




# **THE DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATION**

## **NATIONAL REPORT OF THE STATE OF ERITREA**

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**Ministry of Education  
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## Table of Contents

	Title	
Unit 1.	Introduction	3
Unit 2.	National and Education Context	4
Unit 3.	The Education System Facing the Challenges of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century: An Overview.	6
3.1.	Major reforms Introduced in the Education System	6
	3.1.1. Legal Framework of Education	7
	3.1.2. The Management and Organization of Education	8
	3.1.3. The Aims and Purpose of Education	10
	3.1.4. Curricular Policies, Education Content and Teaching and Learning Strategies	13
3.2.	Major Achievements, Policies and Lessons Learned	15
	3.2.1. Access to Education	15
	3.2.2. Quality of Education	17
	3.2.3. Equity in Education	18
	3.2.4. Learning Achievements	19
	3.2.5. Teacher Recruitment and Professional Development	19
3.3.	Role of the Education System in Combating Poverty, Social Exclusion and Cultural Marginalization	20
Unit 4.	Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future	21
4.1.	Legal Frameworks in relation to Inclusive Education	21
4.2.	Dimensions of the Phenomenon of Exclusion in Education	23
4.3.	Barriers to Inclusive Education	25
4.4.	Facilitators of Inclusive Education	26
4.5	Teacher Education in Support of Inclusive Education	28
Unit 5.	Conclusion	29
	References	30
	<i>Appendix 1: Map of Eritrea</i>	31

## **UNIT 1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the past 15 years since independence, the Government of Eritrea [GoE] expended various efforts to ensure educational opportunities to all citizens- children, youth and adults alike. Through these efforts, commendable achievements have been gained. Many children who have had no opportunity gained educational access. Schools have been constructed in many rural remote parts of the land. Policy documents that acknowledge and ensure every citizens right to free and compulsory basic education have been formulated. Curriculum that matches the development needs and strategies of the newly emergent Eritrea; and reflecting the core set of ideals of the liberation struggle such as self-reliance and creativity, has been put together.

However, these colossal efforts fell short of reaching all children, youth and adults. Educational access remained a little above 50 per cent. Nor could it recognize and respond to diversity among school children. As a result, many faced exclusion from participation or encountered learning barriers.

In response to these challenges, and in order to align educational priorities and practice with the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2002, the Government of Eritrea initiated a fundamental national education reform that spans all levels of education. The reform set new course of education; and a great deal of time, effort and resources are extended towards the achievement of the education reform.

Similarly, the GOE extended different efforts in order to address the educational needs of various historically disadvantaged groups, such as girls, children in remote areas and children with disabilities. The efforts include the developments of education in gender policy and strategy, pilot inclusive education program and complementary basic education. These efforts are, by and large, inclusive in orientation.

This national report, documents the achievements and challenges of the Eritrean system of education in the past 15 years of independence, with emphasis on the later part of the period which is setting new directions. In line with the requirements of the 48<sup>th</sup> session IBE conference theme - *Inclusive Education: The Way of the Future* it offers a picture on Eritrea's progress in inclusive Education. Moreover, to acquaint the reader with the contextual elements at play before and after independence, national education background is presented briefly.

## **UNIT 2: NATIONAL AND EDUCATION CONTEXT**

Education is not a new venture in Eritrea, a country along the Eastern Red Sea Coast, with a population size of about 4 million. Its beginnings can be traced back to religious, linguistic and cultural developments that were flourishing around the Horn of Africa. During these early times, skills, knowledge and values were transmitted from one generation to the next via oral means. Traditional teachings, for the purpose of reading and writing religious inscriptions were also common.

Nevertheless, the foundation for modern education has roots in European missionaries that arrived Eritrea in the middle of the nineteenth century. Historical books document that Swedish Evangelical Missionaries established a school around Massawa in 1866. Over the years, several political, social and economic factors and forces influenced its development and shaped its form.

By and large, Education in Eritrea started to encounter challenges and thereby take new dimensions in the 60s to 80s. Ethiopian annexation of Eritrea in 1962 brought new political dynamics in the country. The Ethiopian government waged war and created mayhem in order to put-off Eritrean people's resistance to occupation. As a result of chaos that followed, many Eritreans either joined the resistance or fled into neighbouring countries such as the Sudan. Moreover, many of the schools were changed in to military garrison and others were destroyed due to war.

In 1991, when Eritrea was liberated, the Provisional Government of Eritrea inherited a system of education ravaged by war and drained by systematic neglect. During the protracted war of independence [1962-1991], even though small in number, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front [EPLF] had established schools and adult literacy programs in liberated areas of the country. These provisions emphasized self-reliance, perseverance and social justice, in line with the doctrines of the EPLF.

The GoE, right after liberation, started expending efforts to ensure educational access to all citizens. These efforts, by and large, recognize the fact that education is an instrument to create modern, technologically advanced and internationally competitive economy and socially just state. The government formulated transitional education policy directions and charted strategic programs in line with national development objective and strategies of the new country.

Despite debilitating infrastructural, human and material resources, through a decade [1991 – 2002] long venture, access expanded, policy of mother tongue education established, teachers' number and capacity enhanced. In spite of all these efforts,

access remained very small. Moreover, the system continued to produce graduates with no job credentials. High repetition and drop out characterized as its features. The education system was unresponsive to local situations and needs, and heavily relied on traditional pedagogical approaches.

In 1998, war engulfed many of Eritrea's southern regions. The border war with Ethiopia, which continued up to 2000 and the ensuing 'no war- no peace' circumstances at present brought new contextual havoc to the one that was subsiding. In areas bordering the war many families were displaced from their habitat and live in make-shift tents. These new contextual elements hampered national and education development, and engendered dramatic demographic and social alterations in the national environment.

Equally, the 21<sup>st</sup> century brought new realities and challenges, including globalization, technological and cultural changes. Thus, in response to the challenges of the post liberation educational practice [1991-2002], and new demands and priorities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2002, the GoE initiated a fundamental national education reform program at all levels. The reform has set a new course for education.

However, the context bears many elements that affect the momentum of the reform process, and put children's learning and participation at risk. These contextual risks include orphan hood, displacement, poverty. For instance,

- Orphan hood affects a significant proportion of under 15 years of age children;
- Many Eritreans livelihood is dependent on subsistence farming which relies heavily on rainfall and requires children's labour;
- The illiteracy rate is very high among the adult population; etc.

These ensuing social, cultural and economic challenges, including population density variation in many areas incurred by nomadic or semi-nomadic life style, enlarge the need as well as resources required to extend educational access and other services to all areas and citizens. This stretches far beyond the current capacity of the government.

