

Educational Policy and Practice for Universalizing Primary Education in Ethiopia: Dilemmas and Consequences

Dawit Mekonnen (PhD)

Center for the Study of International
Cooperation in Education

Hiroshima University

Oct. 13, 2011

Why Universal Primary Education?

- **Human/Individual rights:** United Nations Human Rights Declaration (1948) “Everyone has the right to education. Education *shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages.* “
- **Social justice** (gender, minorities, rural areas): females, children of minority groups and rural areas
- **Economic Development:** Poverty reduction and turnover from primary education

Cont'd

- **Non-economic benefits** such as nutrition, health, birth, culture change, and social engagement
- **Basic education is not only a requisite for human capital but also social capital and economic capital (Sen's capability theory).**
- **Foundation for Lifelong learning (LLL):** Learning is lifelong, life-wide, non-formal, formal and informal
- **Preparation for training in vocational and technical subjects**

Global Initiatives

- Jomtien, Thailand 1990, World Declaration on Education for All (EFA), before the end of the decade. 155 countries.
 - Target year for universalization was 2000.
- **ARTICLE III - UNIVERSALIZING ACCESS AND PROMOTING EQUITY**
- **1. Basic education should be provided to all children, youth and adults.** To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities.

Cont'd

- **ARTICLE III**

.....The focus of basic education must, therefore, be on actual learning acquisition and outcome, rather than exclusively upon enrolment, continued participation in organized programs and completion of certification requirements.

- Concern both for quality and enrollment

Cont'd

- **Dakar (Senegal) Framework for Action, 2000**

Goal 2: That by **2015** all children, **particularly girls**, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of **good quality**.

Goal **6**: Improving all aspects of the quality of education, and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills

Cont'd

- United Nations General Assembly Millennium Development Goals: Specific to Education to be achieved by 2015.
- **Achieve Universal Primary Education**
 - Ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling
- **Promote gender equality and empower women**
 - Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels by 2015

Ethiopia: Background Information

- Population about 75 million in 2007 census, projected to be above 80 million people. Second most populous country in Africa.
- Multi-ethnic (above 70), with their own language.
- Muslims (40 %) and Christians (60%).
- Origin of coffee and humanity (Lucy, 1974; Selam, 2007).
- Land-locked country with the secession of Eritrea in 1992.
- Amharic: a working language at federal level, a local language in Ethiopia.

Cont'd

- One of the few countries that has never been colonized in Africa.
- People living below poverty line are about 37 %, one of the poorest countries.
- One of the fastest growing economies in Africa (10 % for the last five years).
- Has its own alphabet, calendar (today is Oct. 3, 2004) , and timing system.
- 13 months of one year.
- Current government took power in 1991.
- Federal country with 9 regions and 2 administrative cities
- Federalism based on linguistic boundary/ethnic groups

Education System in Ethiopia

- New educational structure and policy introduced in 1991.
- Primary education free. Stated as compulsory very recently in 2008.
- Universalizing primary enrollment, with quality and equity, is the basic objective of the education policy.
- About 20-23 % of the total budget is assigned for education.
- 8-2-2 –structure of the education system
 - 8 years of primary education
 - Grades 1-4, 1st cycle and Grades 5-8, 2nd cycle)
 - 2 years of general secondary education
 - 2 years of preparatory education for higher education

Cont'd

- **Technical and Vocational Education**
 - 4+non-formal education=Level I
 - 8+1, formal certificate=Level II
 - 10+3, formal certificate=Level III
- 10+3, Teacher training for primary schools
 - 10 +1 for grades 1-4 before some years.
- 12+3 or 12+5 for engineering and law, Higher Education
- 12+3+1, Secondary school teacher education

Measures Taken by Ethiopia

1. Curriculum and Instructional Measures

- **Mother-tongue Instruction**: 22 languages of the 70, increased enrollment but which languages to include and leave remains very controversial.
 - Nations asking for inclusion of their MTLs as MI
- **New textbooks**: Relevance of curricula to local contexts
- **Self-contained classroom instruction**: Single teacher handling students from grades 1-4
- **Continuous assessment**: Misused and abused
- **Multi-grade system in remote areas**: Students of grades 1-4 in the same class by the same teacher

School directive changes

- **Automatic promotion:** Students from grades 1-3 are promoted automatically.
- Difficulty in implementation of large class size: 60-70 students in a class
- Debate on the impact of this policy on teachers and students' attitude toward learning.
- **Free primary education from grades 1-10** (except evening classes)

Decentralization of the education system

- Primary education is the responsibility of **regional states**. Secondary and higher education is the responsibility of regions and federal government
- Districts empowered to decide on the school financing
- Schools empowered to administer their own finances with the establishment of the school board: parents, teachers, political representatives from kebele, and principals of schools
- Helped to empower localities but accountability on quality of education too much compromised.

Teacher preparation

- 10+1, for first cycle primary schools
- 10+3, for second cycle primary school grades (expected to teach three or four subjects)
- Training in more than 22 languages.
- Much of the training conducted in the form of distance education and summer (in-service) training
- *Training mainly to satisfy policy requirement of 10+3 for second cycle as most of the teachers were 10+1*
- With increment in teacher qualification, students' learning has not improved rather declined.

Alternative Basic Education

- Non-formal education for out of school children and children in nomadic areas , aged 7-14
- 3 years of non-formal education equivalent to 4 years formal education
- Teachers are grade 10 complete with little or no training on teaching
- Supported by Non-governmental organizations
About 1 million students enrolled in 2010.
- Major challenge is that poor transition to formal schools due to dropout and difficulty to manage the lesson in grade 5.

Cont'd

- 10 % of primary school students are expected to be enrolled in these program
- Three times a week lesson
- Attendance very fluctuating
- Teachers encouraged to enroll students so long as they come to school any time

