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# **The Status of Private Provision of Higher Education in Ethiopia**

By

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## **Abstract**

*The major objective of this paper was to assess the status of the private provision of higher education (PHEIs) in Ethiopia. More specifically, the study has attempted to: provide a historical overview of private provision, to examine the regulatory framework for private higher education, and to assess the opportunities and constraints for growth of private higher educational sector in Ethiopia suggesting policy choices and advices. Empirical materials for the study were drawn from two major sources: documentary information (e.g. policy documents, the 20 year Education Sector Development Plans – ESDP I-IV and some important directives from HERQA/Ministry of Education) as well as in-depth interviews conducted with seven key informants (five heads of pioneer private providers and two other providers). Among other things, the study revealed that the Ethiopian Government created a positive climate, at least initially, that allowed an unprecedented mushrooming of PHEIs; that the provision of PHEIs in Ethiopia suffers from considerable lack of predictability/certainty; and that there are practices indicative of double standards that affect the operation of the private sector. The need to have a clear roadmap about the contribution of the PHE institutes stood out as an overall recommendation to tackle constraints related to the provision of higher education in the country.*

## **Objectives and Methodology of the Study**

The major objective of the present investigation is to evaluate the status of private higher education provision in Ethiopia. To that end, it had attempted:

- i) to provide an overview of private provision of education in Ethiopia;
- ii) to assess the opportunities and constraints for growth of private higher education;
- iii) to examine the regulatory/policy framework for private higher education;
- iv) to suggest policy choices for private higher education and indicate their implications.

Data for this study were drawn from two major sources: documentary information and in-depth interviews. Following a brief description of the instruments, the rationale for using them and how the data were analyzed will be described.

### **Documentary Information**

By and large, government documents used include policy documents, proclamations, education statistical abstracts, the 20 years Education Sector Development Plans (ESDP I-IV) and Higher Education Quality and Relevance Agency (HERQA) publications, and some important directives from HERQA or the Ministry of Education (MoE). Data obtained from these sources were primarily used to describe policy issues and the legislative framework that provides rules and regulations for the operation of private higher education institutes of the country.

### **In-depth Interviews**

In order to have rich empirical data about the sector from the horse's mouth, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected providers and the empirical materials garnered were qualitative. Seven informants took part willingly in the in-depth interviews. While five were chosen as key informants since heads of some pioneer providers, two of them were included due to their involvement in areas the other five were not engaged in: health and industrial technology related fields. Twenty questions were used as guide for conducting in-depth interviews. With their informed consent, interviews with four of the participants were tape-recorded and

fully transcribed later. Three of the key informants were reluctant to be tape-recorded so rigorous notes were taken during the interviews. Because of the sensitivity of part of the information obtained, their anonymity will be maintained.

## **Methods of Data Analysis**

The presentation and the discussions of the material garnered, particularly from the in-depth interviews, have been organized thematically. Major themes which emerged included: policy/legislative matters, abrupt directives passed quality issues and accreditation practices, issues of “double standard” as well as challenges and prospects of PHEIs in Ethiopia.

## **Profiles of PHEIs in Ethiopia**

### **Emergence and Size of PHEIs**

Even though the beginning of higher education in Ethiopia dates back to 1949, with the founding of Trinity College (Now Addis Ababa University), the provision of private higher education in the country is a more recent phenomenon. It emerged in the mid-1990s. Published works documenting this recent history are also rather scanty. Writers chronicling the history of PHEIs (Teferra, 2005; Teshome, 2007; Wondwossen, 2008) record that most of the pioneer institutes did not directly begin providing college education. They started their career as English language schools, computer schools or as vocational institutes offering short-term tailored courses, as marketing and supplies management. The duration of their short term courses could last three to 12 months.

Interviews conducted with heads of pioneer PHEIs, revealed, for example, that St. Mary’s University College started first as language school and worked in that capacity for some years before it began activities as two year college institute. Admas University College, another pioneer, started offering short-term tailored courses such as accounting and supplies management. The case of Alpha University

is even much more different, in fact, before embarking on providing college education, it had offered primary and secondary education through distance mode to students unable to join regular schools.

Despite agreeing that most pioneer PHEIs evolved from language schools or computer centers or vocational training institutes offering unaccredited certificates, writers as well as key informants do not seem to agree on which private provider is the pioneer institute. Wondwossen (2008) gives the pioneer status to Unity College (now Unity University) and most of the key informants concur on it. Teshome Yizengaw (2007), an ex- Deputy Minister for Ministry of Education disagrees. For him, Alpha University College, Ethiopian Adventist College and Harar People to People Agro Technical College were the first three accredited non-government colleges and that was in 1996. He asserts that Unity College was accredited a year after that. A HERQA publication (HERQA, 2010) supports Teshome's claim. According to that document, Unity College is reported to have been accredited a year after the first three colleges were accredited. Following the accreditation of some 10 private colleges, though, most providers started as full-fledged colleges from the outset. That is particularly true of colleges engaged in health related fields that began to mushroom from 2002 onwards. Almost all private colleges began as a two year diploma granting institutions before providing undergraduate programs. HERQA's publication (2010) indicates that pre-accreditation and accreditation of undergraduate degree programs started in 2003 in some three colleges and expanded to others providers afterwards.

