of references of information for the study.

#### Sampling Techniques

Adequate samples were taken for the study through simple random and purposive samplings. Simple random sampling was used to obtain primary schools providing preprimary education that were included in the samples. This was done by listing their names and drawing the required sample using lottery technique. Hence, twenty-three primary schools were selected as sources of data. Besides, thirty-five teachers teaching primary schools were made to fill the questionnaire. Purposive sampling was used to select informants such as primary schools directors, and districts education offices experts due to their close duties and responsibilities they hold in the area. Accordingly, ten directors and four districts level experts were interviewed. Further, thirteen classrooms and play areas were observed on purposive basis.

#### Data Collection Instruments

Both quantitative and qualitative instruments of data collection were used to collect data for the study. These consisted of questionnaire, observation and interview. Multiple instruments were used to check the consistency of information and to gather supplementary ideas, which would never be obtained by one means.

#### Data Analysis

Qualitative data collected through interviews, open-ended questionnaire and observation were analyzed using narration and the summary of the words of respondents. For the quantitative data, descriptive statistical analysis such as percentage followed by descriptive statements was used. The data collected through close-ended questionnaires were summarized in tables and analyzed using percentage followed by descriptive statements.

### Results

#### Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

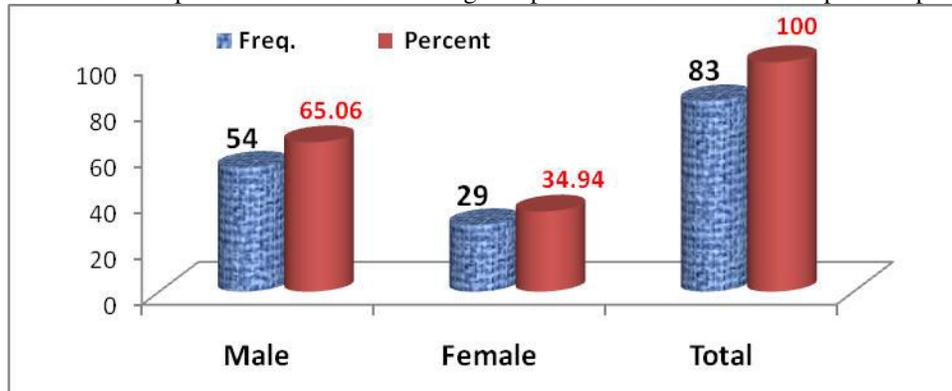
From all the respondents, 15.66 %, 30.12 %, 36.14 % and 12.05 % of were school leaders, teachers, students, parents and Woreda/zonal Administrators, respectively (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Respondents' Category

No.	Respondents' Group	Frequency	Percent
1	School Leadership	13	15.66
2	Teachers	25	30.12
3	Students	30	36.14
4	Parents	10	12.05
5	Woreda/Zonal Administrators	5	6.02
6	<b>Total</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Own Survey, 2017

Three-fifth of the respondents comprised were students and teachers while the least proportion of the respondents came from woreda and zonal administration.. None of respondents that holds a managerial position were included for parental position (Table 1).



**Fig1.** Respondents' Category by Sex

Fig 1 indicates about gender status of the respondents from West Arsi, West Wollega, West Hararghe And East Shoa zones of oromiya region. Accordingly, 65.06% percent of the respondents are males and 34.94% percent are females. Based on the data, majority of respondents of employees working at schools in the selected zones are males than female.

#### *Challenges to Enforce "Compulsory" Primary Education*

To achieve the full realization of the right to primary education and implement the international human rights standards, the compulsory nature of primary education has to be assured at the nation level as a duty of the state and in this case of Oromiya too. Currently, the OEB in collaboration with the Woredas and Kebeles; door to door counting of children lacking access to education and awareness creation programs including annual education week to resolve issues of equity at the primary education level. However, in the due course of the study, it was understood that the lack of education law at the national level has stand on the way of effort made by the regional educational bureau to achieve the intended goal of universal access to primary education. Oromiya as being the capital regional of a multi-ethnic developing country has its own socio-economic and cultural challenges that not only undermine children but also unaware of the existence of their right to education and other human rights of primary education. The absence of education law has not only handicapped the regional educational bureau in its effort to ensure access and equity in primary education but has also stand on the realization of the right as the principle of accountability at times of non-fulfillment is missing.

