

On Results of the Reform
in Ethiopia's Language
and Education Policies

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Contents

Dieter Wartenberg Foreword	7
Catherine Griefenow-Mewis Preface	9
Catherine Griefenow-Mewis Are African languages fit for use in education, science and technology?	11
Gizaw Tasissa Trends of modern education in Ethiopia with special emphasis to school curriculum	21
Dhaba Hundie Language reform in primary education in Ethiopia: A brief historical overview .	39
Sutuma Edessa The use of mother tongue in Oromiyan schools - result of the Ethiopian education reform	49
Katrin Seidel, Janine Moritz, Julian Tadesse Results of the Ethiopian reform in language and education policy	59
Katrin Seidel and Janine Moritz Epilogue	127

Foreword

Dieter Wartenberg (Addis Ababa)

With the publication of the book „Education in Ethiopia” in 1999 and 2001 respectively, a broader audience was provided the opportunity to get a first general idea of the Ethiopian educational reforms, their results and problems in the last decade of the 20th century. Since then tremendous changes have taken place in Ethiopia’s education system.

When I learned about a research project undertaken by a group of Berlin students under the guidance of Dr Catherine Griefenow-Mewis and aimed at ascertaining the latest developments in the Ethiopian education system I became instantly interested. What further fascinated and eventually convinced me to provide my support was the students’ plan to publish their results as a continuation of the above mentioned book.

After two expeditions, both supported and partly financed by the Humboldt University of Berlin and the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD), numerous interviews and discussions, and countless hours spent analyzing the collected data and statistics the students could present a plenitude of detailed partial research results at the workshop „On Results of the Reform in Ethiopia’s Language and Education Policy” held at the Addis Ababa University in April 2006. As host of that workshop I was glad not only to be able to welcome the research team but numerous Ethiopian education experts as well. The workshop represented both the opportunity to review and discuss the first research results and to compare these with the findings of Ethiopian scholars. Their contributions were enlightening, facilitating a subsumption into the historical context and giving insight into the extraordinary use of the multitude of Ethiopian languages in the process of education.

The publication here at hand reflects the results of the Ethiopian education reform as well as the exceptional efforts Ethiopia undertakes to comply with the challenges this reform creates. The interested reader may not only ascertain that Ethiopia’s strive for more education dates back to the times of the biblical Queen of Sheba and has lasted for more than 3000 years, but also the fact that at present this strive means educating one of the worlds’ youngest populations. More than 55 per cent of the 77 million Ethiopians are under the age of 18 years in comparison to Germany with 19 per cent after all.

Despite or maybe even because of the enormous expansion of the education system that notwithstanding its doubling or rather tripling student numbers has nevertheless been unnoticed in the worldwide public so far, the current construction of 13 new universities, and the introduction of new languages as media of instruction Ethiopia faces massive problems in the education sector. I only mention here the

growing number of students, the lack of teachers and educational materials, the fluctuation among the teaching staff, the language-related complex of problems, and the traditionally problematic gender issue in the field of education. The current trend proves furthermore to be a breathtaking race between the expanding education sector and a rapidly increasing population presently growing by roughly 1 to 2 million a year. Through this publication the reader shall gain an insight into a unique if problematic development.

Addis Ababa, November 2006

Dieter Wartenberg