A couple of published government documents (HERQA, 2010; MoE, 2010) provide different information about the number of accredited Private Higher Education Institutes (PHEIs) running undergraduate programs in the country. Included in the latest Education Statistics Annual Abstract (MoE, 2010) there are 49 non-governmental higher education institutes that provide undergraduate education. On the other hand, a recent report by HERQA—an agency reporting to the Ministry of

Education, presents a list of 64 PHEIs granting various undergraduate programs (2010). Though it is difficult to identify the exact number of PHEIs with absolute certainty<sup>1</sup>, it is possible to say that the data provided by HERQA are the more plausible. Partly because of the depth and breadth of data required by the Ministry preparing the Education Abstract, the PHEIs might have shown apparent reluctance to send information required. In fact, the Ministry itself is skeptical about the completeness of the data it reports. "...some of these institutions," the Ministry decries, "are reporting part of the inputs, some are reporting incorrect data and others are not reporting at all" (MoE, 2010, p.59). Besides, as an agency entrusted in giving and denying accreditation, HERQA is better placed in obtaining data from the PHEIs it accredits. Despite their credibility, the data obtained from HERQA lack the breadth and depth of the data acquired from the Education Abstract. Albeit these limitations are present, we are forced to rely on these sources for different purposes, thus the following discussion is done relying on such backdrop.

### **Scope of Training**

The 64 PHEIs offer various undergraduate degree programs in different fields of studies. A close scrutiny of the recent report done by HERQA, comprising a list of accredited institutions, indicates that there are some six general categories of training offered by the PHEIs. These include: Business, Law &IT<sup>2</sup>; Industrial Technology and Construction; Health; Teacher Education; Agriculture; and Social Sciences/Humanities. The table below shows the involvement of PHEIs in these fields.

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<sup>1</sup> Note that the list found in the HERQA 2010 consist of 93 institutes that have been accredited since 1996 as diploma (2-year) or degree granting institutions out of which only 61 institutes are currently giving undergraduates education. Three other institutes not included in the list are found from a recent directive addressed to all undergraduate offering PHEIs.

<sup>2</sup> These three fields are categorized together because they are disciplines commonly offered in most PHEIs.

**Table 1-Major fields of studies offered by PHEIs.**

Categories of Training	Number of Institutes	%
Business, Law & IT	43	67.19
Health	22	34.75
Teacher Education	8	12.50
(Industrial ) Technology and Construction	6	9.38
Agriculture	5	7.81
Social Sciences and Humanities	9	14.06
<b>Total*</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>145.69</b>

Source: HERQA, 2010 (compiled by the researchers).

\*The total exceeds 64 and 100% because some institutes are involved in more than one fields of study.

In line with the trend in other African countries and elsewhere, the first category (Business, Law and IT) is the category that has attracted the attention of the private providers most. Forty-three of the 64 accredited PHEIs (about 67.19%) are engaged in providing education in these fields of studies. There are two possible reasons for that. One, these fields (at least until recently) are reported as characterized by a higher demand, and graduates in these disciplines are believed to have better opportunity of securing jobs. Thus, the relative higher engagement of the PHEIs is partly demand driven. Secondly, as reported in related studies (e.g. Giesecke, 2006; Oketch, 2003; Teixeira, 2007) running these fields is not capital intensive.

Nearly half of the PHEIs (22) offer training in health related field of studies. Given the relatively higher capital required to run programs in this category (e.g., training of Medical Doctors, Health Officers, and Laboratory Technicians), the reality defies the conventional belief that private providers are often engaged in areas that require

low investment. In the other four categories, the involvement of the PHEIs is proportionally low. Agriculture (that involved only 5 PHEIs) and Industrial Technology and Construction (with only 6 providers) are the categories involving the smaller number of providers. That may be attributable to the large capital investment such fields require. Despite requiring a relatively lower capital and higher demand, teacher education is the other area that involved a relatively fewer number of institutes. That, according to some providers, is the result of a circular announcement done by the government in 2007, according to which it would not employ teachers graduating from PHEIs in public schools.

In spite of the obvious overrepresentations of PHEIs in business related fields and the underrepresentation in technology and science areas, as shown in the table above, a recent directive from HERQA dictates PHEIs to be prepared to offer training to 70 percent of their students in science and technology fields and to only 30 percent in social sciences in two years time—a policy being implemented in public HEIs as well. The point is to what extent the PHEIs are prepared to comply with this direction of training, issue that will be discussed later.