### **UNIT 3. THE EDUCATION SYSTEM FACING THE CHALLENGES OF 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: AN OVERVIEW.**

#### **3.1. Major Reforms Introduced in the Education System**

Since Eritrea's liberation in 1991, the [GoE] exerted various efforts to broaden educational opportunities for all its citizens. The Macro Policy paper of 1994 stipulates, the fact that education and training are instruments to human capital formation - a

human capital that derive a modern, technologically advanced and internationally competitive economy.

It formulated transitional policy directions and charted strategic programs in line with national development objectives and strategies of the new emergent country. The drafted policy directions and the charted strategic programs, largely, are based on development needs of the emergent state of Eritrea and the core set of ideals that guided the liberation struggle: 'self-reliance'. These policy directions and program strategies, mainly designed to resuscitate the emptied system of education, served for more than 10 years, 1999 – 2002.

However, with the emergence of the 21<sup>st</sup> century these post liberation educational directions and practices become more and more exclusionary and heed little to present national realities and demands. Thus, in response to these challenges of the post liberation educational practice, and new demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in 2002, the GoE initiated a fundamental national education reform program at all levels. The National Education Reform [RATEES, 2002] pronounces:

- All wastage of manpower, resources, effort and time in the educational system must be abolished in as much as it is humanly possible.
- All doors and opportunities must be open to Eritreans of all ages to develop to their full potential both professionally and personally.
- Education must be employment oriented such that at the end of any level of education any person can find gainful employment commensurate with the person's level of education and training.
- The standards and quality of education and training in the education system must be high enough such that products of the educational system would have a high degree of acceptability in the international arena of education and employment.

This education reform - Rapid Transformation of the Eritrean Education System [RATEES] - set a new course for Eritrean system of education. It provided guides for actions for the new direction: i.e. in the curriculum design, learning organization and management.

### **3.1.1. Legal Framework of Education**

Over the years, the GOE has established national and sectoral legal frameworks to guide various aspects of the education course. These legal framework documents assure that every citizen has the right to free and quality education at least at the basic education level. **Article 21** of the Eritrean Constitution states that, education is a right, and hence, guarantees all citizens the right of equal access to publicly funded social services, such as education.

Similarly, the revised National Policy on Education of 2003, heir to transition period Declaration of Policies on Education of 1991, affirms that “Education is a fundamental human right and a lifelong process by which all individuals are given opportunities to attain their potential as all rounded citizens.”

These policy orientations are firmly rooted in the Marco Policy [1994] objectives of the government which considers the “realization of broad-based education incorporating widespread dissemination of skills and languages and extensive human capital formation” as essential requisites for a modern, technologically advanced and internationally competitive economy and state.

In line with these national orientations thus, the National Policy on Education states that:

- the provision of eight years of basic education is compulsory to all school-age children, and it is free of charge;
- Five year Elementary education is compulsory for all citizens; and
- Education will be made all-inclusive and that the government will work towards realizing equitable educational opportunities to all citizens irrespective of rural-urban, regional and ethnic differences [MoE, 2003].

The National Policy on Education also gives due consideration to other levels and forms of education provision, including Early Childhood Care and Education, Adult Education and TVET. The policy objective stipulates that:

- Early Childhood Care and Education [ECCE] is an integral part of wider educational process, and the government makes every effort to expanding and improving the provision;
- Technical Education and Vocational Training [TVET] and Tertiary Education provision will be expanded to meet skilled and high level professional and skilled manpower requirement of the growing economy;
- Adult and continuing education, through formal and non-formal channels, will be expanded, diversified and integrated in to the mainstream of national education to achieve higher literacy rates and competence.

These legal frameworks, and the country's commitment to international community's instrumental documents, such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child [CRC], Millennium Development Goals [MDGs] and Dakar Framework for Action on Education For All [EFA], attest that education is considered both as a right in its own and an instrument to bring economic prosperity and establish social justice.



In recognition of these legal frameworks, commitments and present national development needs, the GoE charted a National Education Sector Development Program [ESDP] for the period 2005-2009. The program provides a tangible way to implement government's strategies, and provides a framework for the design of specific interventions including their scale, scope and cost. ESDP reaffirms these objectives, and covers the following areas:

- Increase equitable access to basic and secondary education;
- Improve the quality of basic and secondary education;
- Develop vocational, technical and technological skills; and
- Strengthen institutional capacity to deliver better quality education services.

### **3.1.2. The Management and Organization of Education**

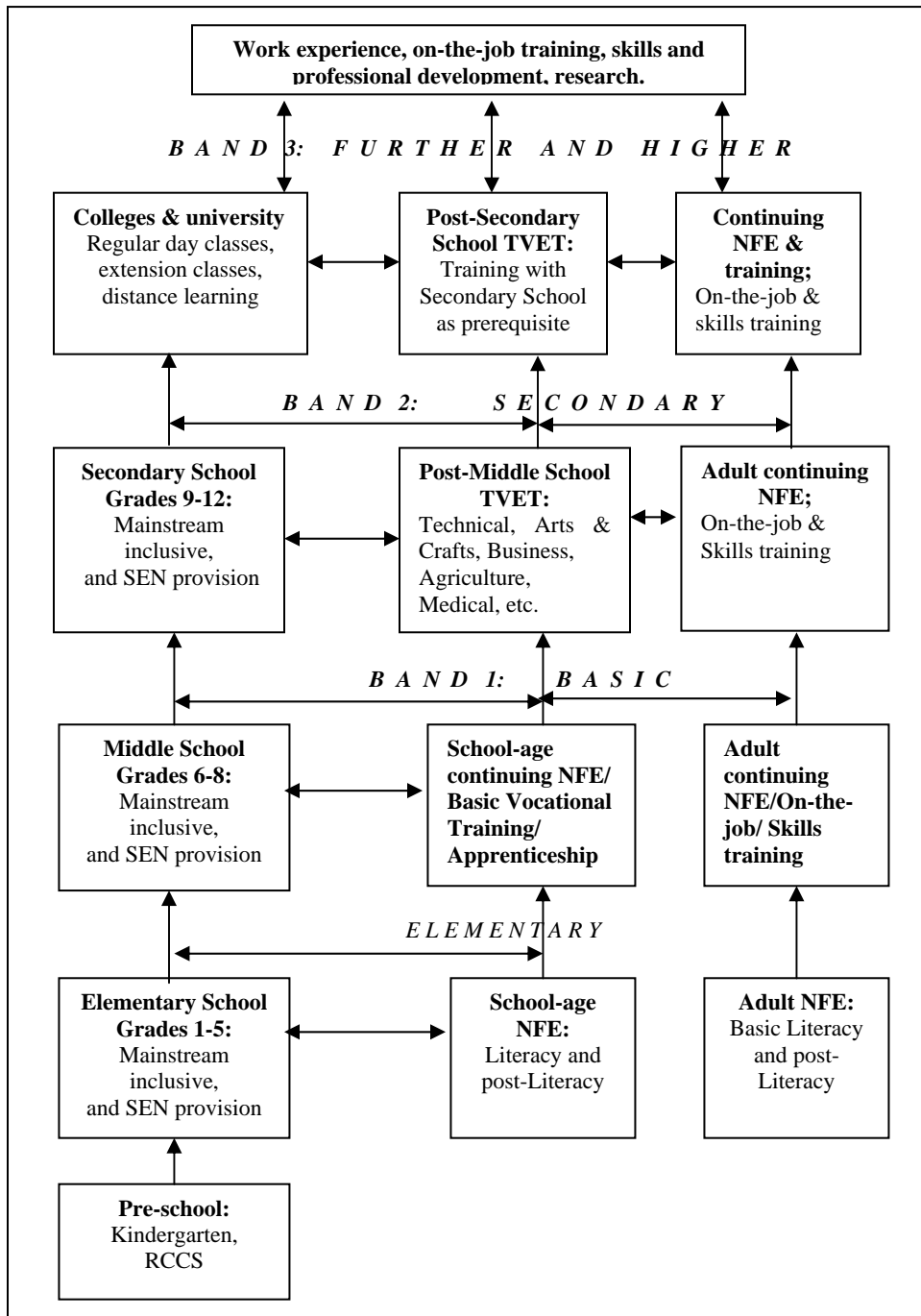
The National Education Reform [RATEES] represents government's vision to the promotion of access to quality education for all citizens. Thus, a Curriculum Framework that represents the objectives and spirit of the reform has been designed. To facilitate the implementation thus, a new dynamic four level or band structure was devised.