The concept of "compulsory" within the right to primary education is the core standard whereby the principle of compulsory serves to highlight the fact that neither parents, nor guardians, nor the state are entitled to treat as optional the decision as to whether the child should have access to primary education. For the term "compulsory" to be effective at the primary education level in Oromiya, state parties needs adopt further enactment at the national level. In addition to the lack of legislation on the right to education, Oromiya through its implementation power also lacks a legally binding instrument to ensure free and compulsory primary education. Due to the existing legislative gap, the woredas and school administrations face the challenge of making parents/guardians duty bound to send their children to school. Based on the case study conducted in the selected woredas, the major gaps that stand on the way of making primary accessible and equitable in Oromiya include the lack of: compulsory beginning age of primary education, compulsory nature of sending children on regular basis, compulsory nature of the right to access to primary education for children with special needs, orphans, children with disabilities and street children, compulsory nature of the right of all girls to access primary education, compulsory nature of migrant children and domestic servants to have access to primary education and compulsory ending at age of primary education. Compulsory education is meant to protect the best interest of the child, one of which is access to primary education. Thus, absence of legislation that protect the best interest of the child in ensuring accessing primary education is standing on the way of achieving the ESDP V of UBE for Oromiya. The issues are even more pertinent in relation to equity as there is still difference in accessibility of primary education for boys and girls in Oromiya. Currently, the GER and NER of girls have increased even better than the boys. However, considering the total population of the school-aged girls in Oromiya, many of them do not have access to primary education. In addition, vulnerable children and children with special needs also have challenges in accessing primary education mainly due to the lack of awareness and recognition of their right to education. Thus, despite the recognition of the international and regional human rights standards as the laws of the land, the lack of national education law and legislation addressing the gap in relation to access and equity is presented as a challenge for the full implementation of compulsory primary education in Oromiya.

#### *Policy Gap*

The driving reason behind adoption of ETP in 1994 was mainly the need to address the demand for educational opportunities; ensure equitable access, equality and relevant education and to produce citizens that can compete worldwide. Since adoption of the ETP, Oromiya has undergone through several changes including the increase in population, economy and re-construction of the regional. However, since the ETP has not been revised yet, the standards set can no longer address the current challenges faced by the regional.

More specifically, the policy gaps are observed in light to the reliable data without which one could not use important indicators of access and equity at the primary education level in Oromiya. Furthermore, rural-urban migration and urban re-development programs are not also other issues that have a negative effect in ensuring access to primary education but are not addressed by the policy nor did it leave room for emerging challenges. These are problem caused by lack of an educational policy that addresses emerging challenges of ensuring challenges.

#### *Absence of Reliable Data*

In the implementation of the international and regional frameworks on primary education, having adequate data on the current situation and challenges comes at the forefront. The major problem raising policy concerns in Oromiya related to the availability of accurate data on the accessibility of primary education to all. During the in-depth interview it was indicated that though the enrollment increase, there is constant variation witnessed on the statistics report caused by the difference between school entry age provided under the policy and actual age children start primary education in Oromiya which eventually leads to the miss guided information, which is the result of the inadequate polices. The other issue in relation to reliable data is the population projection used in determining access to primary education. As indicated in the in-depth interview and also observed from the data, there is a significant difference between the national educational statistics annual abstract and regional government of Oromiya education bureau educational statistics annual abstract creating a miss understanding in relation to the exact status of accessibility of primary education in Oromiya. On the other hand, the annual statistics report of OEB the GER is more than 100% in some woredas caused by the rural-urban migrating children that are not within the population count of the regional. Further, minimal data on birth registration of all children in the regional is also presented as a challenge in ensuring how many children are entering primary schools as the right school age. Thus, access to primary education for migrating children is not only inadequate but also lacks the necessary information to get remedied. The lack of well disaggregated data on several issues faced by children and their current conditions makes it difficult to identify problems, disparities and design appropriate policy for the implementation of international human rights instruments as well as national policies and laws.