### **Geographical Distribution of PHEIs**

Other than those providers engaged only in distance mode of delivery, there are about 55 private higher institutes providing undergraduate education in regular and/or evening programs. Consistently with the trend in other African countries (Teferra, 2005), most of the PHEIs operate in the capital city and other big towns of the country. Nearly two-third of the PHEIs offering undergraduate degree education are in fact concentrated in the capital Addis Ababa, exactly, as shown in Table 2; 36 of the 55 PHEIs (65.45%). Next to Addis Ababa, the regions with the second and the third highest number of PHEIs are Oromia, with 43 private colleges (23,64%) operating in the Region and Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples Region (SNNPR), with 9 private colleges (13.63%). While Oromia, the largest region in the country, has 13 private colleges (23.64%) operating in the region, SNNPR has only



nine private colleges (13.63%). Unfortunately, there is no a single private college offering undergraduate programs in the historically disadvantaged regions: Afar, Benishangul Gumuz, Gambela and Somali. The needs of students from these regions wishing to pursue their undergraduates' studies are addressed by few pioneer PHEIs through distance mode (Wondwossen, 2008).

Even in the regions where the presence of the PHEIs is relatively higher, the operation of the institutes is by and large limited to regional capitals. In the Amhara regional state, for example, four of the eight private providers are situated in Bahr Dar, the region's capital while the other four have spread in four different towns. The situation in Tigray is even worst since five of the six providers operate in Mekele, the regional capital. This is consistent with the findings of Wondwossen (2008) about the distribution of private institutes offering post secondary education in the country.

**Table 2- Geographical distribution of PHEIs: Regular/evening.**

Regions/City Administrations	No. of PHEIs		No of Towns
	Number	%	
Addis Ababa	36	65.45	1
Afar	-	-	-
Amhara	8	14.55	5
Beneshagul Gumuz	-	-	
Dire Dawa	3	3.64	1
Gambela	-	-	-
Harari	2	3.64	1
Oromia	13	23.64	9
SNNPR	9	16.36	3
Somali	-	-	-
Tigray	6	10.90	2

Source: HERQA, 2010 (compiled by the researchers).

## Program/Mode of Delivery

Though not all, the 64 accredited PHEIs provide undergraduate education in various programs: regular, evening, *Kiremt* (summer) and distance mode. Looking into their students' enrollment in the last five Academic Years (2004/05-2008/9), in these various programs, may shed light on the extent of the private providers' involvement. As shown in the table below, in all the five Academic Years, PHEIs have had by far the highest student enrollment in the distance program. Except in 2005/06, when there was a slight decline, there was a steady increase of student enrollment over the years in distance programs. For example, the number of students enrolled in 2004/05 (which was 17,775) nearly tripled and rose to 54,900 in the 2008/09.

**Table 3 - Undergraduate student enrollment in PHEIs (200/05-2008/09).**

Year	Regular		Evening		Kiremt (Summer)		Distance		Total	
	BS	F	BS	F	BS	F	BS	F	BS	F
2004/05	4,045	1,507	8,621	3,977	0	0	5,109	455	<b>17,775</b>	<b>5,938</b>
2005/06	7,387	3,124	13,058	6,282	0	0	19,246	2,736	<b>39,691</b>	<b>12,142</b>
2006/07	7,885	3,601	15,207	7,362	0	0	11,258	1,545	<b>34,350</b>	<b>12,508</b>
2007/08	8,767	3,768	15,089	6,947	35	7	24,911	3,264	<b>48,802</b>	<b>13,986</b>
2008/09	13,370	5,979	15,994	7,535	436	123	25,100	5,886	<b>54,900</b>	<b>19,523</b>

Source: MoE, 2010, Education statistics annual abstract.

A more detailed/specific examination of the distance delivery courses in the recent academic years could even provide a better picture of the situation. As indicated in the above Table 3, 54,900 students have been enrolled in 2008/09; while the PHEIs offering distance education were only 10 institutes. The number of students enrolled for undergraduate education in public universities is nevertheless much lower than

that of the PHEIs. Including the Civil Service College (a governmental college) the share of public universities for the same academic year through distance education was only 13,307 students whereas the PHEIs had 25,100 students — almost two-fold of the government HEIs. The gap could have even been higher; some private providers note that, if all the PHEIs had provided data. As a whole, distance education is the only program in which PHEIs considerably exceed public universities in the provision of undergraduate education. This contrasts with the South African scenario of distance higher education which is “almost entirely provided by the public universities and universities of technology” (Badat, 2005, p.185).