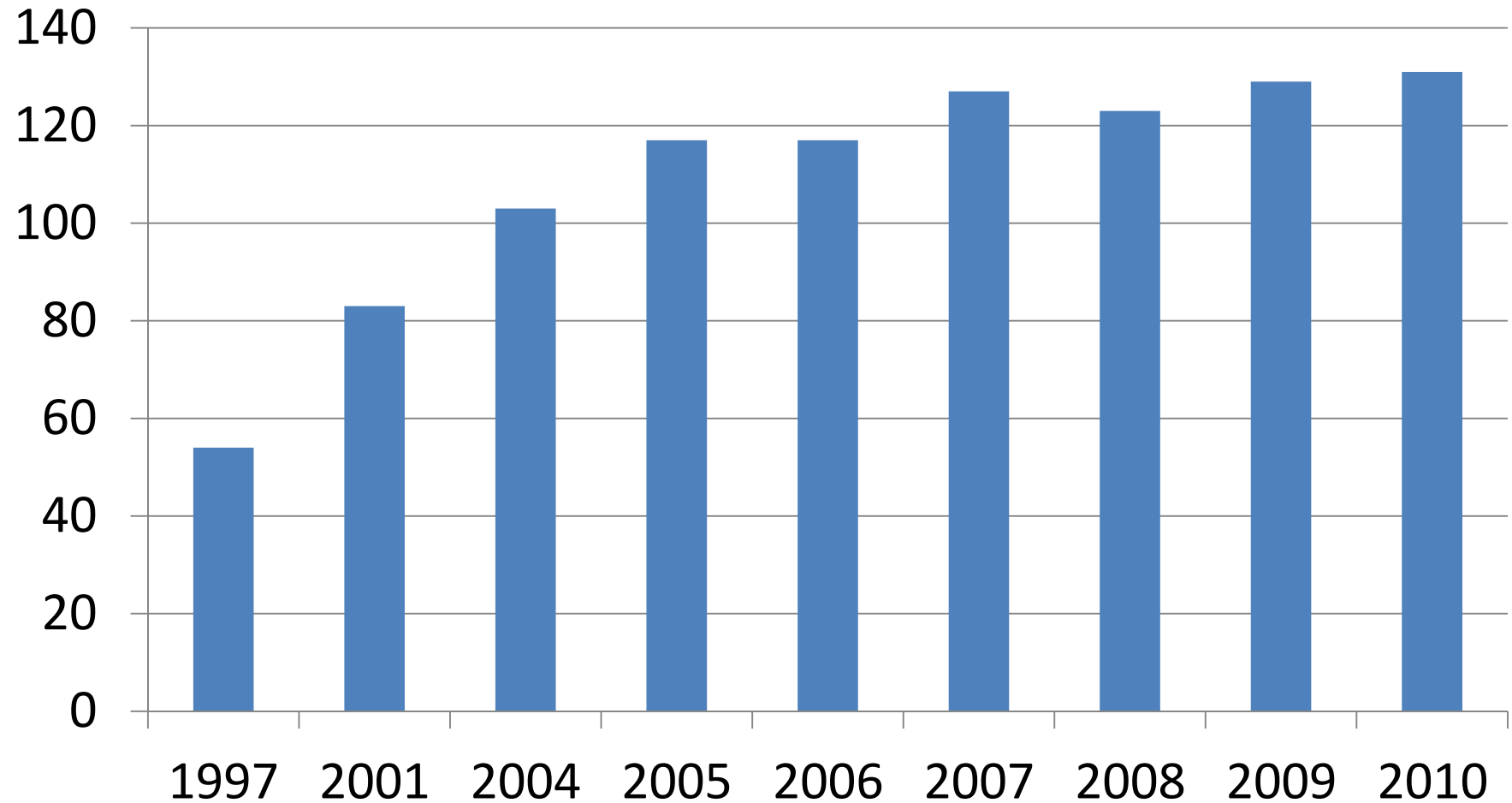
Other miscellaneous measures

- School feeding programs
- Registration date relaxed (open for two months)
- Mobile schools for nomadic areas
- Quota for schools
- Teachers' campaign in enrolling and recruiting school age children
- School improvement (quality)
- Continuous professional development (quality)
- School clustering
- Best teachers award and sharing experiences

Changes

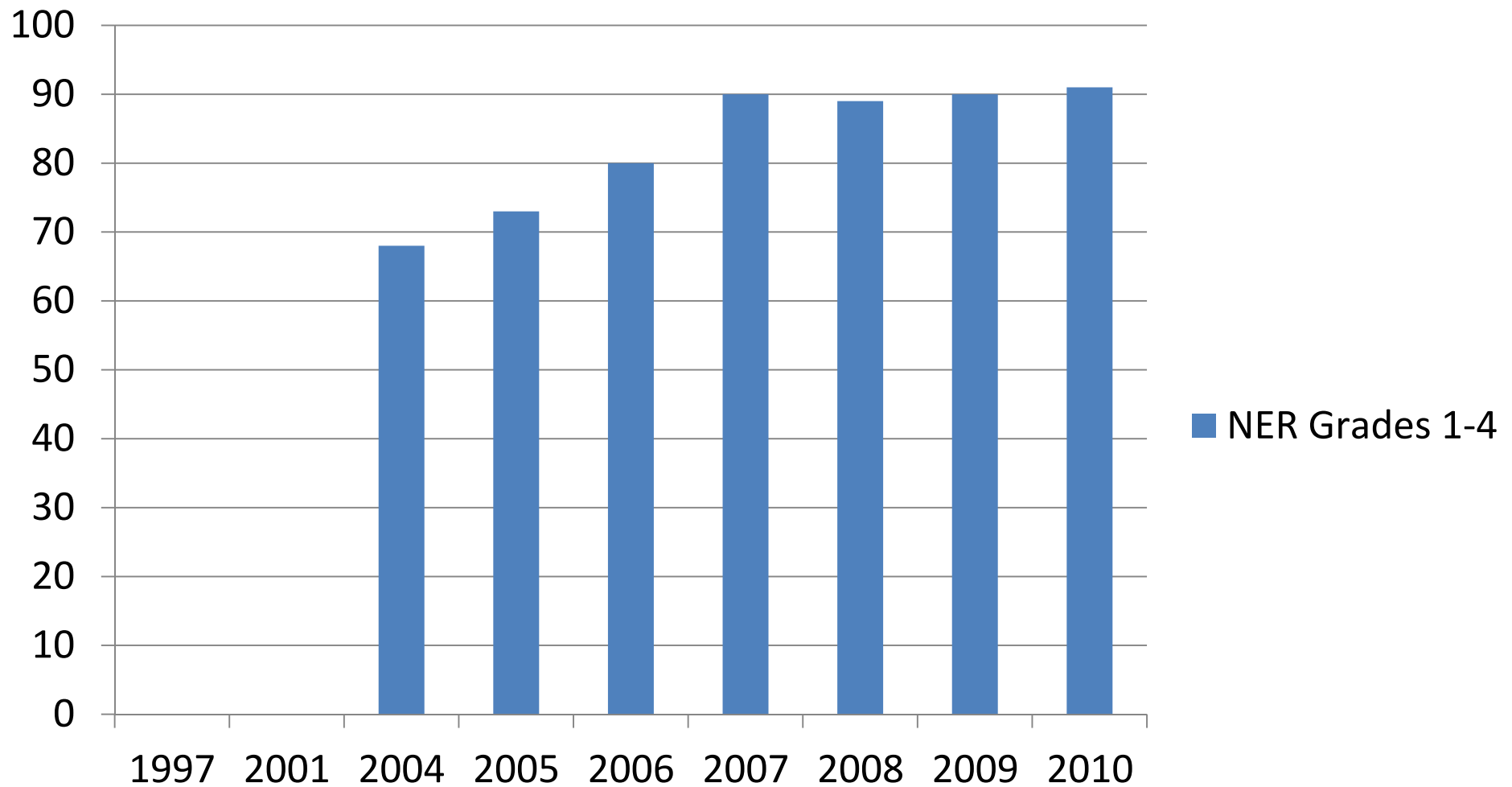
- **Enrollment (both Gross and Net Enrollment)**
 - Significant changes in the last ten years
 - But net enrollment at both first and second cycle still far below
 - GER exceeding 130 % and expected to continue because of backlog
 - Many of the overage students reluctant to finish primary education. Looking for jobs as daily laborers and working as carpenters and others.