This four level structure consists of Basic, Secondary, Further and Higher education levels, with some overlap between Further and Higher levels, and allows for combination of formal and non-formal provision. It also makes sufficient provision for horizontal mobility between formal and non-formal learning activities, thereby facilitating the move towards an integrated system of education and training.

The successful implementation of these new intertwined structures in line with the objectives require smooth and coordinated administrative and implementation structures. Thus, to manage the different sub-systems, and themes in education development, the Ministry has been structured into five departments, namely: Department of General Education, Research and Human Resource Development, Technical Education and Vocational Training, Department of Administration and Finance, and Adult and Media Education Department. These departments as well as the Minister's office incorporate divisions and units.

Furthermore, in line with the government's scheme of decentralization of governance and management of state structure apparatus, as well as the new demands both at the national, regional and community/village levels, the Zoba/Regional Education branch offices have the responsibility to perform the operational activities including performance reporting system, monitoring quality and effectiveness has been established.

Table1: The Structure of the Eritrean education system



### 3.1.3. The Aims and Purpose of Education at Each Level

The broad visions of the GoE inform the overall education objectives. The objectives of the education provision in Eritrea are:

- To produce a population equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and culture for a self-reliant and modern economy;
- To develop self-conscious and self-motivation in the population to fight poverty, disease , and all the attendant causes of backwardness and ignorance;
- To make basic education available for all.

**Early Childhood Care and Education:** ECCE is an essential component of the national education system. The overall aim of the ECCE system in Eritrea is to promote children's rights to survival, growth, psychosocial and cognitive development. In line with this vision, the provision also strives to maximize children's readiness to start school as a firm foundation for later education.

Current ECCE services encompass a two-year comprehensive and integrated learning program for kindergartens, or a one-year integrated rural community care service and parenting support. ECCE provisions are made to children from 4 to 6 years.

The strategies of these learning centres emphasize a holistic view of the needs of young children, and hence, promote all round development, the assurance of basic human rights to every child, early intervention, activity based learning, and individual response to differing needs of children.

**Elementary Level Education:** The Formal Elementary Level Education is a five-year school cycle with mother tongue serving as medium of instruction. The main purpose of this form of education is to give all children a firm ground in essential learning; and thereby establish a foundation for further learning and growth.

The parallel Non-formal Basic Education is intended to address the learning needs of adults [mainly ages 15-45], out-of-school youth and overage school children who for various reasons could not complete or even begin schooling. The main focus of non-formal basic education programmes is literacy and numeracy, with provision for continuation in two year post literacy and skills/vocational training in an area of need or interest. Both formal and non-formal Elementary Education promote a sound base for human resource development.

The aims of this level of education are:

- To promote national awareness and support the development of Eritrean national outlook

- To provide basic communication and life skills [including literacy and numeracy] appropriate to every context
- To encourage the development of socially desirable values such as cooperation, responsibility, tolerance and service to others.
- To offer the necessary knowledge, skills, values and attitudes for the holistic development of the individual and for lifelong learning and productive work in adult life.
- To lay the foundation for an understanding and appreciation of science and technology together with the promotion of care and concern for the environment. [MoE, 2008]

**Middle Level Education:** This level represents the end of Basic Education cycle. Middle level has both formal and non formal forms of provision. Formal Middle level education offers a broad-based general education with opportunities for exposure to practically oriented learning experiences. It spans three years in length. The non-formal form of Middle School provision allows for a diversity of learning provision while at the same time making it possible for learners to move between formal and non-formal learning activities.

On completion of the Basic Level, an assessment of learning standards through National Examination is conducted. The National Examination also serves as entrance for secondary school. The middle level educational provision has the following aims:

- To further develop national consciousness, unity and loyalty to the nation
- To consolidate the development of basic communication and problem-solving skills.
- To foster the spirit of creativity, self-confidence and self-reliance in individual learners.
- To prepare learners for social and civic responsibilities within a framework of democracy and social justice.
- To provide learners with knowledge, skills, values and attitudes necessary for personal development and productive work.
- To prepare a sound basis for further learning and human resource development.
- To promote the study of science and technology along with the development of values and attitudes for responsible utilization of the environment [MoE, 2008].

**Secondary Level Education:** Secondary education aims at both preparation for further education and the world of work. At this level, the curriculum provision is guided by general core conceptions of balance between content and transferable skills. This level has both formal and non-formal forms of provision as well. In the Formal Secondary Education structure learners are offered four year curriculum provisions of core, enrichment and advanced placement courses. Work related practical studies with

relevance to individual learner interests and work-related development needs are an integral part of this curriculum provision.

On completion of secondary education, school leavers can have the option of either seeking employment or pursuing further education and training in a less differentiated division between academic and vocational pathways.

