



A Generation of Sociological Training:

Prospects and Implications for Social Development in Ethiopia

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Keywords: Ethiopia; sociological education; professional engagement; opportunities; challenges

Introduction

Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa, next to Nigeria, hosting over 90 million people (CSA, 2007). According to 2011 DHS, Ethiopia has over 80 ethnic groups with diverse social, cultural and linguistic identities. Although, recently the service sector and industry are shouldering the economy, most of the population makes a living out of mixed agriculture. The total land surface is about 1.1 million square kilometers and shares borders with Djibouti, Eritrea, the Republic of the Sudan, the Republic of South Sudan, Kenya and Somalia (CSA, 2011).

The Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists (ESSSWA) was founded in June 1996 by ninety-five professionals, but by the end of 2013, the membership grew to over one thousand. The supreme governing body of the Association is the General Assembly composed of all members. It has an elected Executive Committee comprising seven individuals who manage ESSSWA. ESSSWA works with a vision to see sustainable and positive social change in Ethiopia and actively participate in the transformation process. The mission of the Society is to represent the interests of professional sociologists, social workers and anthropologists and advance the application of their disciplines for the

wellbeing of the Ethiopian Society (ESSSWA, 2012).

This introductory paper is based on a review of the literature on sociological studies, thoughts and training curricula. It uses ESSSWA membership database to provide an overview of professional sociologists' area of engagement and continuous professional development needs.

History and Policy Frameworks of Sociological Education in Ethiopia

The history of modern formal education in Ethiopia is not more than a century old while informal education has been practiced in Ethiopian Christian religious institutions since the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century (Asgedom, 2005; Dagne, Undated). Informal education in Islamic scholarship institutions has been practiced in Ethiopia since 890 AD. The traditional church and Islamic education institutions and scholarship are now competing with the modern educational establishments (Chaillot, 2009; Lule, 2013).

The professional training of sociologists and social workers in Ethiopia dates back to the establishment of higher education in Ethiopia in 1951 in the form of the University College of Addis Ababa (ESSSWA, 1998). In the 2012/13 academic calendar, there were twenty-one public and two private universities providing training in pure sociology and composite Bachelor of Arts monocular degree in sociology and

anthropology, and sociology and social work. The sociological education has expanded enormously in Ethiopia with the student population growing from 120 in 1996 to 4,500 in 2013.

Since its first launch, the training passed through various stages including merger and joint offer of courses of Sociology and Anthropology (Yntiso, 2006). The sociological training curriculum went through reviews which failed to construct Ethiopian sociological thoughts and discourses from the African perspective (Tadele, 2009). The trend in the construction of African and Ethiopian sociological knowledge remained unchanged (as indicated in responses to mailed and online questions), the sociological education was non-critical to the sources of knowledge and failed to construct the Ethiopian sociological epistemology.

The FDRE Education and Training Policy provides the basis for equitable and improved access to education for all the people. The Ethiopian education system and institutions are characterised by complex problems of relevance, quality, accessibility and equity. The policy underscores that higher education be research-oriented, equipping learners with all-rounded problem-solving skills to address the various needs of the community (FDRE, 1994). Education sector development programs were designed as midterm five-year strategic plans informed by rigorous annual reviews positioning the basis for inclusive, equitable education for all (FDRE, 1994). Other policy frameworks include the social welfare and developmental policy, health policy, food security strategy and all other national development policies and strategies.

In 2008/9, the government introduced a guideline on national university intake and preparatory education, especially on admissions to the science and technology, and social sciences and the humanities streams. Therefore, the university intake nationally was regulated so that 30% of the students were placed in the social and human sciences while 70% were placed in the fields of science and technology. ESDP IV has a section on determining the student population of higher education, cost sharing and direction of tertiary education in Ethiopia, wherein sociological

education is one among others (MOE, 2010).

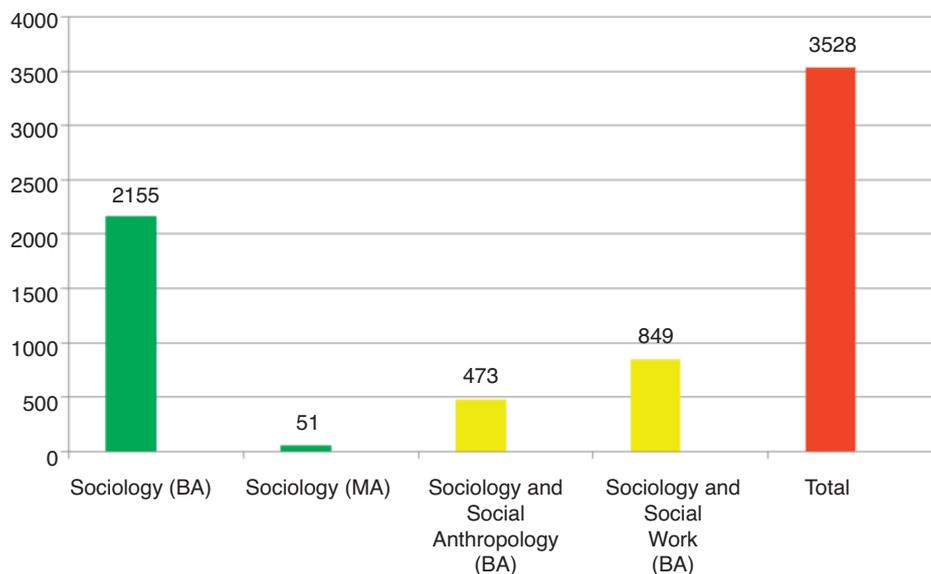
The government of Ethiopia had been providing free education covering full boarding and medical coverage since the 1950s until the introduction of cost sharing schemes for boarding, medical costs and 15% of the tuition fee (OPM, 2008; Yizengaw, 2006). In 2003/4 the government of Ethiopia introduced a scheme to share costs with students including boarding, medical expenses and part of the tuition fee (OPM, 2008). Although the average cost of education is less than \$500 for a three-year Bachelor of Arts Degree in the cost sharing scheme, there is a loan mechanism to be repaid later during the years of service at various public and nonpublic sector institutions.