Grades 1-4 Gross Enrollment Rate

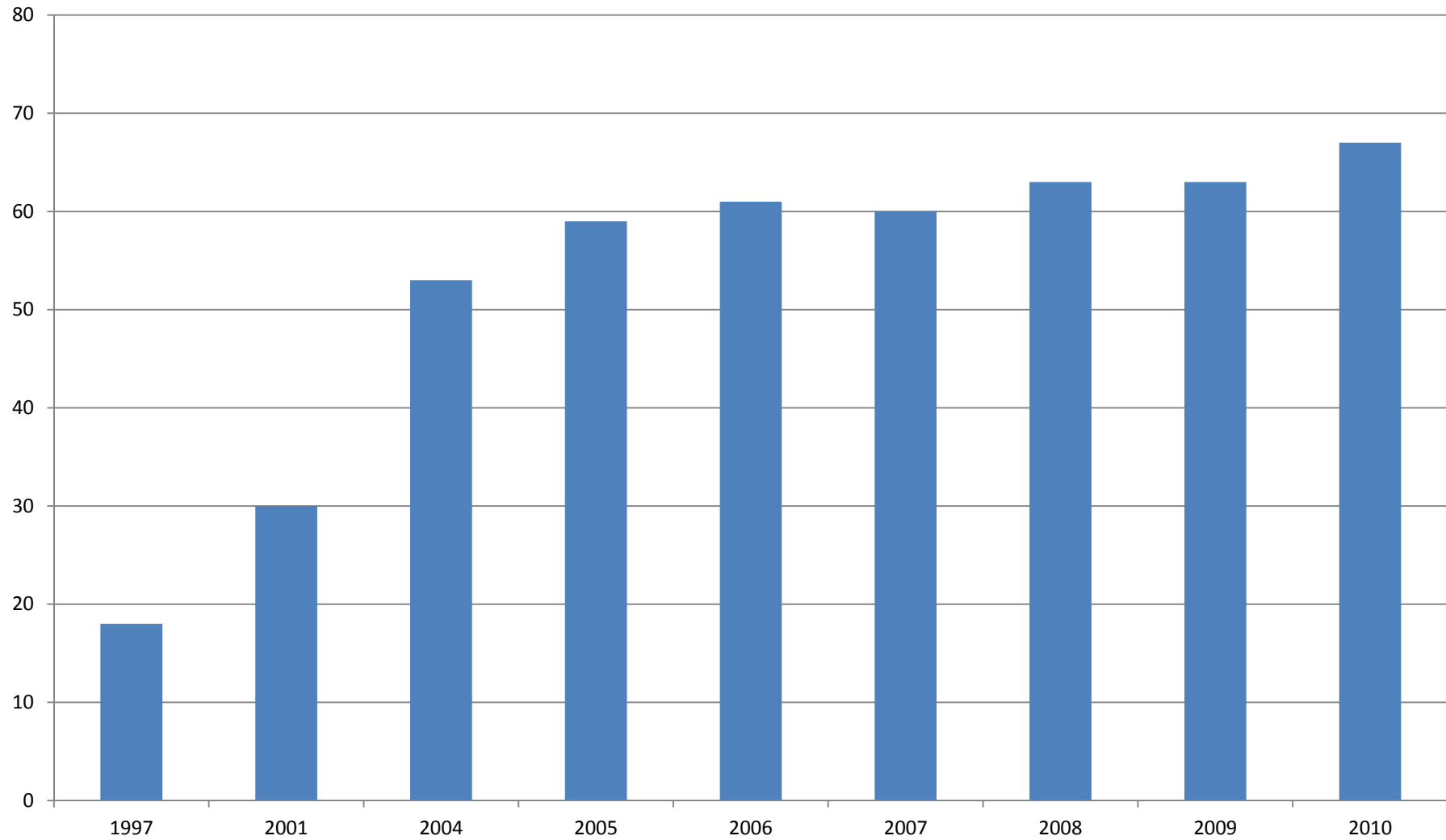


Net Enrollment Rate

NER Grades 1-4

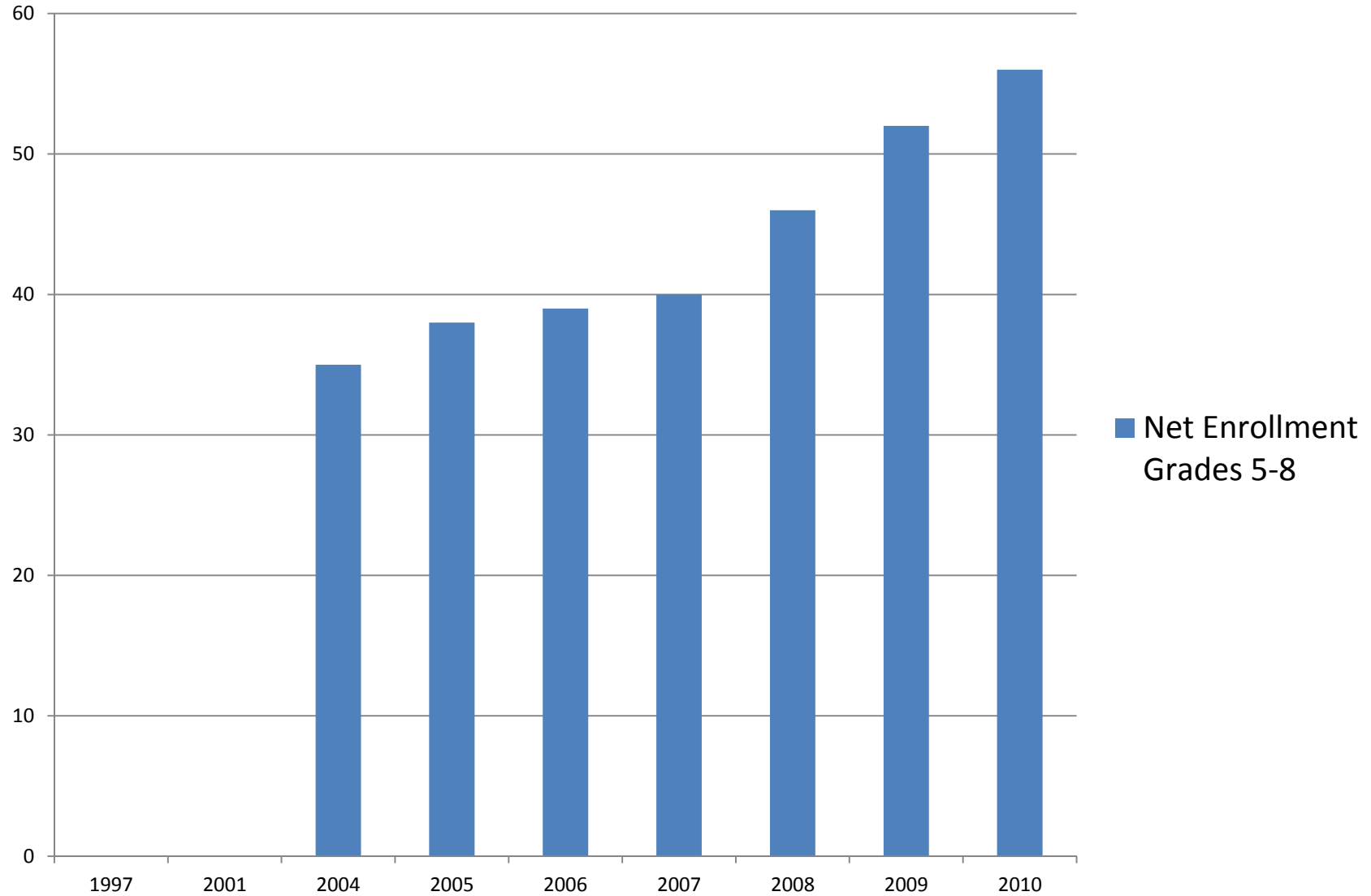


Gross Enrollment Rate Grades 5-8



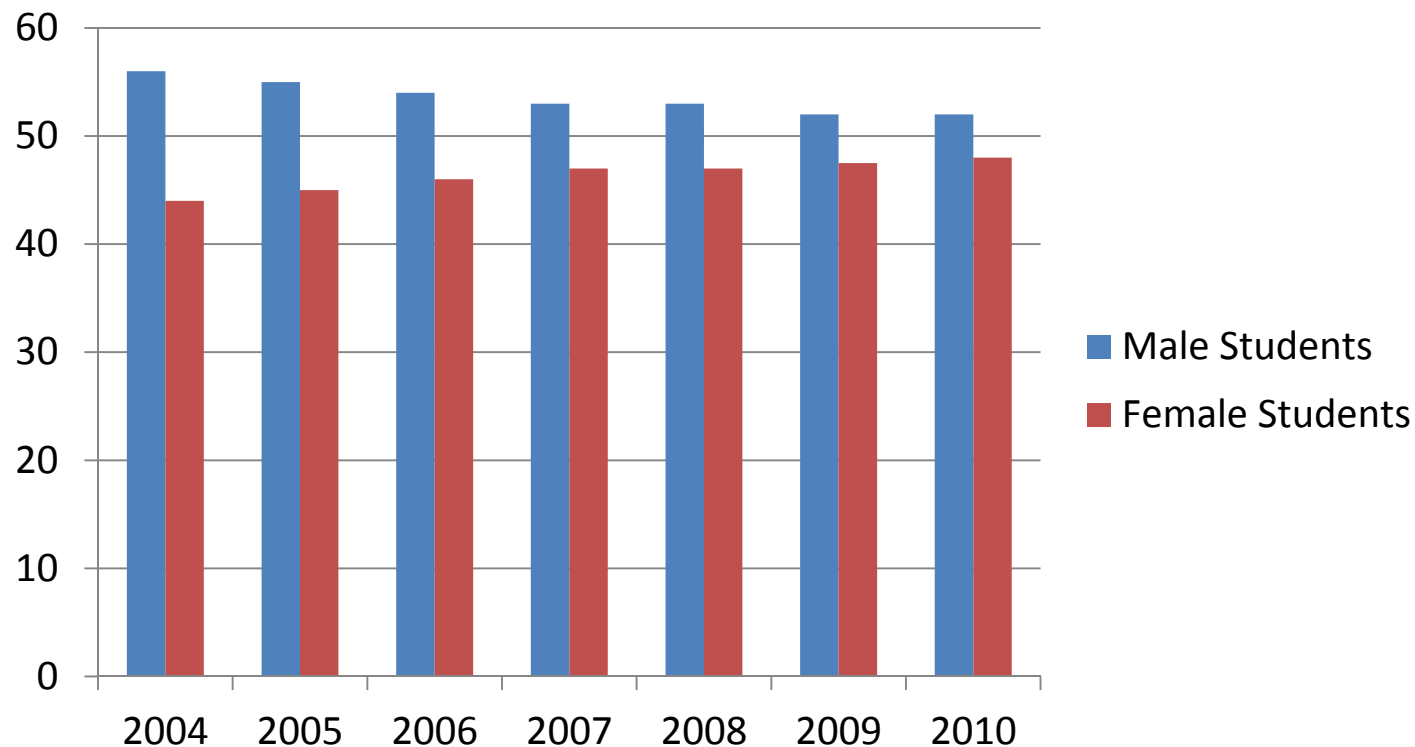