The other programs worth looking into are the regular and evening ones<sup>3</sup>. Next to the distance mode, the involvement of PHEIs is relatively higher in the evening programs and there has been consistent growth over the last five academic years. The share of undergraduate students from evening programs which was only 8,621 in 2004/05 has almost doubled and reached an enrollment of 15,994 students in 2008/09 Academic Year. In terms of gross enrolment, excluding the *Kiremt* (summer) program, the program that holds proportionally the minor number of students is the regular program. Between 2004/05 and 2008/9, the number of undergraduate students enrolled in the regular program was almost half the size of those attending in the evening programs in the respective academic years: 4,045 vs. 8,621, in 2004/05; 7,387 vs. 13,058, in 2005/06; 8,767 vs. 15,089. However, in 2008/09 Academic Year, the student enrollment in the regular program saw a considerable rise and reached 13,370. Still, the student enrollment in the regular program was lower than that of the evening program which was 15,994.

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<sup>3</sup> The enrollment of students in *Kiremt* (summer program which primarily addresses in-service students which is the domain of public universities is practically negligible in the private sector).

## **Public vs. Private HEIs: A brief overview**

A brief comparison between the enrollment of students in the public universities and PHEIs reveals that there is a huge difference between the two sectors in all the programs. Other than the distance program in which the public universities are outnumbered by the student enrollment of the PHEIs, the enrollment rate in government HEIs in other programs is enormously higher than that of the private institutes. A look at the data in the 2008/09 Academic Year (see Table 4 below) may clearly show how huge the difference is. With regards to the student enrollment in the regular programs, for instance, the number of students enrolled in public institutes is over 10 fold of the students enrolled in private: 157,429 vs. 13,370, but it has to be noted that five years ago, the difference was nearly twenty-fold (78, 232 vs. 4, 4045). As sometimes jokingly expressed, it can be said that undergraduate students hosted by private providers in the regular programs are just the “left-over” from the public institutes. Speaking about this huge difference, some private providers accuse the government to make sure that the number of students reported to pass the Ethiopian Higher Education Entrance Certificate Examination (EHEECE) does not considerably exceed the intake capacity of public institutions. Though not as huge, the difference in student enrollment between the two sectors in the evening programs is still very high. In 2008/09 Academic Year, students enrolled in PHEIs account for only a-third of the students attending in public universities: 47,852 Vs. 15,994.

**Table 4 - Student enrollment across programs: Public Vs. private HEIs.**

Year	Regular		Evening		Kiremt		Distance		Total	
	PUs	PHEIs	PUs	PHEIs	PUs	PHEIs	PUs	PHEIs	PUs	PHEIs
2004/05	78,232	4,045	28,841	8,621	13,311	-	-	5,109	120,384	17,775
2005/06	93,689	7,387	26,339	13,058	14,182	-	-	19,246	134,210	39,691
2006/07	107,960	7,885	39,500	15,207	19,856	-	1,733	11,258	169,049	34,350
2007/08	127,033	8,767	48,362	15,089	34,299	35	4,505	24,911	214,199	48,802
2008/09	157,429	13,370	47,852	15,994	35,604	436	13,307	25,100	254,192	54,900

Source: MoE, 2010, Education statistics annual abstract.

### **Distribution/Share of PHEIs**

As might be expected, student enrollment in PHEIs across different institutes is quite uneven. While some institutes train students in thousands, others, strangely, educate in single digits. Though this is quite a common feature across all the programs, it is more apparent in the distant program where the private sector has a higher share than the public one. As indicated earlier, among the 49 PHEIs that supplied data to the Ministry, only 10 institutes are involved in distance education. Even among these limited number of institutes, students' distribution is not proportional. If we look, for example, at the 2008/09 enrollment (see Table 5 below), the highest provider is St. Mary's University College (with 12, 478 students) and the lowest provider Nile College (with only 23 students). Looking into the student enrollment from a different lens may make the unevenness more vivid. Of the total of 25,100 students enrolled in distance education in the year 2008/09, 12,478 students (nearly 50%) are hosted by a single institute. On the other hand, the

bottom three institutes (see the Table below) provide education only to 0.70% of the students — a figure that is less than one percent.

**Table 5 - PHEIs providing distance education.**

Name of Institutes	Gender		BS	%
	M	F		
St. Mary's University College	10,431	2,047	12478	49.71
Alpha University College	2,660	1,877	4,537	18.08
Admas University College	1,923	211	2134	8.50
Yardstick International College	1,632	171	1,803	7.18
Rift Valley University College	787	822	1,609	6.41
Sheba Info Tech & Business College	920	665	1,585	6.31
Unity University	678	64	742	2.96
Nelson Mandela College	96	6	102	0.41
PESC Information Systems College	41	10	51	0.20
Nile College	15	8	23	0.09
<b>Total</b>	<b>19,214</b>	<b>5,886</b>	<b>25,100</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: MoE, 2010 (compiled by the authors).

In the evening program, of which the private providers have the second highest share, the distribution of students across the PHEIS involved is also uneven. In comparison with the distance program, a larger number of PHEIs result involved: 10 vs. 32, but there is a huge difference between the first and the last institute in terms of number of students. While Admas University College, the provider with the highest number has 2,488 students pursuing their undergraduate studies in the evening program, Addis Ababa College of Technology and Commerce (the last

provider) has just 3, raising the question of feasibility of providing education to such small number of students.