In line of these orientations, secondary education has the following aims:

- To foster national consciousness and cohesion through an informed and enlightened understanding of the Eritrean People's collective culture, experience and aspirations.
- To offer the necessary knowledge, understanding and skills, and the application of these abilities to meet personal and societal challenges.
- To instil a sense of self-discipline, self-confidence, self-reliance, creativity, initiative and personal responsibility.
- To assist learners to appreciate and assume civic and social responsibilities in line with the principles of democracy, social justice and service to the nation and to others.
- To promote the development of the learners' potential in line with their needs and interests.
- To enable learners to develop skills of problem solving, inquiry, information gathering, analysis, interpretation, communication and other essential learning process.
- To lay a firm foundation for further education and the world of work.
- To prepare a sound basis for an understanding and appreciation of science and technology together with the development of knowledge, values, attitudes and commitment to protect and improve the environment. [MoE, 2008]

**Technical Education and Vocational Training:** The MoE has been exerting efforts to produce semi-skilled and skilled workers with the aim of creating opportunities for gainful employment. Thus, this program with the main aims of providing the technical and vocational knowledge and skills necessary for agricultural, industrial, commercial, infrastructural and service sector development needs of the country, and thereby lay a firm foundation for producing a pool of skilled, disciplined, adaptable and technologically aware workers with the potential of effecting qualitative improvements in the life of Eritrean people.

In addition to these formal forms of TVET, non-formal skills development and training forms are also available. Women, youth and other disadvantaged groups of the population are main beneficiaries of this scheme.

There is a three-tiered structure for delivery of TVET: basic, intermediate and advanced. The duration of the programs ranges from one year to three.

**Further and Higher Levels of Education:** With respect to this level, there is a network of an expanded system of institutions of further and higher education. The main function of these institutions is to attain skilled manpower, consolidate the transition from school to work and provide opportunities for continuing learning. These institutions offer a wide range of courses and programmes leading to certificates, diplomas and degrees. Progression routes are available for graduates of one programme to pursue further studies and training in the same or different institutions. The programs in further and higher education include research activities relevant to the socio-economic development of the country.

#### **3.1.4. Curricular policies, Content and Teaching and Learning Strategies**

The new national curriculum is designed to offer broad, balanced and relevant learning. In order to reflect these broad ideals, the curriculum gives due consideration to the following themes:

- Holistic development of individual learners through the growth of their aesthetic and physical abilities as well as the social, moral and cultural needs;
- Science and technology and its application to everyday life in view of the foreseeable trends and demands of the future;
- Forging cohesive Eritrean national culture that respects Eritrea's multi-cultural nature, and
- Incorporating common core of social values [eg. Self-reliance, self-confidence, commitment and perseverance] which flourished during the liberation struggle for independence.

The curriculum offers learners a set of core learning areas organized and sequenced spirally along the levels. Expected Learning Outcomes and Competencies defined in every subject for each grade level ensure such spiral progression.

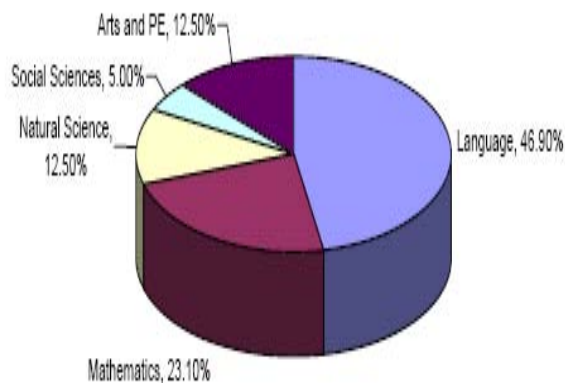
To ensure accessibility as well, the curriculum outlines that mother tongue serves as language of instruction in Elementary schools. Starting from Middle School level, English serves as the medium of education for this helps Eritrea to play its full part in global community through education and training, science and technology and international

relations. Learners are required as well to develop sufficient competence in English and Arabic by the end of Basic education cycle.

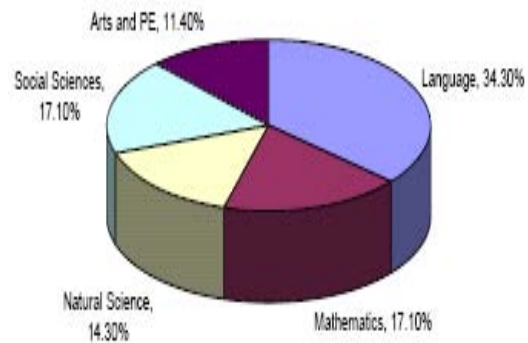
Moreover, the curriculum reform in its planning and organization gives due precedence to:

- Cross-curriculum themes such as environmental Education which give the curriculum unity beyond subject divisions;
- Subject integration to show the holistic approach to learning, and the relationship that exists between subjects;
- Co-curricular programs such as the development of affective values, cooperation, and team spirit to complement and strengthen the learning that occurs within the context of formal curriculum.

To a great extent, time allocation in the formal education curriculum reflects the weighting given to the various components of the curriculum at the different levels in the school system. Time allocation for different learning areas in the National Curriculum show that over 66 per cent of curriculum time at Elementary school level is allocated to the learning of basic skills [i.e. literacy and numeracy]. At Middle level the time allocated to mother tongue education at Elementary level is shifted to provide more time for the teaching of mathematics, science and social studies.



Time Allocation for Elementary Level



Time Allocation for Middle Level

Another peculiar feature of the education reform is its emphasis on learner-centred and interactive pedagogic approaches in the delivery of curriculum content. This pedagogic strategy is outlined in the Guidelines on Learner-centred and Interactive Pedagogy in the National Curriculum. Furthermore, the process of monitoring progress and achievement is applied through the use of multi-faceted continuous assessment techniques that include oral/written work, project, and dialogue.

### 3.2. Major Achievements, policies and Lessons Learned

In the past 15 years since independence, despite debilitating infrastructure and resource base, educational opportunities expanded to vast areas. The GoE invested enormous human and material capital to extend equitable provision as set out in a 5 year programme [2005-2009: Education Sector Development Program – ESDP].

Commendable achievements have been gained so far in terms of access, at all levels. All these opportunities made available to children, youth and adults at all levels of education, however, must be seen in relation to the resource available to support such endeavour and the annually growing population and demand size in education. The achievements made so far, witness Eritrea's commitment towards the realization of the goals of EFA and MDGs.