Cont'd

Net Enrollment Grades 5-8



Cont'd

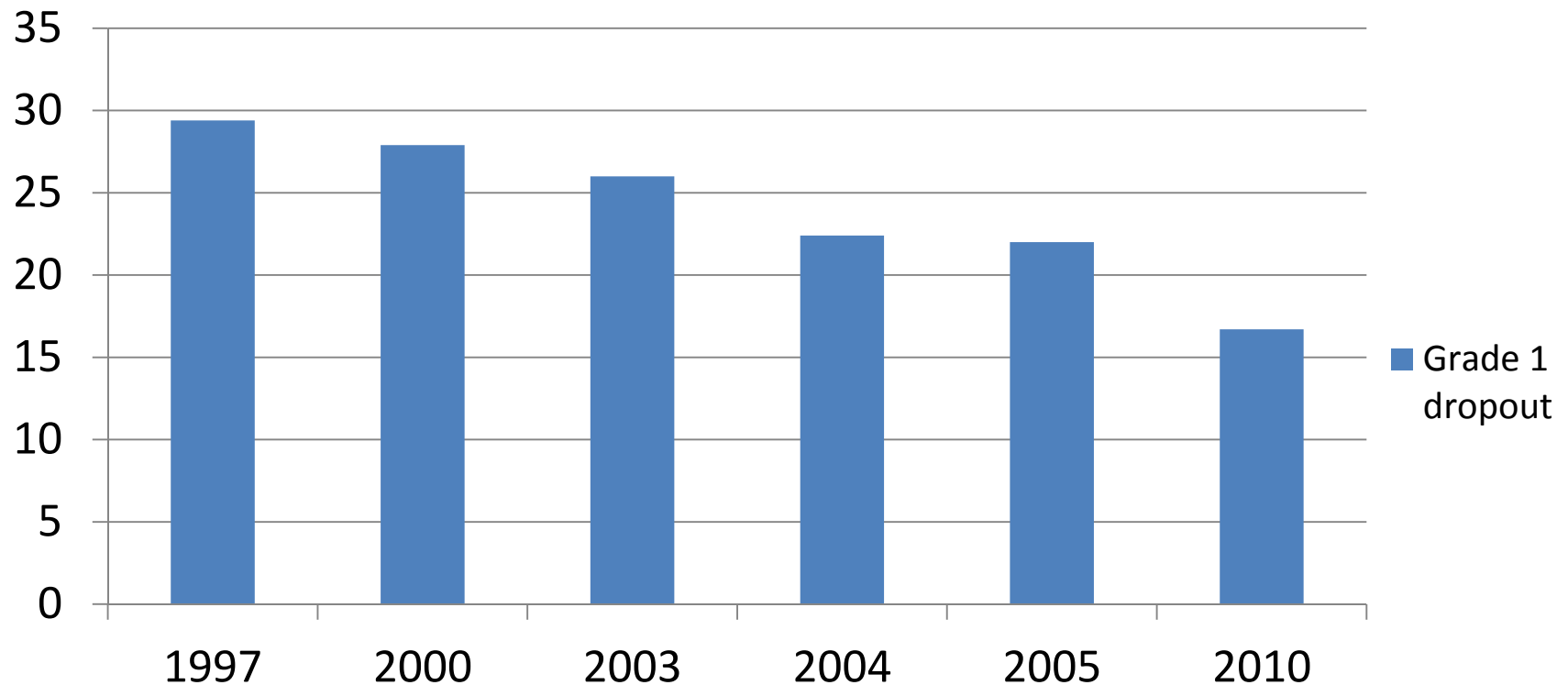
- Gender disparity narrowing down in primary education: Toilets and accompanying girls to schools useful strategies