#### *Implication of Regional development Program*

The rapid expansion of the regional is also raised as a major area of policy concern. The informants in the selected Zones indicated that the implementation of the policy has some negative effect on accessibility of primary education in many terms. Most of the resettled residents means of income was farming and petty trading which are not quickly enable them to thrive and continue in the new location. The situation not only made life difficult for these residents but also made them unable to send their children to school. Due to this reason, many of the children are being forced to assist their families by working in different places and lack the time to come to school. The absent of support strategies like school feeding program in the new location, children travel long distance to continue their education at their previous school. However, it was indicated that many of them are now dropping school due to the shortage of means of transport showing the absence of geographical accessibility. The issue is even more serious for children with special needs as they cannot travel long distance to come to school. Furthermore, the reduction of number of students primary government schools are at the risk of being closed which ultimately affect the children who still come to the school. In general the best interest of the children does not seem to be one of the guiding principles behind the resettlement policy framework nor did the education policy gave room to these emerging challenges of ensuring the realization of the right to primary education.

#### *Financial Challenges*

Improving access as well as equity in primary education in Oromiya requires sustained increase in budgetary resources at all grade levels. The Budget priority areas of OEB focuses on achieving ETP and its implementation strategies like ESDP IV, GEQIP, and education sector ESDP Vs areas like EFA and UPE goals and targets. The educational statistics annual abstract shows that Oromiya's student teacher ratio and class room student ratio has improved by hiring and upgrading. It was indicated by the respondents that in effort to increase access, currently the budgetary resources of OEB are mainly focused on the supply of schools and school construction. However, challenges like low teachers salary, creating safe environment for children with special needs and infrastructural challenges are still presented as impediments for achieving the educational goals. In addition, the rapid expansion of the regional and high rural-urban migration has also limited the effectiveness of the financial resources in making primary education accessible to all. Thus, budget allocation in line with the current challenges and issues faced by the children and the families that send their children to school is very essential.

#### *Non-School Related Challenges*

There are a number of non-school factors that affect access and equity to universal basic education. Among these, socio-cultural and socio-economic challenges are the leading ones. In the subsequent sections, problems that affect access and equity to universal basic education in Oromiya region had been discussed.

#### **Socio-cultural Challenges**

As shown in item 1 of table 3, early marriage of students is the first most serious challenge of access and equity. The students quitting school and getting married to elder people is one among major problems for the number of dropouts to increase. The interview with the government officials and the Parent Teacher Association indicated that the number of students who drop out for the reason of early marriage has decreased but most administrators (mean  $\pm$  SD = 4.87 $\pm$ 1.33) and teachers (mean  $\pm$  SD = 4.84 $\pm$ 1.53) said that this is still a major problem. The case of considerable number of students from one school who coupled themselves and didn't return to school

from semester break this year also indicates that the problem is still prevalent. The reason is that the children don't want to go with their parents and follow cattle during the time of drought and mobility. Bad tradition like abduction, rape and early marriage were among the factors that highly caused dropout of children in Oromia Region (Berhanu, 2006). Thus, it is one of the major long standing barriers that inhibited enrolment at primary level in underserved areas of oromiya. Lack of interest towards formal education is the third least important challenge for access and equity. In spite of the government officials' say in the interviews that more than a dozen of the community have enough awareness for modern education, most students (mean ± SD = 4.67±1.05) and teachers (mean ± SD = 4.41±1.62) have said that lack of interest for formal education is still a problem. Third, educated role models are not at proximity to the students. Higher proportion of the students in the discussion revealed that they want to be teachers when they were asked what they want to be after they complete their education. The educated people they can see around are only teachers. As table 3 indicated also, the majority of the woreda administrators and school leaders (mean ± SD = 4.79 ±1.45, and mean ± SD = 4.57 ±1.12, respectively) said that lack of educated role model is a challenge in the area. Parents (mean ± SD = 4.00 ±0.00) and Teachers (mean ± SD = 4.77 ±1.86) also said that they didn't see the benefit of education since many students didn't continue further education or apply it for the betterment of their life. Belittling girl's education is the fourth most important challenge to access and equity. As the majority of students (mean±SD = 4.67±1.05), the administrators (mean ± SD = 3.01 ±1.38) and teachers (mean ± SD = 3.09 ±1.63) agreed that belittling girls' education is a hindrance to primary education expansion. Few years back before community awareness is done, the culture of underserved parts of the selected zones of oromiya kept the girls at home because the society didn't believe that educating the girls is of no importance. Belittling girls' education is also manifested in that assistance to girls is very much lacking and is also one of the major factors that contributing significant effect to the dropout as indicated by most of school leaders and of parents (mean±SD = 4.74±1.1, mean±SD = 4.13±0.35).