#### 3.2.1. Access to Education

School enrolment has significantly increased at all levels. In 2006/07 academic year, the enrolment figures reached over 500,000 from just 208,274 students at Eritrea's liberation of 1991/92. All school levels achieved a substantial increment, but the enrolments were by far substantial at Basic Education level, in line with realization of National Development Plans and fulfilling the EFA and CRC commitments.

**Pre-primary Level:** In 2000, the GoE invested in Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development program. Through such program, provisions of ECCE showed rapid growth. A number of new pre-school centres have been established all over the country. Moreover, the capacity of the teaching force in these centres enhanced.

	2000/01		2003/04		2006/07	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Population age 5-6	104,926	96,475	106,339	97,263	88,291	80,787
Net enrolment ratio	4.5	4.4	6.4	6.5	14.6	15.0

In 2006.07, there were 477 governmental and non-governmental Community Care Giving and kindergarten centres fairly distributed over all the regions. A majority of these, about 328, are located in rural areas, and they are Rural Community Children's centres.

The teaching forces in these establishments largely are females, and 696 of the total 1067 had professional training. At this level, private or non-governmental community's contribution is significant and makes about 22 %.



**Elementary and Middle Levels:** Over the years, the education system witnessed a gradual increase in enrolment at this level. In Elementary level children of the age range 7-11 are enrolled. Currently, the net admission ratio for children of age 7 at grade 1 is about 25.2%; whereas the net enrolment ratio at this level is 55.0%.

	2000/01		2003/04		2006/07	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Population age 7-11	248,232	238,407	268,340	254,635	258,858	238,904
Net enrolment ratio	44.7	39.8	54.4	48.3	51.5	48.4

Similarly, enrolment at middle school level has increased in the previous years. The net enrolment ratio at this level is about 23.3 percent. In addition to expanding education, the MoE is undertaking efforts to enhance progression rates of students at all levels.

	2000/01		2003/04		2006/07	
	M	F	M	F	M	F
Population age 12-14	84,683	84,945	136,804	137,210	178,807	152,731
Net enrolment ratio	49.0	41.3	53.9	35.9	45.7	38.9

However, enrolment disparities do prevail along urban-rural and gender lines. In urban areas, girls have equal enrolment rates as boys, but girls' proportion slide down with increase of grade level. Girls are likely to drop at higher levels of education than boys. In predominantly rural and remote regions of the country, although educational opportunities have been provided, girls do not access as much as the boys.

**Secondary Education:** Usually, learners ages 15-18 are enrolled at this level. Secondary education received considerable attention in the past few years under the Education Reform Program. Integrated secondary education, which gives considerable focus to science and technology and information and communication technologies in the delivery of core and enrichment subjects to prepare students for employment or further vocational training, has been expanding.

Thus, the number of these schools and enrolment at these schools has been rising. In the year 2006/07, under such scheme there were 75,800 students. The gross enrolment ratio for this level is about 21.4%; where as the net enrolment is 14.2%. There are significant distinctions between girls' and boys net enrolment at this level: 25.6% for boys and 17.1% for girls. At this level, the trend of flow rates in terms of repetition and promotion is enhanced, whereas the high drop out rate yet remains to be a challenge.

**Technical Education and Vocational Training:** Since 2003, TVET became more diversified in type and enhanced in number in line with the recommendations of the national education reform. Thus, the number of centres serving such children rose from just 1 at liberation to 33 in the year 2006/07. In these centres, there are about 1499 learners attending different courses or skills. The private sector makes significant contribution in this regard.

Technical and Vocational Education: enrolment by gender and year						
Level	2000/01		2003/04		2006/07	
	Tot	F	Tot	F	Tot	F
Advanced	359	110	160	32	208	93
Intermediate Technical	1014	228	1210	333	1085	481
Intermediate Agricultural	292	66	495	148	195	101

**Adult Education:** Eritrea has scored substantial progress in adult literacy sector. In the early 90s, adult literacy was provided in small fragmented projects in association with national civic organizations such National Union of Eritrean Women. Since 1998/99, it has been launched as a national program under the auspices of the MoE. This program has two phases, literacy and post-literacy, which focus on acquisition of literacy, numeracy, science and social studies. The literacy program is further supported by radio broadcast. The radio broadcast disseminates its programs in four local languages.

In 2006/07, there were 70,532 attendants of the adult literacy program in 1078 centres. Of these attendants, 62,554 are females. About 77 rural libraries were also established to support post literacy activities and to control the relapse to illiteracy. A total of 291,384 youth and adult learners attended literacy programs since it was nationally launched in 1998. The main participants remained to be women, making about 91% of the total. Though adult enrolment continue to rise in the period, non-completion [attrition] is seen to be high, and hence few progress to the next phase of adult education. Despite these achievements, about one half the adult population yet remain illiterate.

Recent heavy investments in Basic Education, and the favourable policy environments created by the recent education reform, has effect on the proportion of out of school children. Through the past efforts, the percentage of out of school children [year 7-11] has dropped from 75.19 per cent in 1991/92 to 46.63 per cent.

### **3.2.2. Quality of Education Provision**

Research studies have indicated that the curriculum being phased out, was too academic, and was organized and delivered as a preparation for the pursuit of higher education rather than meeting the learners' general education needs and skills of development. Thus, since many learners did not attain the learning achievement targets, they either failed or dropped out. The studies further point out that, the underachievement exhibit regional and urban-rural variations. National MLA (Monitoring Learning Achievement) [2001] study points out that statistically significant differential attainment have been observed along town schools and village schools.

A new national curriculum framework has been drafted in response to these challenges. Under the new scheme, the principal quality enhancing measures followed by the MoE include:

- Revision of curricula with a focus on standards for expected learning outcomes and vertical as well as horizontal integration of subjects;
- Provision of adequate text books and learning materials, consistent with new curricula;
- Increasing school leadership and teacher competencies through systematic and well-targeted in-service staff development programs on the new curricula, teaching methods, continuous assessment, as well as language proficiency;
- Reduction in class size through the provision of additional classrooms,
- Enhancing the school and classroom environment, a great number of schools buildings made of palm mats and branches were rehabilitated, supplied with furniture, equipment, latrines and water;
- Strengthening the school support system, such as science laboratories, libraries and pedagogic resource centres,

### **3.2.3. Equity in Education**

The GoE has extended significant efforts to reach all children and learners who have been excluded from education. Hence, the MoE employed various approaches, including: diversification of the educational provision, ensuring its relevance, formulation of policies and guidelines that ensure the right to quality education, sensitization and awareness raising to enable the public utilize the windows of opportunities utmost level and advancing inclusive education.

