

EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT IN POST- INDEPENDENT ERITREA – AN EXPLANATORY NOTE¹

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ABSTRACT

Education is a lifelong process. Twentieth century has witnessed the miracles of Human Resource Development (HRD) activities reflected through increase in GNP and overall productive activities. The Government of Eritrea offering both formal and informal training programmes at different levels in order to develop the human resources. This prosperity in education is obviously a great thing for Eritrea, and the dream to make Eritrea a technological-oriented and advanced nation would become real, because the cumulative effort done so far in the human development is noteworthy. As Human Resource Development Programmes concentrate much on the category of major raw human resource to be processed into the work force and its role in reconstructing the economy. An attempt is made in this paper to analyse the educational and human resource development after independence. This paper also provides detailed account of technical and vocation education with special reference to skill development programme.

Keywords: Education, Human Resource, Development, Eritrea, Technical education.

INTRODUCTION:

Education plays a dominant role as an effective instrument for large-scale achievement and revolution in all spheres. Purposeful education enables the individual to understand and study the real life situation and to develop an opportunity for creating confidence in the minds of younger generation, and provide a strong base for rational and value-oriented and nation-building progress (Myers & Harbison, 1965; Mingat and Tan, 1986). Technical and vocational courses in higher education play a significant role in this context. Therefore, a close introspection of the trend of tech

characterize the people of Eritrea. The Government is investing heavily on human resources development in the conviction that among its best resources are its people. Obviously, the courses in technical and vocational education are considered as utility-oriented subjects; however they involve heavy cost to the national exchequer of Eritrea (Government of Eritrea, 1996).

The World Bank (2000) acknowledged the importance of technical and higher education for countries not to be left behind in a global economy based on knowledge. Criticizing an analysis that measures the benefits of higher education solely in terms of incremental earnings accruing to individuals, higher education is regarded as 'simultaneously improves individual's lives and enriches wider society' (World Bank, 2000: 37). Further, education is a lifelong process. What a student obtains from the school and college is only a small part of the education that needs for the economic and social life of human being. Thus, both in the case of man who is determined to reach the summit, and the man who wants to make a complete success of his life, additional education is imperative to develop the special skills. Therefore, the education must be constant and continuous programme (Myers & Harbison, 1965; Bacchus, 1992, Rena, 2005^c).

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The Ethiopian-Eritrea war in 1998-2000 severely hurt Eritrea's economy. GDP growth fell to zero in 1999 and to -12.1 per cent in 2000. The May 2000 Ethiopian offensive into northern Eritrea caused some \$600 million in property damage and loss, including losses of \$225 million in livestock and 55,000 homes. The attack prevented planting of crops in Eritrea's most productive region, causing food production to drop by 62 per cent. The erratic rainfall keeps the cereal production well below normal, holding down gro

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Government of Eritrea (GoE) has a strong, clear conviction that the key to rapid and sustainable long-term economic development rests with the development of human resources. The government emphasized the pivotal role of human resources in the development of Eritrean economy in the Macro-Policy Document (GoE-1994). The document details of the objectives and relevant policies of the major HRD issues: education and training, health, social welfare, rehabilitation of war victims and other vulnerable and disadvantaged members of the society, gender, youth, and population.

It is been realized that the country's most valuable asset is its people and the social solidarity present in Eritrean society, a society characterized by a high sense of community as well as a strong commitment to development (World Bank, 1994). Furthermore, it is intended to produce a society that is equipped with the necessary skills to function with a culture of self-reliance in the modern economy. The education system is also designed to promote private sector schooling, equal access for all groups (i.e. prevent gender discrimination, prevent ethnic discrimination, prevent class discrimination, etc.) and promote continuing education through formal and informal systems. Barriers to education in Eritrea include: traditional taboos, school fees (for registration and materials), the opportunity costs of low-income households, most institutions are still in the process of renovation and expansion; and lack of professionals to run the existing institutions properly is a serious drawback in the country (Rena, 2005^c). Therefore, the main plan in developing its qualitative human resources in the country, at present, the majority of secondary education takes place in the academic line, so a first step is to have more technical and vocational secondary education. As far as higher education is concerned, after secondary school, students are supposed to go to junior colleges and only a very small number of students would go to the University for their Degree (Muller, 2004).