Cont'd

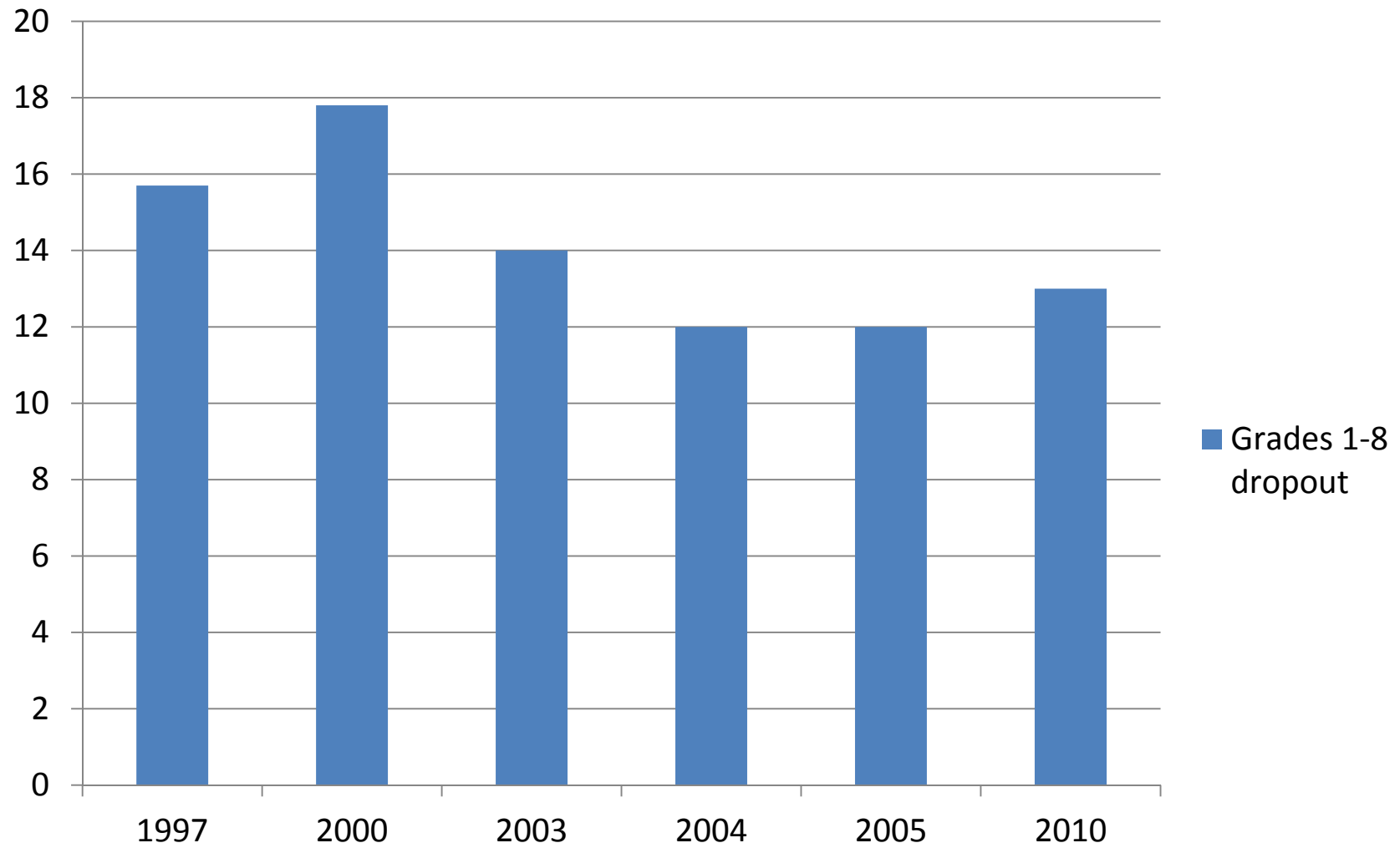
- **Dropout:** Boys' dropout higher than girls at national level.