Similarly, we can observe that, out of a total of 15, 994 undergraduate students enrolled in 32 PHEIs in the evening programs in 2008/09 Academic Year, 70 percent (10,917 students) is concentrated in just six institutes: Admas University College (2,488), Unity University (2,332), Alpha University College (2,204), St. Mary's University College (1913), Micro Link Information Technology College (1,037) and City University College (943). The other 30 percent have spread unevenly in the rest of the 26 PHEIs ranging from 757 to 3 students (MoE, 2010).

Though the disparity is not so huge, the regular program involving most of the private providers (i.e. 39 PHEIs) is also characterized by uneven distribution of students. If we consider the extreme cases, while Sheba Info Tech & Business College has 2,143 students, the institute with less has just 6 students. Out of the 13,370 students enrolled in a total of 39 PHEIs, 75 percent are pursuing their studies in just 10 institutes, while only 25% of students are enrolled in other 29 private providers (ibid).

### **The share of PHEIs in Postgraduate Programs**

In comparison with the number of private providers engaged in the undergraduate education, private colleges involved in postgraduate studies are rather few. Out of the 64 PHEIs engaged in providing higher education with different modes of delivery, only four institutes offer graduate studies in one form or another: Unity University, Hilco Computer Science and Technology College, International Leadership Institute and St. Mary's University College. Unity University and Hilco College run graduate programs of their own in regular programs. The graduate programs hosted by St. Mary's in conjunction with Indira Gandhi National Open University are delivered through distance mode. On the other hand, International

Leadership Institute runs graduate programs that it operates on its own and in partnership with Greenwich University in distance programs. A closer look at the programs run by these institutes reveal that even in the graduate programs, PHEIs in Ethiopia are still involved in programs characterized by market-oriented sector and easy to finance. While Hilco College focuses on IT related disciplines (Software Engineering and Computer Science) the other three institutes are mostly engaged in business related programs such as: Business Administration/Marketing and Development Management (in the case of Unity University) Transformational Leadership and Change (in the Case of International Leadership Institute), and Business Administration, Public Administration, Commerce, Economics (in the case of Saint Mary's University College and Indira Ghandi's). A slight departure from this common trend is the provision of some programs on social sciences/humanities (e.g., Political Science, Social Work, and Sociology) offered by Saint Mary's University College still in collaboration with Indira Ghandi National Open University.

Though not included in the list of accredited institutes made available by HERQA (2010), it has been found that there are even other two other foreign universities (University of South Africa, UNISA and Sri Sai) offering graduate programs in distance mode. UNISA has even ventured to offer PhD programs. It can be said that the involvement of foreign universities, as affiliates to local universities, a major characteristics of PHEIs in Kenya as reported by Oketch, is an emerging phenomenon in Ethiopia.

Incomplete as they are, data from the latest Education Statistics Abstract on student enrollment (see Table 6 below) can also give us some idea about the level of involvement of the PHEIs in graduate studies. The information is incomplete because they do not include the number of graduate students attending private colleges. For example, the Abstract does not have data for students attending in St. Mary's University College/Indira Ghandi National Open University's Graduate Programs neither data for students who graduated from UNISA. As shown in Table



6, of all the 10,125 students enrolled in the postgraduate program, only 324 students (3.2%) pursue their studies in the PHEIs. Even though the number of undergraduate students enrolled in public HEIs is still much higher than the ones in the PHEIs, the difference is not that big. In the undergraduate program, the share of the PHEIs is much higher: about 17.76% (nearly six folds of their share the postgraduate studies).

**Table 6 - Student enrollment in all HEIs in 2008/09 Academic Year.**

Program	Students enrolled in government in 2008/09 in all HEIs								
	Government			Non-Government			Gov't and Non-gov't		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Undergraduate	33,932	9,647	<b>43,579</b>	5,299	6,892	<b>12,191</b>	39,231	16,539	<b>55,770</b>
Masters	2,705	377	<b>3,082</b>	134	24	<b>158</b>	2,839	401	<b>3,240</b>
PhD	17	0	<b>17</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	17	0	<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,654</b>	<b>10,024</b>	<b>46,678</b>	<b>5,433</b>	<b>6,916</b>	<b>12,349</b>	<b>42,087</b>	<b>16,940</b>	<b>59,027</b>

Source: MoE, 2010 (compiled by the researchers).

### **Role of PHEIs in promoting access to female students**

As argued by Wondwossen (2008), in terms of giving access to female students to higher education, PHEIs in Ethiopia have played a bigger role than their public counterparts. Out of the total number of 43,579 students enrolled in the government HEIs; only 9,647 (27.64%) of female students were enrolled there (see Table 6 above). In contrast, much bigger percentage of female students (35.56%) was enrolled in private HEIs.