Within the centralized HRD planning in Eritrea, this has certain implications for the workings of the university: after having passed the matriculation exam, subjects of study are allocated, and students' priorities are given only cursory concern in this process. According to these predictions, it is then decided how many students should be admitted to which department. For postgraduate studies the university draws up staff development plans and facilitates to send students abroad for education at Master's or Ph.D. level. In that way it hopes to assure that the country's human resources are used in the most efficient way. The success of such a strategy depends largely on a shared vision between the goals of the official policy side, embodied by the government and the university administration on one hand, and the people, the individual students, on the other. Without such a shared vision 'brain drain', which plagues many African countries including Eritrea that see their university graduates leave for the industrialized world where salaries are considerably higher, is difficult to avoid (Muller, 2004).

In line with this, the government is embarking to introduce a new education system that is firm and fair as well as flexible and of the highest standard. Thus, the Government has opened and planning to open many colleges in the country such as: a college of nursing and Orroto School of medicine,⁴ agricultural College, a technical school in Massawa, and the Eritrean Institute of Technology at Mai Nefhi etc. In 2005, a Cabinet Ministers meeting, underlined the need to strengthen the colleges of science and technology in the country, but expressed no concern over the future of Asmara University. "We have tried to link the various colleges with the related development sectors. For instance, the

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Sending students for higher education (Bachelors, Masters, and Doctoral Degrees) for upgrading their capabilities and expertise to other countries such as South Africa, India, Europe etc. is found to be high priority in the country. At present, Eritrea depends on expatriate teachers both at high school and higher educational institutions, however, to reduce the number of expatriate teachers at all levels is one of the important objectives of Eritrea. In line with this they are developing their own teachers by sending to other countries.

There is a Distance Learning Program, which was begun in 2002, when the University of Asmara signed a memorandum with the University of South of Africa (UNISA) to jointly set up this program. It is to be noted that as a part of HRD in Eritrea, the Eritrean Human Resource Development Program (EHRD) is awarding the scholarships to some of the eligible and deserved candidates. Currently, there are about 300 students for undergraduate courses and about 50 students for postgraduate courses are on the rolls. However, the programme is not successful due to the financial problems of Eritrea. As a result, less than 50 students have completed their studies in all levels.

It is to be noted that, for the first time in the country, the Ministry of Education has started open distance learning in March 2006 with the cooperation of the University of Asmara. It is reported that the program started for about 600 junior school teachers holding certificates and to upgrade them to diploma level. These teachers have come from all the six zones of the country. This is three years program, which aimed to upgrade the proficiency of teachers and offer quality education. It is to be noted that about Nacfa 40 million is allocated for the first batch. The second batch of the open distance-learning program is expected to start in 2007, will target the remaining 1,400 certificate holding junior school teachers.

Asmara Commercial College

Asmara Commercial College (ACC) under MoE, which offers advanced diploma and certificates programmes, was established in 1996. Although still based at Red Sea Secondary School Campus, this college offers various Diploma Courses including Accounting, Banking and Finance, Business Management, and Secretarial Science & Office Management to both regular and evening students. Since its establishment, 672 students in six batches were graduated (Rena, 2004). It is observed that the students who had completed their diploma from ACC, many of them are continuing their extension (evening) degree programme with the University of Asmara, however, it is very expensive process. Therefore, as part of the human resource development programme, the ACC can be updated to a degree level and/or affiliated with the Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT) or University of Asmara. Thus, MoE and University concerned officials can consider the thought and resolve the problem. Therefore, the officials concerned have to be rolled out the welcome mat for the ACC advanced diploma graduates who are strongly aspiring to continue their higher education.