**Table 2.** Factors outside the school related to socio-cultural constraints that hinder the primary education expansion in some selected Woredas of oromiya region

No.	ITEM	Students		Teachers		School Leaders		Parents		Administration		Overall	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Develop disobedience	4.67	1.05	3.41	1.62	4.39	1.12	3.13	.64	3.04	1.41	3.73	1.17
2	Circumcision	4.80	1.26	4.97	1.53	4.26	1.29	3.50	.76	4.88	1.47	4.48	1.26
3	Fear of marriage to other Ethiopians	4.80	1.26	3.25	1.55	4.04	1.26	3.00	.00	4.88	1.45	3.99	1.10
4	Suspicion towards modern education	4.93	.96	3.09	1.71	4.52	1.24	4.13	.35	4.00	1.41	4.13	1.13
5	Fear of change of religion	4.80	1.08	4.56	1.70	4.04	1.30	3.13	.35	4.62	1.49	4.23	1.18
6	Fear of change of mode of life	4.67	1.05	3.41	1.62	4.39	1.12	3.13	.64	4.04	1.41	3.93	1.17
7	Early Marriage	4.60	1.06	4.84	1.53	4.57	1.04	4.38	.74	4.87	1.33	4.65	1.14
8	Loss of time for training	4.67	1.05	3.41	1.62	4.39	1.12	3.13	.64	3.04	1.41	3.73	1.17
9	Lack of Educated role model	4.53	1.06	4.77	1.86	4.57	1.12	4.00	.00	4.79	1.45	4.53	1.10
10	Belittling girls' education	4.67	1.29	3.09	1.63	4.74	1.10	4.13	.35	3.01	1.38	3.93	1.15
11	Lack of interest towards formal education	4.67	1.05	4.41	1.62	4.39	1.12	3.13	.64	4.04	1.41	4.13	1.17
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.71</b>	<b>1.11</b>	<b>3.93</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>4.39</b>	<b>1.17</b>	<b>3.53</b>	<b>0.46</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>1.42</b>	<b>4.13</b>	<b>1.16</b>

*Socio-economic Challenges*

Several factors were identified as socio-economic challenges that hindered access and equity in Oromiya region. Among them, demand for-child labor, poverty and health conditions had been cited as the three most important factors that hindered primary education expansion in remote areas of Oromiya (Mean = 4.66, 4.44 and 4.37, respectively). Conversely, variation among the perceptions of the

respondents were high (overall SD=1.16) However, the perceptions of school leaders and woreda administrators towards severity of poverty were higher. This finding agrees with Abdi (2010) in Auma *et al* (2013) who states that financial difficulties due to low economic level of farmers are a hindrance to access to education. This makes it difficult for families to afford basic needs such as food, clothing including school uniforms and other educational costs.

**Table 3.** Factors outside the school related to socio-economic constraints that hinder the primary education expansion in some selected primary schools of oromiya region