Grade 1 dropout



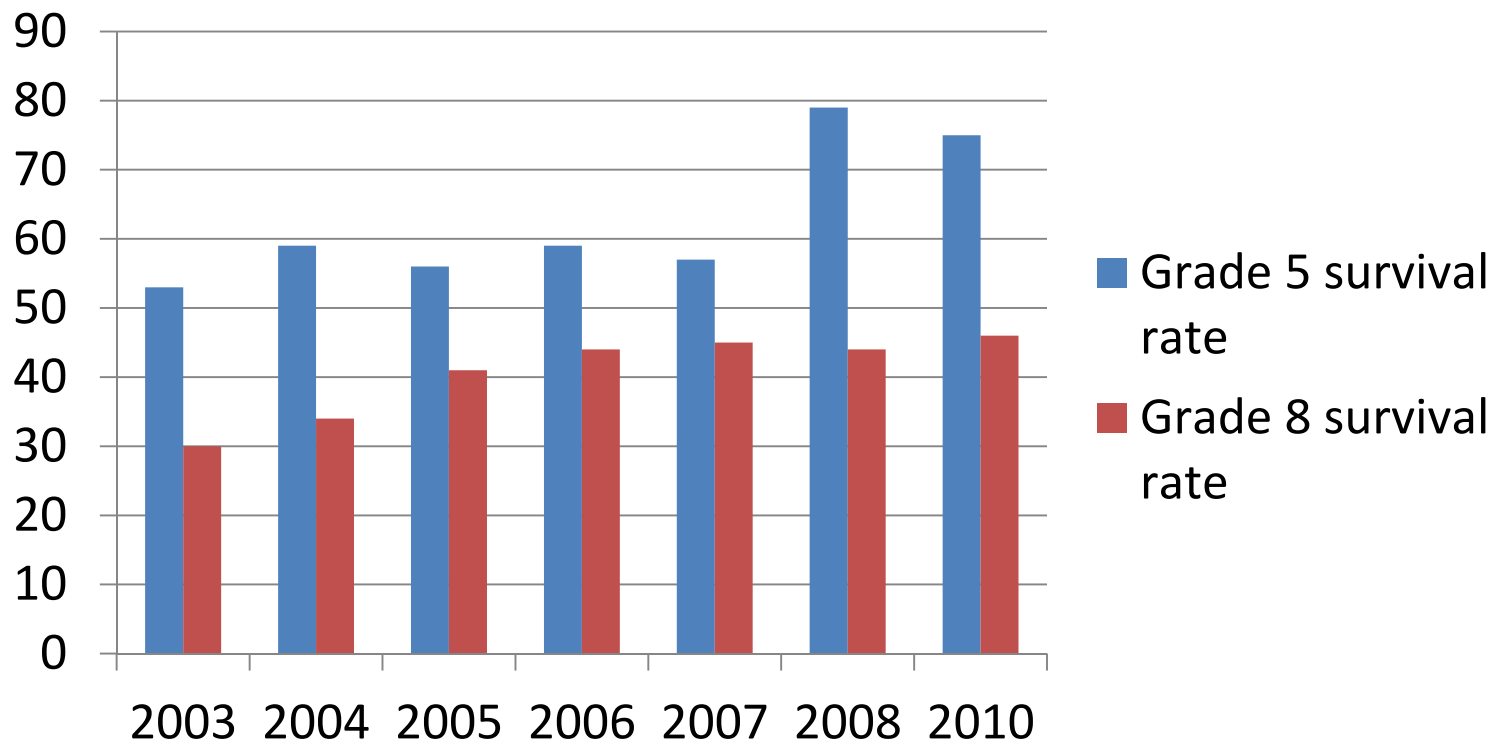
Cont'd

Grades 1-8 dropout



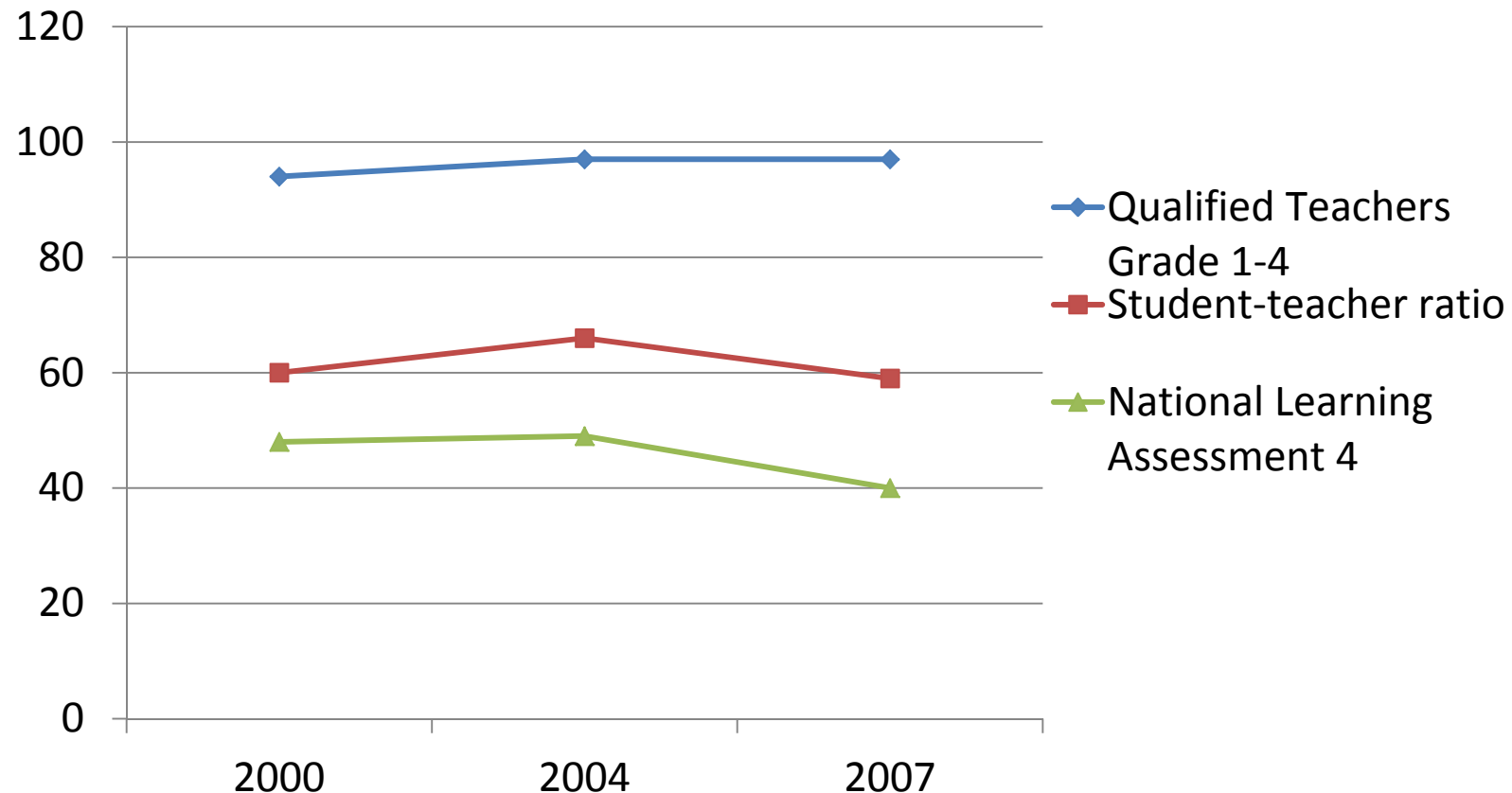
Cont'd

- Survival Rates at Grades 5 and 8: More than **40 %** of the students in the first five years do not reach grade 5. And only **30-45 %** reach grade 8.



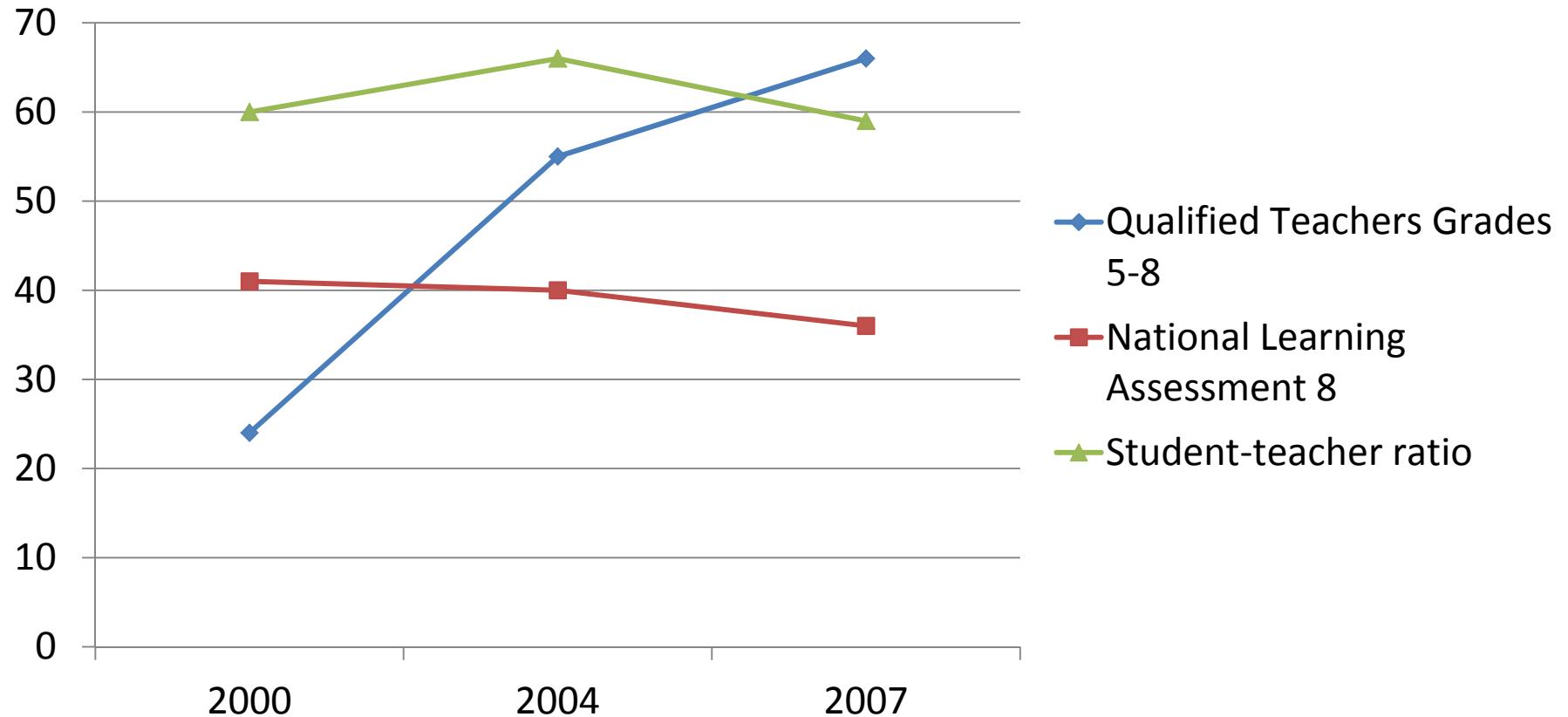
Students' Performance in NLA in Grades 4 and 8

- Students' performance at grade 4 as a function of qualified teachers and student-teacher ratio