Eritrea Institute of Technology (EIT)

EIT is considered as Eritrea's biggest boarding educational institute in a post-independence period of Eritrea. It is situated about 28 Kms south-west of the country's capital Asmara. It possesses more than 10,000 students and 350 faculty members (expatriates mainly from India, Eritreans of Diaspora, Graduate Assistants and the students of University service) (Rena, 2005c). It has a number of new and emerging departments; indeed, it is hoped that, EIT makes an institute of its own kind that will boost Eritrea's educational, technical and developmental standards manifolds in the coming years. This will certainly contribute towards nation building to meet the Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) set by the United Nations. It is observed that the institute is offering degree, diploma programs in numerous advanced disciplines that will serve the ne

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EDUCATION AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING (DTEVT)

al Training as one of the components of HRD are strongly
mprovement process in the Eritrea’s economy. In recent past,
change agent with the guidance of latest plans and policies,
as per the requirement of the Macro-economic policy of GoE
, 2006). Its work is said to be tremendous and remarkable by
and Vocational Institutes offering Advanced, Intermediate and
s as Eritrea had only one Technical Institute in 1960’s. At
echnical and Vocational Training Institutes including 8 Skill
chnical and Commercial School started func

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Table- 3: Graduates of TVET at Advanced Institutions of Eritrea by Gender During the Period 1991/92 to 2003/04.

Year	Number of Graduates		
	Male	Female	Total
1991/92	0	0	0
1992/93	0	0	0
1993/94	0	0	0
1994/95	0	0	0
1995/96	0	0	0
1996/97	39	16	55
1997/98	0	0	0
1998/99	98	46	144
1999/00	139	58	197
2000/01	55	20	75
2001/02	87	20	107
2002/03	165	67	232
2003/04	160	32	192
2004/05	0	0	0
Total	743	259	1002

Source: Dept of Technical and Vocational Education – Various Reports.

Note: There are two colleges at Advanced level- they are: Asmara Technical Institute and Asmara Commercial College, both these colleges did not produce any graduates during the academic year 2004/05 due to the government policy and restarted during the academic year 2006-2007.

It is during June- September that Eritrea harvests its fruit of educated manpower, from different educational institutions. During the academic year 2003-2004 as many as 724 students were graduated from various schools and colleges under the DTEVT. In the technical filed, Pavoni Technical Institute produced 22 graduates; Asmara Technical School - 166; Wina Technical School - 86; Maihabar Technical School - 122; and Don Bosco Technical School - 42. Whereas in the filed of agriculture, Hamelmalo Agricultural School and Hagaz Agricultural School produced 54 and 75 graduates respectively⁶ (see table-2 and 3). Further, Asmara Teacher Training Institute produced about 525 trained teachers and Mainefhi Mother Tongue Teachers Training Institute has commemorated the Graduation of its 336 students. Asmara School of Music also graduated 26 students. The Tourism and Hotel Training School, established in 1998 has so far trained 657 personnel in basic tourism and hotel service skills. Uniquely, in Mekerka, Gash Barka about 300 females who attended a three-year course given by the Ministry of Justice, after completed their courses successfully graduated (Rena, 2005b). All these graduates are equipped with profound skills and knowledge in various technical and vocational fields relevant to the immedi2 324539936268e693996 Tm39

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marketable skills. However, no nation can be exempted from the sufferings of illiteracy and unemployment. The degree of suffering may be different but their existence in an economy is unavoidable and uncontrollable (Rena, 2004). Unless a nation knows the ways to manage this ailment in a proper way, it would crop up as a major problem showing up an economy to the external world as a bad example. Having understood these consequences, the DTEVT has been making strenuous efforts in embracing the major portion of Eritrea's human resources like marginalized youth, returnees, ex-combatants, unemployed and unemployable communities (Rena, 2005c; Rena and Kasu, 2006).

Skill development programmes, are like converting raw human resource into the usable labour force transmitting the present ailing state into the very healthy one. Skill development programmes are the notable achievement of MoE, which successfully operates through different skill development centres all over Eritrea. It offers eight courses in the discipline of Productive Technology like building technology, wood technology, electrical technology, surveying, machine shop etc., Agriculture, Catering and home science and commerce with the flexible system of admitting students and length of training as well for about six months or even more. Once the student has successfully completed, S/he will be given opportunity to participate in Internship programme as a partial fulfillment of their training programme. Mai Habar Vocational Training Centre for the Disabled is one amongst the best centres in performing along with other formal technical training programmes.