No	ITEM	Students		Teachers		School Leaders		Parents		Woreda Edu. Adminis		Overall	
		Mea	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1	Poverty	4.73	1.10	4.28	1.94	4.91	1.16	3.50	0.76	4.78	1.61	4.44	1.31
2	Demand of child-labor	4.67	1.11	4.81	1.67	4.78	1.13	4.13	0.64	4.91	1.39	4.66	1.19
3	Pupils' health problem	4.67	1.23	4.66	1.84	4.61	1.12	3.13	0.35	4.79	1.49	4.37	1.21
4	Tribal Conflicts	4.67	1.05	4.41	1.62	4.39	1.12	4.13	0.64	3.04	1.41	4.13	1.17
5	Farmers' way of life	4.87	0.74	3.06	1.68	4.32	1.27	3.38	0.74	3.00	1.42	3.73	1.17
6	Lack of access to market	4.87	0.83	3.00	1.50	4.74	1.14	3.25	0.46	3.03	1.27	3.78	1.04
7	Education Level	4.87	0.92	3.47	1.57	4.83	1.15	4.88	0.33	3.21	1.29	4.25	1.05
	<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.76</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>3.96</b>	<b>1.69</b>	<b>4.65</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>3.77</b>	<b>0.56</b>	<b>3.82</b>	<b>1.41</b>	<b>4.19</b>	<b>1.16</b>

As indicated in table 3, parents' level of education is one of the major challenges faced in the expansion of primary education. Secondly, rural way of life is another challenge. The mean proportion of parents, administrators and teachers who rated the farmers' way of life as a factor that hinder primary education expansion as the lowest challenges were 3.38, 3.00 and 3.06, respectively. The rural farmer parents believed that education undermines their children's sense of identity and their positive understanding of the rural way of life (Ziyn, 2004). Thirdly, low access to market was indicated by the majority of respondents, (mean = 3.03) of administrators and teachers (mean = 3.00). This relates to economic problem and is supported by the responses of the open ended questionnaire. The students also asserted that because their parents are not educated they compare the importance of education with money and hence don't want to send them to school for use of their labor. The problems are interwoven and there are many such similar cases where one problem is a reason for another problem to occur. The recent access and equity indicators of primary education in Oromiya show that despite the increase in the number of primary schools access has not yet reached the compulsory rise. Confirming the literature review, the study has identified that the major social factors affecting access and equity at the primary education level includes: poverty and financial barriers; child labor and trafficking and parental attitude towards the right of vulnerable children and children with special needs to access primary education.

#### *Poverty and Financial Barriers*

The discussion held with the children indicates the strong relationship between household economic status and accessibility of primary education. As gathered from the case study, household poverty is a major factor affecting the enrolment of children in schools in Oromiya. In addition, the indirect opportunity costs of schooling including working petty trading to support the family and house chores are also another indicator of the link between economic status and access to primary education. This is manifested through the inability of the households and families to provide children with clothing, educational materials, food and other needs of children. To overcome the challenges of poverty, the families demand for their children labor to contribute to household works and earn income causing the children to be absent, repeat and drop-out as they lack sufficient time to study. One participant said that his father transferred me from regular class to night class to help him sell charcoal and with the house chores but now he is back to regular class after my teachers talked to his father. As indicated on the focus group discussion with the children, many parents prefer to send their children to a more productive place like petty trading to earn more money and overcome the challenges of food insecurity or help with the house chores and siblings that send the children to school. Thus, education is considered as not immediate solution to the challenges of poverty rather additional cost. As a result, OEB needs to give profound attention to the social as well as economic barriers and minimize the indirect cost of education as the lack of it is causing not only challenge in accessing primary education but to the overall development of the regional.

#### *Child Labor and Trafficking*

During the interview with teachers and school administrators, it was indicated that households' need for child labor is a major driver of late arrival at school, absenteeism and dropout from school at all levels, and drop out amongst girls is highest. On the other hand, rural-urban migration is also other factor as the victims of child trafficking are usually subjected to child labor with no way of access to primary education. As the children are trafficked illegally to the regional to work in households, house, keeping, café and hotels, the

children are forced to work long hours making access to primary education unavailable. Though the labor law does not allow employment under the age of 14, there is no obligation on the employers to send the working children to school or give time off to attend school. MoLSA has been formulating a National Plan of Action on the Elimination of Worst Form of Child Labor (2010-2014). However, the lack of reliable data on the whereabouts of the children is a major challenge of the initiatives being taken.

#### *Parental Attitude*

There are numerous factors which exclude, or undermine children with disabilities and children with special needs from access to, and performance at school. Scared of being badmouthed by the community, most part of the communities does not want to acknowledge the fact that they have a child that requires special care or a child with disability. In particular, most of the parents of children with special needs do not believe in the ability or right of the children to access primary education due to their condition. Such parental attitude is observed in the door to door counting conducted by OEB as many parents denied of having a child with special needs.