In recognition of barriers to girls' participation and success in school, the MoE in the past years has taken various measures. These measures, in entirety, plan to integrate gender issues in the curriculum, overcome the attitudinal barriers and alleviate inhibiting

factors such as poverty and domestic responsibilities of girls and women. The following are some of the measures:

- Drafted a National Education Gender Policy and Strategy,
- Prepared a communication strategy,
- Introduced incentive schemes and allocated funds towards this end.

Similarly, in recent years, the MoE has initiated Complementary Basic Education program for out-of-school children and youth. Under such scheme, children aged 14-15 who have had no access to education benefited. Early non-formal assessments of this program show that children less than 15 years of age make up over 70 per cent of these learning centres. This scheme has created an alternative route for out of school children to pursue Basic Education.

Moreover, the GoE has initiated similar development programs and activities to ensure equity- both in terms of access and outcome, including: Pilot Special Needs Education within the Concept of Inclusive Education program in [2003-2005], HIV/AIDS Life Skills Based Education program and Multi-grade Teaching in remote rural schools around the country.

### 3.2.4. Learning Achievements

The introduction of new curriculum in conjunction with learner-centred and interactive pedagogical approaches has improved students' learning outcome. Promotion rate has increased. Drop out and failure, in general, has been reduced as well. The promotion rate for Elementary, Middle and Secondary schools in 2006/7 was respectively 78.5%, 77.9%, and 82.2%.

Drop out, Repetition and promotion at elementary and middle levels												
	2000/01						2006/07					
	Dropout %		Repetition %		Promotion %		Dropout %		Repetition %		Promotion %	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Elementary	6.5	6.1	22.1	23.9	71.5	70.0	6.2	4.8	16.1	15.1	76.5	79.1
Middle	9.9	10.3	20.7	26.6	68.8	63.0	7.8	6.1	15.9	14.0	76.4	80.0

### 3.2.5. Teacher Recruitment and Professional Development

Teacher qualification and motivation determines the quality of education provision. The number of qualified teachers and school management personnel has increased over the past years. The teaching force in schools has increased over the past 15 years from 5188 at liberation in 1991 to 11,189 in 2006/07 academic year. The majority serve at

Elementary and Middle levels. Female teachers are quite a minority, particularly at higher levels.

The MoE trains teachers in the two teacher education establishments. Teacher education is free, but admission to these teacher education establishments usually requires completion of secondary school. Nonetheless, Middle schools face a real shortage of qualified teachers. The total annual output of the teacher education colleges couldn't meet the demands created due to the expansion and reform of the education system. The education sector continued to face constraint in this regard both in terms of number and quality of training, particularly at basic education levels.

Proportion of Qualified and Unqualified Teachers by Year						
Level	2000/01		2003/04		2006/07	
	Total	Qualified %	Total	Qualified %	Total	Qualified %
Elementary	6,668	70.5	8,033	83.1	6,933	87.1
Middle	1,377	35.3	2,241	28.2	2,478	36.8
Secondary	1,188	73.1	1,645	78.6	1,778	85.5

In recognition of these challenges, and in line with the demands of the new curriculum, the MoE has taken initiatives to produce qualified and well-trained teachers. The measures taken include:

- Development of Teacher Education and Development Master Plan;
- Expanding college education,
- Provision of in-service staff development programs in order to upgrade teachers professionally and flourish a culture of interactive and learner-centred pedagogic practice. These initiatives are mostly school based, cost-effective and continuous in their feature.

As part of Distance Education Program for Elementary Teachers [DEPETE], the MoE trained a large number of 'uncertified' elementary school teachers. Recently, the MoE has launched Open and Distance Education Programs as part of the in-service training. About 2000 middle school teachers will be upgraded to the diploma level.

### **3.3. Role of Education System in Combating Poverty, Social Exclusion and Cultural marginalization**

The Eritrean context bears social and economic challenges, such as poverty, displacement and orphan hood. The 1998 war the and prevailing 'no war, no peace' situation also caused psychological damage to children, affected education systems, and engendered demographic and social alterations. Moreover, illiteracy and negative cultural

beliefs and practices do prevail in the population. These challenges perpetuate poverty, marginalization and exclusion.

In recognition of these social, economical, psychological and cultural challenges, the government has been taking various measures. The MLHW has been:

- Re-integrating orphans with relatives, and thereby enabling them to continue their education;
- Providing vocational training for street children;
- Providing financial support for street children to continue their education;

Similarly, the MoE in collaboration with development partners has been:

- Providing incentives for girls to continue their education;
- Providing material support for poor communities in collaboration with UNICEF;
- Transforming technical and vocational education in to three levels to enhance employability and thereby combat poverty;
- Expansion of formal and non-formal education, making education more relevant through addition of enrichment subjects,
- Expansion of Early childhood education, complementary basic education, adult literacy, etc.;
- Introduction and integration of HIV/AIDS Life Skills Based Education; School based health and nutrition services in the education system.

#### **UNIT 4: INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: THE WAY OF THE FUTURE**

In the past 17 years after independence, the GoE has made a lot of efforts to extend educational opportunities to all citizens; and thereby ensure their educational right and strengthen their self-reliance and independence. The efforts expanded access at all levels of education. However, the great achievements fall short of reaching all out of school children. Many children and youth, particularly those in disadvantaged circumstances such as girls, children from families with nomadic/semi-nomadic life styles, children with disability as well as those in poor economic status, still face exclusion. In recognition of these challenges, the MoE has prepared some documents and initiated various programs which are inclusive in orientation and practice.

#### **4.1. Policies Related to Inclusive Education**

Inclusive education, in its entirety as holistic educational development approach to overcome educational exclusion, emerged in Eritrea at the turn of this century in relation to developments in special needs education provision. In 2001, the MoE initiated a pilot program, Special Needs Education within the Concept of Inclusive Education- with the objective:

- To inform policy trends and strategies developed in the field of inclusive education over the decades; and
- To provide a conceptual background for the proposed strategy for the development and implementation of inclusive education in Eritrea.

The paper describes special needs education broadly as an approach to meeting the educational needs of multi-faceted target groups of children with barriers to learning ... SNE is a strategy within the overall conceptual framework of inclusive education [Dyssegard, 2001].

The Eritrean system of education also possesses features –be it in practice or orientation- which is inclusive in nature besides this initiative. The education reform, RATEES, for instance, entitles every citizen to an education that enables to reach his/her maximum potential. To this end, the paper further stipulates, “it will open all opportunities to ensure access to quality education for all, including the gifted, children with disabilities, and those with learning difficulties.”

The revised National Education Policy of 2003 affirms also that “Education in Eritrea is a fundamental human right and a lifelong process ...” This document explains further that sustainable development cannot be realized without the full and equal participation of all social groups, and hence:

“All citizens, irrespective of differences in gender, ethnicity and language, and location, will have equal access to educational opportunities and will have the opportunity to pass grades automatically once they join the system. With the consideration of individual differences, support will be provided for the needy students” [MoE, 2003].