The contribution of PHEIs in increasing the participation of female students in the undergraduate programs becomes even more vivid when we examine the rate of graduation of students in government and non-government HEIs in the 2008/9 Academic Year. As can be seen in Table 7 below, in the government HEIs, out of 43,579 students who graduated in 2008/09 Academic Year, female students were only 9,647 (22.14%). In sharp contrast with that, the rate of female students who graduated in the PHEIs was even higher than that of the male students. In fact, out of the 12,191 students who graduated in the PHEIs then, 6,892 (56.53%) were female students (MoE, 2010).

**Table 7-Graduates from all programs of Higher Education Institutions (2008/09).**

Program	Number of graduates in government and non-government higher institutes								
	Government			Non-Government			Gov't and Non-gov't		
	M	F	T	M	F	T	M	F	T
Undergrad	33,932	9,647	<b>43,579</b>	5,299	6,892	<b>12,191</b>	39,231	16,539	<b>55,770</b>
Masters	2,705	377	<b>3,082</b>	134	24	<b>158</b>	2,839	401	<b>3,240</b>
PhD	17	0	<b>17</b>	0	0	<b>0</b>	17	0	<b>17</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>36,654</b>	<b>10,024</b>	<b>46,678</b>	<b>5,433</b>	<b>6,916</b>	<b>12,349</b>	<b>42,087</b>	<b>16,940</b>	<b>59,027</b>

Source: MOE, 2010, Education statistics annual abstract.

## **Private Providers' Views on and concerns about PHEIs**

### **Government's policy towards PHE and its role in the educational Landscape**

Most of the key informants give credit to the Ethiopian Government for the growth and expansion of private higher education in the last 14 years, appreciating the overall policy direction of the governments towards the sector. They have a lot to comment about the Government's favor. Thanks to the encouraging policy

environment, the number of PHEIs that was almost nil some 14 years ago has now reached over 60; thanks to the Government's commitment to expansion of higher education, PHEIs have given access to hundreds of thousands students that could not be accommodated by public providers; owing to the enabling policy environment, some PHEIs which were relegated to offer short-term unaccredited certificates at the outset of their careers now run programs at all levels ranging from TVET to postgraduate studies. The providers are grateful that they have made millions by investing in the sector and thankful to the Government for being given the opportunity to educate numerous young men and women and help them in create and secure jobs.

Coming back to key informants' views, appreciative as they are towards the overall enabling policy direction, at the same time; they even expressed some serious concerns and fears about existing situations for the future of the sector. While primarily making government and policy makers responsible for their concerns, they attach even part of the blame to private providers for the vulnerability the sector is in. Amidst all these fears, there are also providers with some sense of optimism.

### **Providers' Opinions of Recent Directives**

Because of its important implication on the overall operation of PHEIS, a recent directive issued by the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA), issued on 26 August 2010, and has captured the attention of providers engaged in the sector. Many providers, in fact, claim it to be likely having serious implications on the future of PHEIs. Among other things, the directive: bans public as well as private sector from providing distance education in all undergraduate and postgraduate programs, prohibits existing private providers from opening new programs and new branches, and forbids PHEIs form to increase their enrollment capacities.

As a whole, private providers interviewed are critical of this directive. They are dismissive of its contents and the manner in which it is disseminated. Some say it is rather abrupt. In fact, most of the informants advance the view that the directive results sudden even to HERQA itself. A key informant supposed to have insider information on the issue says that HERQA officials were taken aback about the issuance of the directive for it was issued in their absence while discharging accreditation related assignments out of Addis Ababa. Another informant recalls that it was just four months ago that the Agency provided his institution a three year accreditation renewal for 12 programs in distance modality. In doing so, the Agency recommended some improvements that had to be made before granting the permit. “If the Agency were aware that it would ban distance education altogether in four months,” the informant argues, “Why bother asking us to take to make improvements over our initial applications for renewal?”

A couple of informants are even more critical of the directive. For one of the informants with a very critical stance, the directive is comparable to a criminal act by the government to deliberately kill private higher education in the country. Though not as harsh, another pioneer provider presents the directive as indication of government’s policy twist against private provision of higher education. Both note that the measure was so frustrating that it gave them the impression that they have no legal protection as private providers.