It is observed that thousands of youth enter the workforce each year in Eritrea without the benefit of a high school education and most have no skills for the job market. However, most of them work under national service for a meager salary of Nakfa 450(\$30) per month. This must come as a sobering reality to those who are euphoric about the nation development. There is yet hope that the skills gap that separates knowledge workers from the school dropouts can be bridged with some innovative strategies and the political commitment to see them through (Rena and Kasu, 2006). Experts who participated in the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation symposium on knowledge societies in Geneva endorsed the potential of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) to take the education agenda forward in developing countries like Eritrea. ICT is more than just the Internet and encompasses the traditional mass media such as radio, television and even the telephone, which can deliver educational video and data. With such tools available, not a day can be lost in chalking out a national strategy for the labour pool (UNESCO, 2002; Yusuf, 2005).

The imparting of skills largely depends on the Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and/technical schools that have a base in the public and private sectors in Eritrea, besides, the State-run programmes, and NGO efforts. These are simply not equal to the task. The ITI

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Further, the challenge before the State, therefore, is to build on the existing infrastructure of ITIs, schools, colleges, institutions in the private sector, and NGOs. Computers and multimedia make it possible to learn in an interactive manner and these have to form the core of the new strategy. The potential of multimedia to train both literate and illiterate youth makes it all the more attractive. One vision of an ICT movement is to have a national network of vocational training centres, adopting the franchise model to extend coverage. Courses in the service sector areas such as tourism and health care could be taught at such centres, besides the existing schools and colleges. In a report on development choices for the 21st century, UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation point out that technical and vocational education is best served by a diversity of public and private providers, with the Government acting as a facilitator (UNESCO, 2002; Rena and Kasu, 2006).

It is believed that the government expenditure on education is expected to provide economic benefits in such as i] providing the basis for poverty reduction, overall human capital development, and accelerated economic growth; and ii] rationalization of public expenditures for the welfare of the people in Eritrea.

i) Poverty reduction and economic growth. Education is a key element of the government's strategy to reduce poverty. Weak system capacity, including inadequate physical infrastructure, insufficient numbers and untrained teachers, and limited management capacity for service delivery, has been one of the key factors responsible for unsatisfactory education sector performance, reflected in low enrollment ratios and poor education quality. Hence, the Government of Eritrea focuses on capacity enhancement for education service delivery at elementary, middle, secondary, and tertiary levels. The construction and rehabilitation of classrooms will enhance the physical capacity of the system to absorb more children into formal education. Strengthened teacher-training programs would enhance the human capacity of service delivery. Curriculum reforms are aimed at improving the relevance and quality of the education system. In the meantime, resources invested in strengthening the institutional capacity at the center and Zoba (province) level to ensure more effective and efficient system management. Thus, strengthening Eritrea's education system capacity is important from the perspective of economic growth.

ii) Rationalization of public expenditures. The Government's total spending on basic and secondary education was US dollar 33.9 million, 34.9 million and 26.8 million in years 1998, 1999, and 2000.⁷ As stated earlier, between 2000 and 2001, MoE recurrent expenditure increased by 8 percent. Social and economic progress requires a broad-based education and training sector reform with the establishment of sustainable sector financing accompanied by an adequate planning and budgeting process (World Bank, 2003). Furthermore, it is envisaged that the education sector development program is also incorporated in the Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan and integrated into the Medium Term Expenditure Framework prepared in 2004.

CONCLUSION

The future questions to be addressed are whether the nation-centred education policies pursued by the Eritrean government

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approach, the bottom line of which regards education as an investment which will eventually lead to increased productivity to benefit individuals and ultimately society. Education is herein seen as a panacea for development, which in increasing human capital will lead to other developmental gains (Muller, 2004).

Hence the development of relevant HRD policies mu

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⁶ All these figures are clubbed in the table hence the table does not represent the respective institutes mentioned in the text.

⁷ See *Eritrea Education and Training Sector*. It is to be noted that spending for basic and secondary education includes spending by the MoE and all other line ministries who are involved in education activities.

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