Similarly, other policy documents, such as National Education Gender Policy and Strategy, A Concept paper for Complementary Basic Education for out of School Children, Education Sector HIV/AIDS Policy and Action Plan promote the ideals and practices of inclusive education, even though technically they are crafted for specific target populations.

For instance, National Education Gender Policy and Strategy, drafted in recognition of gender imbalances in enrolment, progression and outcome of education at all levels and forms of the education system, aims at:

- Mainstreaming of gender issues in the national educational process in order to eliminate the imbalances and inequalities of access and success between boys and girls.
- Advance an educational and social environment in which girls and boys can realize their full potential in contributing to the national development goals.
- Promote equality of access to both sexes and ensure their success at all levels- formal and non-formal education and training.
- Promote equality an equity, efficiency, partnership, pluralism, unity, and harmony in the educational system and other affairs.
- Alleviate the social, cultural and economic barriers that hinder girls from access to, full participation in and achievement of their potentials in gaining knowledge and skills in all fields of education and trainings.
- Develop a society where women and men can influence, participate in, and benefit equality from development process.
- Engender the educational curricula, teaching force and learning materials, as well as extra curricular activities and facilities.
- Apply affirmative action in compensating for the drawbacks that girls encounter arising from their historically disadvantage position concerning their enrolment and performance in education and training.
- Make the necessary facilities available suitable for women and others in special situations such as disability.
- Ensure that the education system is responsive to the specific circumstances of minority groups, people in remote places, nomadic and semi-nomadic communities, returnees, displaced persons and others in similar disadvantage.
- Foster partnership in education provision, recognizing the national limitations of resources, including technology, human and funding. [Girls' Ed Pol, p10]

The concept paper on Complementary Basic Education also incorporates inclusive ideals. The proposed concept paper stipulates that:

“Complementary Basic Education [CBE] is education provided to out-of-school children of ages 10-14. ... It is the intended institutionalization of the practice of providing an education package equivalent to Elementary School for children of school going age [9-14] outside the formal school system...”

Besides, international commitments of the GoE, such as UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Millennium Development Goals and Dakar Framework for Education For All



[EFA] are instrumental in promoting the education of all children in general, children in disadvantaged circumstances in particular. Moreover, the MoE has initiated inclusive education policy and strategy development in year 2008.

#### **4.2. Dimensions of the Phenomenon of Exclusion in Education**

**Low Rates of Enrolment:** Even though basic education is compulsory and free the national participation rate, year 2006/07 EMIS data indicate, is just a little above 50 per cent. Of the eligible 497,762 school children aged 7-12, only 248,782 have gained educational access. At all levels, a large proportion remains out of school. There is no school for these children to attend. The past efforts couldn't bridge the gap, the resources required to extend access stretch beyond the capacity of the government. The net enrolment for elementary, middle and secondary school levels is 50.0%, 23.3% and 14.2% respectively.

Shortage of classrooms or schools also has effect on children and youth who gained educational access. These students have to travel long distances, in certain cases in harsh environmental and weather conditions, to reach to school. The distance the learners have to travel from home to reach school increases as learners' progress to higher levels of education.

There are variations also along gender and rural-urban lines in opportunities of access. Children and youth from rural regions are more likely to be excluded. Girls, particularly those from nomadic family life styles or rural neighbourhoods, far linger behind in the enrolment statistics. The disparity becomes even wider as learners progress to higher grades.

Similarly, Ministry of Labour and Human Welfare (MLHW) reports indicate that many children in disadvantaged circumstances such as orphans and street children remain out of school. For instance, National Survey Report of MLHW [2001] on orphans indicates that more than one third of the group sampled had never been to school; and those who are in schools, their learning is affected.

**The curriculum:** Different studies have indicated that the phased out curriculum emphasises content; and it had little relevance for learner's life situation. Moreover, traditional frontal teaching styles characterised it. MoE studies, for instance, point out that as much as 15.1% first graders repeat in grade1. Still a significant proportion of other students repeat two or more years to complete the elementary cycle.

The curriculum reform undergoing has features which overcome some of the exclusionary elements. Teachers have started also to employ learner-centred teaching

techniques in their interaction with students. However, it takes time before the new approaches are firmly established as a culture.

**Non conducive classrooms and School Environment:** Many schools work in double-shift, and have large class sizes. This bears marked difficulty for teachers who make round from class to class to teach for just about 40 minutes. Teachers barely identify their students' educational needs in such kind of teaching organization. Many schools also lack water and latrine facilities, and are not fenced. In certain regions, seasonality and extreme hot weather have been identified as factors for children's irregular attendance. School hours and academic calendar do not suit 'migration' patterns of certain group of population. Similarly, resource limitations affect classroom maintenance and supplies of teaching materials.

**Poor Educational Support Scheme:** Support services, such as pedagogic resource centres, libraries, and laboratory rooms, are seldom available. In the case of children with disabilities, those in special schools or those pursuing through a default integration scheme, the curriculum makes insufficient provision of learning materials and equipments to maximize their learning. Learning support scheme is seldom available for children facing barriers in learning.

### **4.3. Barriers to Inclusive Education.**

Various studies of GoE have identified economic, social and political factors, besides the in-school factors, that inhibit children's participation and success in school. These factors are entwined and dynamic in character.

**Economic Factors:** Poverty is the most fundamental factor affecting children's participation and learning. In many rural communities, family livelihoods depend on children's contribution ranging from tending animals to looking after young siblings. In impoverished urban neighbourhoods children are engaged in different jobs to support family's income. These parents find the design and the delivery of the education system unfit with their particular life needs, and hence usually their children miss school. All these cases limit children's participation, and impact their learning achievement and competence even if they are in school.

**Social Factors:** Different stereotypes, beliefs, and value systems do exist among the general public and in different cultures of Eritrea which negatively affect children's learning and participation. In certain areas, traditional beliefs discriminate against girls' participation in school. Traditional assumptions which assert that a 'normal' school is no place for children with disabilities are common among the public.

**Political Challenges:** The 1998 border war with Eritrea's southern neighbour and the ensuing 'no war, no peace' order have continued to challenge the government's efforts in many aspects. The war brought damage, and caused disruption in the social fabric. During the war, children witnessed atrocities, and a significant proportion of southern population is internally displaced and lives in tents. The war has destroyed schools and school systems thereby causing disruption to educational opportunities. It has brought emotional and developmental challenge to children. These factors severely limit government's capacity to provide educational opportunities to all citizens.