Informants critiquing the directive also speak other measures taken by regional states that would make the operation of private providers almost impossible. The Oromia Regional State is, for example, reported to have prevented private providers from offering training in health related fields on the pretext that the market for graduates from these fields has already saturated. Informants counter argue and they refer to research reports indicating the nation’s dire need for health professionals. The Amhara Region, on its part, is said to have banned private provision of education in business related fields for the same reason. Informants also accuse of

government owned and, to some degree, private media of damaging the credibility of private providers. An informant's complaint below is representative of that:

*A cover story in a leading government Amharic newspaper strictly warns parents and children to think twice before choosing PHEIs... A private news paper has recently published a list of private providers that have been given warning from concerned bodies. This is illegal and unethical. Who would dare to study in institutions that have been given warnings? As private provider, if you don't enroll new students you are out of business.*

On the other hand, two informants make a somewhat positive assessment of the recent HERQA's Directive. Their 'appreciation' of the directive is partially attributable to their overall attitude towards distance education as a mode delivery. For them, the mode of delivery is prone to unavoidable problems (e.g., poorly designed materials, unreliable tutorial support, poor assessment methods, and lack of commitment on the part of students). They are thus supportive of part of the directive that prohibits distance education across the board. The two informants depart/diverge in their assessment of the portion of the directive that disallows PHEIs to run Law and Education programs. The informant supportive of the government's move says that the directive is long overdue and he calls for similar measures against PHEIs engaged in health related fields. On the other hand, the other informant laments that prohibiting PHEIs from running Law and Education programs on the pretext of quality is rather one-sided. As far as offering poor quality education is concerned, the key-informant adds, some of the public institutes are not immune either.

Albeit having different views on various contents of the directive, almost all the participants agree that the directive is an example of uninformed and arbitrary decisions taken against PHEIs. They recall a similar government circular made some three years ago in which it was stated that teachers graduating from PHEIs would not be employed in government schools.

## **Government's Treatment of Public vs. Private HEIs**

The discussion question: “Does the government treat private and public institutions or public and private institutes fairly/on equal footing?” is perhaps the only question that elicited unanimous responses from respondents. Invariably, key informants answered the question with big NO. They all agree that government HEIs enjoy preferential treatment. They all accuse the government of advancing stark “double standard.” Informants in the study only differ in the explanations they give to that. Still, all agree the practice of accreditation which is an essential requirement to all private providers is not applicable to public providers at all. That is the case despite the existence of a legislative provision that both need to be accredited. Explaining this unfair treatment, an informant says, “A public university has free ride to open any program it wants to”. Likewise, informants decry, for government HEIs, it does not matter whether the public universities have the required staff mix/ratio to operate a certain program. For a public HEI to operate as undergraduate degree program, it must have the following faculty profile: 30 % PhD; 50% Masters and 20% BSc/BA. Other than AAU, which is reported to have met this requirement quite marginally, none of the other 22 public universities were even close. The situation of some newly established universities was even quite dismal. There are universities that opened departments in Computer Science with graduate assistants and just one lecturer that has got MSc in Computer Science. In such departments, complex courses like “Data Structure” that are always handled by senior instructors in older universities are offered by simple graduate assistants.

While expanding programs in already accredited programs results too restrictive for PHEIs, public universities can easily introduce massive programs at once. On this regard, a key informant says:

*Take what AAU [Addis Ababa University] is recently doing. It has opened a number of Masters Programs across its various colleges and it is planning to offer training to thousands of students in the evening programs. I know the University has been struggling to run its regular programs due to lack of staff shortage, lack of adequate facilities such as laboratories and libraries. Has it employed new faculty for the evening*

*program? Has it opened new libraries? The answer is, “Obviously no!” Still, the Ministry of Education has turned deaf ear to the university’s aggressive move to open numerous programs knowing very well that it has not made the necessary preparations to host new programs. This is a stark example of double standard.*

Some three informants also critique the government for exercising preferential treatment of government HEIs with regards to “joint appointment”. All interviewees are appreciative of the 2003 HEP that allows joint appointment of faculty/staff in private and public institutes. This provision, the informants complain, has been scraped from the revised 2009 HEP. According to the recent proclamation, faculties are not allowed to work for a private and a public institutes at a time but can only work jointly for two public institutes/organizations.

Taking into consideration that private providers’ widely heard complaint about lack of support from the government and absence of legal protection, we asked stakeholders to indicate their views on the necessity to give legal protection and some support to PHEIs. Regarding legal protection, expectedly, all the respondents expressed their agreement at the level of 95 percent and above. When asked whether the government should facilitate working conditions for PHEIs, and if it should provide the necessary support for all PHEIs, more than 85 percent of the respondents in each category agreed. Stronger level of agreement among stakeholders was observed on a closely related item. The item that support should be given only to those PHEIs that discharge their duties responsibly drew more support (90 percent on average) than was the case for providing support to all PHEIs.