Moreover, as their level of participation in the joint discussion of teachers and parent as well as their willingness to provide education materials indicates low parent attitude towards the right to primary education. From the focus group discussion, it was gathered that some parents are not willing to buy school materials specially books as it's not considered to be a waste of money nor do they follow up on the learning teaching environment their children spend time at woreda levels. In addition, it was also indicated that teachers and school administrators are not welcomed by parents or guardians when they try to follow up students who are frequently absent from school. On the other hand, the interviews with school administrations indicate that, other parents also advice their children not to associate with children with special needs believing that the children condition will be transferred. Thus, evidence based advocacy and communication for social change by expanding support to those parts of the regional accountable for explaining the rights of children and the accountabilities of duty bearers using all communication tools including religious leaders and traditional associations is very essential. In addition expanding research initiatives to deepen knowledge and understanding of the factors that affect parental attitude towards children right to primary education can also serve as a another tool to bring the desired change.

#### *Institutional Barriers*

The availability of educational institutions and facilities in sufficient number is an obligation of the regional government of Oromiya. From the case study and in-depth interview, the institutional barriers identified include: capacity gaps, inadequate guidance and counseling support; child unfriendly school facilities and language barriers.

#### *Capacity gaps*

Though the responsibility of each level of the educational system of Oromiya is delineated, the system still face institutional limitations and capacity gaps mainly in terms of high turnover of qualified and experienced staff . In addition, the case study indicates that zonal and Woreda governments have weak capacity to gather and report on the performance of access and equity on time. Accordingly, they have difficulty in managing and reporting the implementation of the international human rights instruments and national policies and laws. Setting strategic plans, monitoring and evaluation in relation to ensuring access and equity of primary education for vulnerable children is also indicated as a challenge.

#### *Inadequate Guidance and Counseling Support*

Minimal awareness about children protection strategies is presented as a challenge that has negative effect on the accessibility of primary education for these children. Recently, the school feeding program in different government primary schools in Oromiya has made education accessible to many street children. However, due to the living conditions of the street life the children led, they are exposed to different drugs and other behaviors that ultimately affect their education. During the focus group discussion with the children, it was indicated that after they began attending school, they struggle with the addition of cigarettes and other drugs forcing them to be absence from class and even drop out of school.

On the other hand, despite the school feeding program, since the children are still living on the street, they have low self-esteem and do not want to play or associate with other children. Thus, unless there is permanent counseling and rehabilitation program to help the children overcome the addictions and build their self-esteem, the school feeding program alone will not be able to help the children continue with their education.

#### *Child Unfriendly School Facilities*

From the case study undertaken in the selected woredas one of the challenges faced by children with special needs within the school compound includes: the school building constructed without consideration of the needs of the children; shortage of school equipment in line with their needs and shortage of teachers trained in the area of giving due care for children with special needs. It was indicated that children with disability face more challenges accessing the school building, toilets and school compounds as the constructions are not exactly in line with the conditions of these children. One participant indicated that a disabled student has dropped out of school due to health issues as she caught a disease while using the toilet. The toilet in our school is really dirty and since she cannot walk, she sits on it and that's when she got really sick. The current challenges observed shows the existence of a gap in the implementation of the commitment entered under the CRC, for mentally and physically disabled children to fully enjoyment of decent life through ensuring dignity, promoting self-reliance and facilitating the children's active participation in the community. Thus, in order to ensure the

implementation of the international instrument and ensure the sustainability of the post 2015 agenda of being sensitive to inequality by making access to primary education, the OEB needs to address the obstacles that stand discourages the children from fully participating in school.

### Conclusion

In the pursuit for the realization of right to education in Oromiya has been showing noteworthy changes in terms of achieving accessibility and equity. Despite the progress and achievements however, evidences show that the general literacy rate remains very low as it did not reached the target set to by the ESDP V to achieve UPE by 2015. The general theoretical literature on this subject and specifically in the context of Oromiya is inconclusive as there are emerging challenges that are not exactly addressed which manifested in the decrease in both GER and NER, high drop-out rates, low completion and high repetition rate at the primary education in Oromiya. The study mainly sought to answer the extent of the implementation of the international human rights standards, national policies and laws on the right to primary education in Oromiya and the challenges encountered in the implementation of the programs and strategies.