All these in-school and out-of school factors affect all children's learning, however, in such circumstances there are groups of children who disproportionately face exclusion from participation or facing learning barriers once enrolled in school. They include:

- Girls who are not utilizing the opportunities available, or those facing learning breakdown because of heavy domestic responsibilities.
- Other Disadvantaged groups including orphans, HIV affected and street children who are likely to drop out of school for not coping with the academic requirements and school schedules and guides;
- Children in remote areas and/or from nomadic or semi-nomadic communities who have to migrate from place to place with seasons;
- Children with disability, for whom only three special elementary schools for sensory impairments are the only available placements.

#### **4.4. Facilitators of Inclusive Education.**

Across the country, there have been many initiatives and transformations to improve the availability and quality of education to all groups. These activities have generated a range of examples that would be useful to policy making and school level practice in relation to inclusive education. The approaches in action include the recent education transformation and accompanying curriculum reform.

**National Education Transformation:** The rationale and the guiding principles of the education transformation, and subsequent National Curriculum Reform aspire to ensure all opportunities to all ages of Eritrean citizens to achieve their full potential both professionally and personally. This new direction benefits all children including those facing barriers in learning and participation. Some of the measures of the national reform which advance inclusive ideals and practice are:

- Efforts directed at making the National Curriculum relevant to learners,
- Delivery of the curriculum in learner-centred approaches;
- Provisions that allow horizontal transition between formal and non-formal education forms,

- Engendering the curriculum, etc.

**Language Policy:** Eritrea has a long tradition in respect to using children's mother tongue for the first introduction to literacy and reading. The trend started during the independence struggle in 70s in 'Biet Timhirti Sawra' [Revolution School]. The education reform reaffirms these commitments again. It requires that Elementary school children learn in their mother tongue. Towards such end, in the past years teachers having good command of local languages have been trained. However, the challenge in this regard remained to be shortage of printed reading supplementary books to support the practice.

**Pilot Inclusive Education Experiences:** Special education services for children with sensory disability started in the 50s by missionaries. Even though the practice remained similar over these years, children completing these elementary special schools are integrated into 'mainstream' middle school settings without adequate support. Teachers tried to help these children with special educational needs within their own capabilities.

Pilot Special Need Education within the Concept of Inclusive Education Program [2003] started with the aim of developing a model for wider replication. The program introduced various strategies to address the educational needs of children in classroom but facing exclusion. The strategies include:

- Enhanced awareness among the teaching profession about the issue of children facing exclusion;
- Emphasized child-centred teaching learning practice at pilot schools and classrooms for a brief time;
- New supportive accommodation scheme demonstrated in regular schools;
- Some Elementary school teachers received training and on-going support on the practice. In many cases, these groups acted as powerful advocates for the new approach.

**Multi-grade teaching:** This practice involves for one teacher to manage more than one class. The scheme is introduced in Elementary Schools where the number of students per class is far lower than that could be accommodated by the classroom. These cases are observed in sparsely populated rural regions of the country. Teachers are being trained, with themes for teaching different grades simultaneously. Even though these scheme is in its infancy, teachers who are able to teach two grades together, can easily tame their practice to accommodate the varying needs of children with different abilities within a classroom.

**National Education Gender Policy:** In line with the strategies of National Education Gender Policy, the MoE has started to mainstream gender issues in the curriculum. Capacity developments are initiated towards such effect. Moreover, to overcome the social factors that prevent girls from participating in education, the MoE has formulated a National Communication Strategy. The communication strategy when fully implemented will curb social factors inhibiting girls' participation in school.

**Complementary Basic Education:** This entry scheme serves children aged 10-14 from remote areas who never had the opportunities to attend school. This entry scheme, and accompanying guidelines which allow horizontal move between different structures, formal and non-formal education, is positive response for children facing difficulties.

**Early Childhood Development:** Investment in early childhood development enables children from rural impoverished neighbourhoods to bridge the gap in their socialization; they will have a positive effect on later children's life. The current emphasis of the integrated ECD program in remote rural regions of the country abolishes many risk factors.

**Community Based Rehabilitation experiences:** MLHW has been running community based rehabilitation program since 1995. The program has 1270 local supervisors actively participating in the program and has, so far, covered about 40 % of the entire country, particularly rural areas. This program has tried to address negative traditional attitudes towards people with disability, and mobilized resources to maximize their independence. The scheme has also brought many children with mild to moderate disabilities to schools.

#### **4.6. Teacher Education in Support of Inclusive Education**

Teachers' attitudes and skills are key factors to change. Indeed, in the past years, the total number of teachers increased significantly, and as a result, the student-teacher ratio improved at all levels. However, much remains to be done to satisfy the qualitative and quantitative needs. Teachers are apt to implement the curriculum in a fashion they have themselves studied and experienced. To address these challenges, the MoE has initiated in-service training programs for teachers in the areas of skill, knowledge and attitude through school-based and distance education schemes.

However, if teacher are to play the roles ascribed to them in the new curriculum, as well as in inclusive practices, then:

- In-service training which familiarizes them with new approaches must be enhanced on school-basis;

- Sufficient awareness raising programmes must be conducted to maintain positive attitude as well as motivation towards children facing exclusion;
- Projects which allow experimentation in learner centred approaches must be enhanced;
- Teachers or paraprofessionals which provide special support must be recruited and trained.

## **UNIT V: CONCLUSION**

The GoE has taken various measures to broaden educational opportunities for all citizens. Through these measures, much has been accomplished to uplift the devastated education system. A lot has been achieved with regard to educational access, the teaching force that serves these children, and the curriculum. Furthermore, favourable policy environment and strategies are in place to guide the course of educational actions.

However, the GoE recognizes well that much remains yet to be achieved. The encouraging policy environments and orientations established by the current education reform require sustained experimentation, innovation, time and vigorous effort to take root in the wider education system. Moreover, the government has also recognized that human capacity development at all levels and sectors, by and large, ensures gains to be sustained and improved.

Similarly, the MoE has demonstrated its commitment in inclusive education approaches in various government documents and programs. Measures have also been taken in this regards, such as girls' education strategies, pilot inclusive education project for children with 'special needs' and complementary basic education for out of school children and youth.

While these initiatives have generated good practice and debate around inclusive education, the MoE believes that much remains to be done. The various efforts undertaken in isolation require consolidation and synergy in light of local circumstances and understandings of exclusion. Strategic plans for managing the process of change over sustained period need to be in place. As its short term plan, the MoE intends to institutionalize inclusive education strategies in the national education sector development program.

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Appendix 1: Map of Eritrea