## **Areas Requiring Serious Considerations to Keep the Sector Moving: Policy Caution**

### **The Need to have Clear Roadmap for the Sector**

As cogently argued by Wondowssen (2008), the Government of Ethiopia does not seem to have a clear roadmap about the contribution of the PHEIs. That is, in sharp contrast with the goal the government sets for Public Universities. For example, the government is clear on how many universities intend to build in each ESDP period and at what rate it seeks to grow student enrollment for each universities in each ESDP period, but is not the same case for PHEIs. While there are rules and regulations about its promotion, there does not appear to be a clear plan about the extent to which the private sector would play a role in Ethiopia's higher education expansion. For example, few years ago, the government had the plan to raise the participation of the private sector to 40 percent (see Wondwosen, 2008), but the rate still stands at 17 percent now. ESDP II outlined the future increasing role of the sector but this doesn't appear to be so as the developments in the last few years may indicate. Interestingly, ESDP IV (2010) plans to restrict the enrollment rate in the private sector from 5 to 15 percent - far below than has been the case so far. Why there is a need to restrict in the first place? Without a clear indication of where the sector should go vis-a-vis the existing and envisaged higher education landscape, it would be difficult to visualize the future of private higher education in Ethiopia.

### **The need to avoid too much uncertainty**

It is true that the provision of PHE is full of uncertainties (see Levy, 2005- 2006). Even then, the private sector in Ethiopia currently suffers from considerable lack of predictability. The uncertainty of the sector is partly attributable to a number of abrupt directives passed by the Ministry of Education/HERQA periodically that seriously affect the overall engagement of the PHEIs in the country. In its latest Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP IV), the Ministry, for example,



envisages the participation of PHEIs in evening, *kiremt* (summer) and distance modalities as follows: engineering and technology, 20%; natural and computational sciences, 50%; medicine and health sciences, 10%; agriculture and life sciences, 50% ; and social sciences & humanities, 50%. Before the ESDP IV has even begun to be implemented, as stated earlier, very recently (August 26, 2010), HERQA passed a directive that prohibits public as well as private HEIs from offering undergraduate programs. The same directive also bans the provision of providing higher education in Law and Education in already accredited PHEIs in any modality. Some regional governments (e.g., Amhara, and Oromia) have even overstretched the directive and banned PHEIs operating in their respective regions from offering business related undergraduate programs. Unless corrective measures are taken, such directives are likely to put at risk the very existence of the sector.

### **Avoiding Double Standard**

As has been verified from various data sources, there are practices that are indicative of double standards that will affect the operation of the private sector. While the public sector can initiate any program of study without applying for HERQA and without necessarily meeting the basic standards set at national level, PHEIs are expected to pass through stringent requirements. A more specific example may make the practice of “double standard” clearer. The 2003 Higher Education Proclamation (FDRE, 2003) allows joint appointment of employees, including faculties in private and public institutes. That provision has, however, been scrapped in the 2009 HEP and joint appointments are only allowed for employees working in different public institutes. That change is not only indicative of “double standard” but also makes it difficult for PHEIs to be competitive with their public counterparts.

## **Providing the Promised and Needed Support for the Sector**

Despite the government's promise of providing support to the private sector, very little has been achieved over the last 15 years. There are few institutions that have, for instance, acquired their own land. Tax exemptions, soft loans, etc. are not common features of the Ethiopian private higher education sector. Such schemes as student loans and scholarship which are common in the private sector other African countries such as Mozambique, Cote d'Ivoire, and Botswana are not part of the policy framework in Ethiopia. An exploration and enactment of successful support schemes is a necessity if Ethiopian PHEIs are to work as strategic partners of the public sector in the future.

## **Revisiting the Implementation- the 70: 30 training ratio by PHEIs**

As indicated earlier, PHEIS have recently been asked to envisage the training they offer along the 70:30 ratio, that is, 70 percent of their students should be trained in science and technology and the other 30 percent in social sciences and humanities. And they are expected to implement this in the coming two years. This is, however, a policy direction that is very unlikely to be implemented by private providers for a number of reasons. In the first place, the preparedness is not there. Except a very small percentage of providers engaged in the sector, the share of PHEIs in science and engineering is rather limited. Given the relatively higher amount of investment the fields of study require, with no apparent preparedness on their part, it is very unrealistic for them to fully engage in that scheme in the envisaged time. Even if there are PHEIs to meet that requirement, as observed in the in-depth interviews, providers do not appear to have the full confidence to invest. Given that current government policies appear to change swiftly, the sustainability of the "70:30 Policy" could not be guaranteed. On top of that, nearly two-third of the students of PHEIs in extension (evening) and distance mode, they are unlikely to fit into this

scheme. Most students pursuing their studies have jobs and they are there to develop their careers.

## **Introducing more Stringent Rules and Regulations**

Revealed from current legislations (e.g., FDRE 2003 and 2009) is that private higher education providers are expected to meet minimum standards — an expectation supported by the development partners of the Ethiopian Government (e.g. World Bank 2007). Contrary to that, stakeholders as well as private providers appear to be unhappy about the way private higher education provision is regulated. Stakeholders, particularly employers, believe that current regulations are rather lax and they call for more stringent stipulations. While providers do not necessarily propose tighter control, most feel that the HERQA does not strictly practice its own existing regulations. Considering stakeholders' consensus on the laxness of current stipulations, the government's move to introduce more stringent regulatory mechanisms is understandable.

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