Concerning equity issues in access to primary education, the case study and in-depth interview shows that, the main determinants of exclusion from school are poverty and financial barriers, child labor and trafficking and parental altitude. The direct link between the socio-economic barriers and accessibility of primary education in Oromiya points to the need for economic incentive to keep the children in school. The findings also indicate the need for the OEB to have reliable data on the emerging challenges faced by the children and greater need for engagement of parents on the value of primary education supported by the involvement of the wider community in awareness raising on child labor. In ensuring access and equity for street children, findings of the study indicate that the challenges faced by children go beyond access requiring both economic as well as psychological support. In the short term, the children need food, clothing and shelter while the education response is one that equips them for the life ahead of them. The ability to care for themselves, overcome the traumas that have caused their vulnerabilities, and earn an income, are essential. Some may require short-term interventions that would enable them to catch up and resume education while others will need an alternative type of education that could be provided by schools or ABECs that specifically offer integrated approaches. To give effect to having inclusive primary education for children with disabilities in Oromiya, initiatives are also required at both regional and Woreda level that have overall responsibility, at school level to make arrangements and prepare the school, teachers and students, and at community and household level in terms of awareness of children with disability right to an education.

The analysis reveals the need for primary education programs and policies in Oromiya to better respond to the needs of children, particularly vulnerable children and children with special needs. Absence of legislation to ensure enforcement of free and compulsory primary education has affected large portion of children in the areas explored by the study. The educational and social needs of vulnerable children, especially street children and migrant children, in Oromiya are not being met by the policies and programs in place which also show inconsistency between with the regional government's plan on education for all, as well as its international commitments on children rights, beyond the scope of the study nevertheless require the undivided attention of the regional government. In addition, based on the findings of the study, there is also the need to adopt a mechanism to address the emerging challenges mainly the impact of the re-development of the regional and rural-urban migration are not taken in to consideration nevertheless affecting the access to primary education of many children in Oromiya. Free primary schooling, school feeding programs, ABE and special needs programs has allowed children from poor households to get access to equitable primary education. However, budget of the sector is far behind the existing challenges demonstrating that financing the educational sector is a major challenge. The rapid influx pupils with special circumstances and the general increase in the population has also created constraints leading to the deterioration of the quality and efficiency of primary education. Thus, the findings of the study indicate that if full access and equity are to achieved, reaching hard-to-reach groups and addressing the socio-economic challenges, OEB need to adopt both policy and legislative frameworks in line with challenges presented.

### Recommendations

Due to the absence of education law, Oromiya lacks a legally binding force to ensure the implementation, compulsory primary education. Due to the existing legislative gap, the woredas and school administrations face the challenge of making parents/guardians duty bound to send their children to school. The need for subsequent legislations to give effect to the international and region human rights instruments recognizing the right to primary education. While principles of non-discrimination and equality are central principles of the FDRE constitution and other national laws of Ethiopia, some of the specific legislations required to full realizing the right to access and equity to primary education in Oromiya are still missing. Specific legislation providing for the right of access to public educational institutions and programs on a non-discrimination basis for students, disabilities to attend school, culture and religious practices of various groups and communities in the society, cultures that would interfere with school attendance, gender-based violence, child labor, corporal punishment and child trafficking. Thus, since these issues are not well addressed under the existing education policy nor did there exist a room to address them there is a need for education policy dealing with these challenges. Adopting specific guidelines to address the needs of vulnerable children is also a key for UBE. Thus, there is a need to being sensitive to non-educational needs that impact schooling, skills to talk to troubled or marginalized children and investing in infrastructure, facilities, teachers and

supplies. Increasing the number of well trained teachers to reach children with special needs is another area to be considered. Raising Awareness and Capacity at the lowest level possible to Address Drop-outs rates and out-of-school Issues is also worth noting. Enhancing community participation to build on the existing initiatives and establish alliance of community leaders, teachers, school management and representatives of civil society organizations is vital.

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