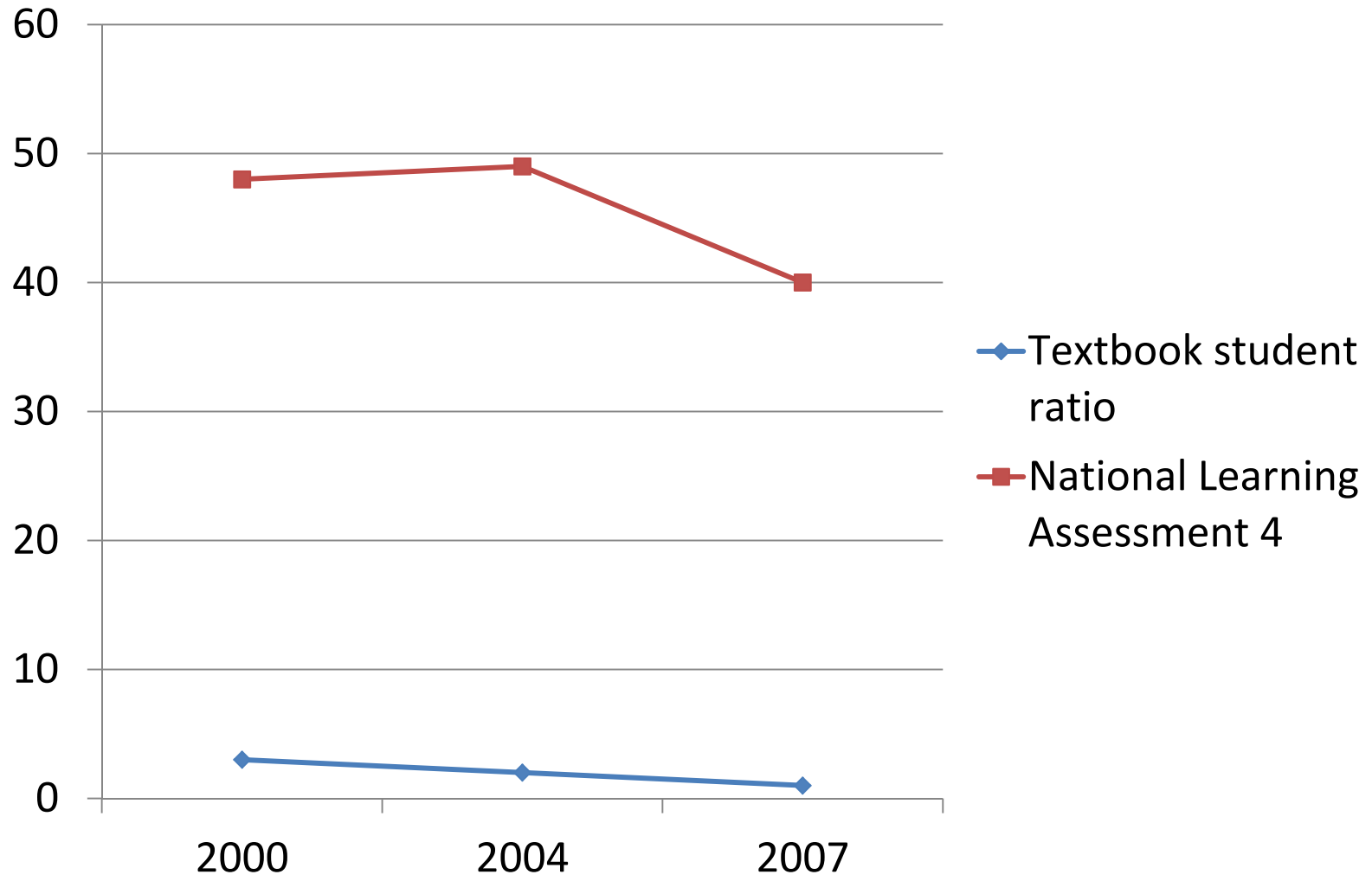


Cont'd

- Grade 8 performance as a function of qualified teachers and student-teacher ratio



Cont'd



Cont'd

- Teachers' engagement and motivation
 - Burnout feeling very high
 - Reported role conflict and role-ambiguity

Lessons

- Global initiatives (UPE) help to expand education for all, including females and children of minorities.
- Increasing enrollment, decreasing gender and rural and urban disparity.
- Mother-tongue instruction attracting many students in schools.
- Schools expanded very significantly.
- Teachers training given priority.

Cont'd

- Yet, serious impact on the quality of education and long lasting impacts on schooling and teachers. Schooling questioned because of the low demonstrated competence by children.
- Dropout remains high and many students who left schools remain unaccounted for because of the priority to enroll new students.
- Survival rate remains very low.
- Despite the Dakar Framework for Action major concern on quality of education, emphasis has been merely on expanding access, resulting in a decline in the quality of education which has already been felt in secondary and higher education.
- Concerns on mere enrollment and competition among countries outshining more important purposes of education: developing learning skills and preparing students for lifelong learning.

Conclusion

- Education for All has been based on the universal primary education with the appropriate quality and relevance.
- In Ethiopian context, although EFA has promoted increment in enrollment, its impact on the quality of learning has been hugely detrimental. Hence, the basic rationales for primary education remain partially met.
- Sustainability of EFA is questionable. EFA has been a revolutionary result rather than a systematized and developmental process.

Suggestions

- Universalization shall follow a natural path that considers economic and social development of people/communities. It cannot be sustained through declarations without considering economic and social development contexts.
 - Mass expansion without the right socio-economic development cannot be sustained.
 - Poverty and illiterate communities.
 - Fast growing population in some developing countries
 - (I read that Japan took 70 years to universalize primary education).
 - Prof. Akio Yonemura has characterized global initiatives as ‘non-historical approach’-same policy irrespective of differences in circumstances

Cont'd

- Some of the reasons mentioned as the rationale for primary education remain marginalized
 - **Economic merit of primary education** is not visible for students and parents. One major cause of students dropout: What happens after finishing primary education? This is true in many developing countries as primary education is the terminal learning point for many students.
 - Primary school complete students do not have the required skill for **lifelong learning** as demonstrated by NLA.
- Revisit the relevance of the curriculum and create a system that rewards completion of primary education. Primary education has to be linked with future merits.

Cont'd

- Policy adoption from other countries needs to be thoroughly examined.
 - Social promotion in developing country context
 - School improvement
 - CPD have been in place. Copied from experiences of other countries without contextualization.
 - Students' low engagement in educational activities
 - Indifference by some teachers on students' learning and their duties
 - Unfavorable attitude towards educational innovations by teachers

Cont'd

- Efforts shall be made to contextualize Universalization of Primary Education and align it with actual contexts of each country.

Arigato Gozaimasu!

Synopsis

Educational Policy and Practice for Universalizing Primary Education in Ethiopia: Dilemmas and Consequences

Abstract

Education is the basis for national development and creation of a modern state. Various global initiatives (World Conference on Education for All (1990), Dakar Framework for Action (2000), and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and national efforts have been put in place to universalize primary education. These initiatives are grounded on children's right for education, economic development and poverty reduction, social justice for minorities and females, and the preparation of lifelong learners. It is fully recognized that these initiatives have served as driving forces in improving access and equity. However, doubts remain on whether such initiatives would result in a sustainable universal primary education in countries which are following 'revolutionary' path of universal primary education-reach the target in enrollment and equity through large allocation of educational budget and campaigns of enrollment. Critics argue that universal primary education has to be coupled with socio-economic developments, cultural changes and empowerment of people. With four years remaining to 2015 (expected year of universal primary education), this paper examines the changes registered in primary education in Ethiopia and draws some lessons on what should be done to sustain a universal primary education. The study used data from the Ministry of Education and other empirical studies conducted on Ethiopian primary education. The study probes why quality of primary education remains to be overshadowed by access and equity although it was clearly stated in the MDGs and Dakar Framework for Action.

Study Context

Much effort has been undergoing in expanding education at various levels in Ethiopia. Coming out from a very long civil war that lasted for more than three decades, Ethiopia formulated a new education and training policy in 1991. The policy changed the structure of education from 6-2-4 to 8-2-2. While the previous policy provides six years of primary education, 2 years of junior secondary education, and 4 years of secondary education, the new policy extends primary education to 8 years with two cycles. First

cycle lasts from grades 1-4 and second cycle lasts from grade 5-8. The major reason for the structuring was the provision of technical and vocational education. The policy indicates that vocational education would be provided when students complete grades 4, 8, and 10. Although vocational training provisions for those who complete grades 4 and 8 are yet to be implemented, a vibrant middle class human power has been created in Ethiopia through non-formal and formal trainings given in grade 10 (Ethiopia Ministry of Education, 2010).

On top of changes on the structure of education, curricula and textbooks were changed across all grades. Medium of instruction in primary schools were changed from Amharic to 22 mother-tongue languages in different regions. Education up to grade 10 has become free. As a federal state organized along ethnic/linguistic lines, primary education has become the responsibility of regional states. Decentralization of the education system has reached to the lower levels of the school. Schools are administered by school boards composed of principals, teachers, parents and local politicians. Teacher training colleges that train teachers in mother-tongue instruction also mushroomed. The training of teachers for primary schools was also changed. While in the previous system, primary school teachers were expected to complete grade 12 (secondary education) to be trained as teachers, the new education policy trains teachers for primary grades from grade 10 for one year (teachers for first cycle primary grades) and three years (teachers for second cycle primary grades). Number of schools has been also growing very fast. A three year alternative basic education has been also designed for students who cannot come to formal schools. Mobile schools in nomadic areas have been introduced. Schools and teachers campaign at the beginning of the academic year to enroll as many students as possible. Schools get a target number of enrollment from local officials in each academic year. Teachers are engaged not only in teaching but also in convincing parents, by going from village to village, to send their children to schools.

Achievements

Significant Increment in Enrollment

Gross Enrollment	Grades	1997	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
	Grades 1-4	54%	102.7%	117.6%	117.6	122.9	122.9
Net Enrollment	Grades 5-8	18 %	52.5%	58.8%	61.1%	60.2%	63.2%
	Grades 1-4	-	-	73.0%	79.9%	90.1%	88.7%
	Grades 5-8	21.8	-	37.6%	39.4%	39.9%	46.0%

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Abstract, 2010, and ESDP II, 2002

The low net enrollment in second cycle primary education shows that many students drop out before grade 5. The GER in first cycle shows that many students are either over-aged or under-aged. Between 10-27 % of school age students were not enrolled in schools in the last five years indicated. Yet, seen against the baseline year enrollment, significant changes have been registered in this direction.

Improved Access to Educational Resources and ‘Qualified’ Teachers

	1997	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Schools	10394	16,513	19,412	20,660	23,354	25,212
Pupil-teacher ratio		66	62	59	57	54
Textbooks to student	5:1	2.5:1	2:1	-	-	1.5:1
Qualified Teachers (Grades 1-4)	-	97.1%	98%	98%	97%	90
Qualified Teachers (Grades 5-8)	-	55.0%	59%	53 %	66%	71 %

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010

The standard teacher pupil ratio in Ethiopia primary education is 1:50. It has now approached the standard following the training of many teachers. Textbook distribution has almost reached the standard. The percentage of qualified teachers in first cycle primary education is also close to 100%. Recently, the government has introduced a new directive that require these teachers to be upgraded a diploma level training.

Increasing Expenditure on Education

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
% Education of Total Government Budget	16.7%	17.8%	24.6%	22.8%	23.6%

Reduced Gender Disparity

The percentage gap between female and male students in primary education was more than 30 percent in 1997. Gender Parity Index at national level in 2008 was 0.93 (Ministry of Education, 2010).

Reaching Minorities and Marginalized Groups

Many marginalized places and minorities have got access to education. However, these areas have still high dropout, gender disparity and repetition rate compared to the

national level. People in many of these are pastoralists. In some of these places, schools are not also well expanded.

Challenges

Very Low Students' Achievement in National Assessment

Students' Average Scores in National Learning Assessment (Out of 100 %)

	2000/01	2004/05	2007/8
Grade 4			
Composite score*	47.9 %	48.5 %	40.9 %
Grade 8			
Composite score**	41.1 %	39.7 %	35.6 %
*Composite score of Math Reading and English (reading test reported to have changed considerably since 2004/05 test)			
** English and Math, but including also Biology, Chemistry and Physics results			

Source: Education Sector Development Program IV, Ministry of Education, 2010.

Achievement of students in secondary school general examination is staggeringly very low. Although the distribution of textbooks, the teacher-pupil ratio and the class size have nearly reached national standards, students' learning outcomes remain very low (Ministry of Education, 2010). This suggests that the teaching and learning process has much deeper problems than the availability of learning materials. The training of teachers for one year and the hugely compromised academic standards to universalize primary education are mentioned as reasons (Yalew, Dawit, and Alemayehu, 2010). A study by USAID also shows that only less than one fifth of the students who complete grade 3 were proficient in reading.

High Dropout and Very Low Survival Rate

Grades 1-8 Dropout in Ethiopia

Year	Boys	Girls	Total
2004	14.9	13.6	14.4
2005	12.3	11.3	11.8
2006	12.5	12.1	12.4
2007	13.1	11.6	12.4
2008	15.9	13.2	14.6

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010

Grade 1 Dropout Rate

1997	2000	2004	2008
29.4	27.9	22.4	22.9

Source: Education Sector Development Programs I, II, and III and Education Statistics Abstract, 2010

Survival Rates in Grades 5 and 8

Grades/Year	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2010
Grade 5	53	59	56	59	57	69	75
Grade 8	30	34	41	44	45	44	46

Source: Ministry of Education, Education Statistics Abstract, 2010 and Growth and Transformation Detailed Matrix Plan, 2011.

The above tables show the high rate of dropout in primary schools and the low survival rate in grades 5 and 8. About 25 % of the students in the last decade dropped out from school before reaching grade 2. These students may have been enrolled in the proceeding academic years. Moreover, more than 40 % of the enrolled students did not continue to grade 5 in the years 2003-2007. Those who completed grade 8 are less than 50 % in the last ten years. Although gender disparity figure favors males, dropout and survival figures indicated that girls have lower dropout rate and higher survival rate.

Questions on the Benefit of Primary Education and Child Labor

One of the challenges that face UPE is the merit gained from its enrollment. Parents and students ask what they would gain after completing primary education. This is because many students would not continue to secondary education. At a national level, it is intended that 80 % of the enrolled students complete grade 8. However, students and parents question what they gain from 8 years of schooling and resort to other activities that are paying in a short-term. Poverty also plays a significant role. Although education is free, children have to work in household activities and some parents do not have the capacity to afford instructional materials required for schooling.

Conclusion

With four years remaining, Ethiopia could achieve universal primary education up to grade 4. However, students' learning outcomes have been getting very low. So, although the students have completed grade 4, *they could literally have problem in reading and writing*. National learning assessments and various studies testify this. It is also to be seen whether sustaining the UPE would be possible in Ethiopia given the positively skewed budget allocated for primary education in the last decade. Parents and children have also started to question the merit of primary education. And population is growing by nearly three percent. These all suggest that one-fit global initiatives and targets do have shorting comings. Lessons from the universalization of primary education in developed countries attest a gradual, contextual, and developmental process. Developing countries like Ethiopia need to have their own integrated, contextualized, and systematized evolutionary process of educating their citizens (including universal primary education) that match with countries' socio-economic, political, and cultural development of rather than compromising educational quality and value towards education for the sake of achieving UPE dates decided at global level.