The country witnessed the expansion of sociological training since 1990 at a bachelor degree level. The Masters program was first launched in 2006 (Yntiso, 2006). Although the number of student intake increased over the years, the proportion of the student population in terms of the overall university enrollment still remains insignificant. For example in 2012/13, the annual enrolled number of students in 31 public and two private universities reached 150,000, while the proportion of sociologists in the overall enrolment stands at 2% (MOE, 2010).

The graduates of sociology, sociology and social anthropology, sociology and social work were employed in public sector offices, international, national, multilateral and bilateral organisations providing social services, and engaging in social and economic development, and policy research. Most sociology graduates and ESSWA members work in program and project management, coordination and supervision, as technical staff including project officers, counselors, learning and knowledge managers and community workers, and as lecturers in various universities (Admassu, 1999; Lule, 2013).

In Ethiopia, there are 10 universities providing training in one of the composite courses at the Bachelor's level. As indicated in the interviews with academic staff and other senior university members at the centers where composite degree programs are offered, factors considered in the design of the curriculum include the following:

Number of Sociology students in 2012/13 in 21 universities in Ethiopia



1. The design of the curriculum takes into account the needs of major employers in the country. In addition, catering to specific market demand varies over the years. Thus, the aim in training people with the composite degree is to create multi-sector employment opportunities.
2. The design of the curriculum also aimed at producing competent multidisciplinary graduates influenced by global, regional, national and local situations.
3. The training background of staff (Anthropology, Sociology, Social Work, Social Psychology) involved in curriculum design influences the nomenclature of the degree program and the design of the course contents.
4. The history of sociological education also influences the emergence of composite degree designs.

Public Positioning of Sociology in Ethiopia

The perception of the general public is that most professional sociologists work in non-governmental organisations while the government sector misconceives

the sociologists as data collectors (Tadele, 2000). Although being a sociologist is regarded as one of the more respected professions, it still lacks a well defined position within the labour market or social structure of society. Addressing societal challenges and seeking remedies is restricted to the non-government sector, but public and private sector recognition of their contribution requires the rigorous work of professionals and associations. Globalisation has brought both opportunities and challenges in public positioning of sociology in Ethiopia.

The current transformation of the country at all levels, including policies and strategies affecting sociological education has created some opportunities in academic engagement. The expansion of higher education from 1 in 1996 to 31 in 2012/13 came with a space for sociology, though challenged by the lack of staff with the appropriate educational mix to fill the various positions. The vast macro social fabric of Ethiopian society is an opportunity for research and development.

Opportunities for Sociological Training

It is an undeniable fact that sociological training is negatively affected by the poor level of development of the educational system in Ethiopia. But, there are also some favourable conditions which help for further improvement of sociological training in Ethiopia. Among these, I would like to mention the following:

- The availability of committed and knowledgeable individuals;
- Long-term institutional commitment, in and out of the country;
- Ethiopia in a period of innovation and transformation; and
- The gradual opening of space recognising the relevance of sociological thought in realising the development endeavour of the country.

The design of composite degree programs in various existing and emerging higher education institutions rests on different historical foundations. The existing composites include, Bachelor of Arts Degree in “Sociology and Social Work”, “Sociology and Social Anthropology”, “Sociology and Anthropology”, “Sociology and Social Administration”, to name a few. These were designed in the belief that the integration of relevant and essential elements of two or more disciplines will equip students with more sound tools and techniques; which in turn helps them to engage

in comprehensive intervention work.

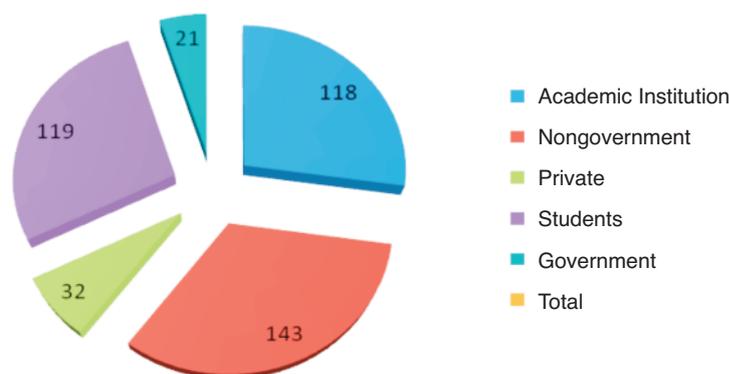
The rationale for composite degree programs emanate from the inter linkage and multi-dimensional nature of dynamic social problems as a challenge requiring professionals with multidisciplinary competence. So the accumulation of knowledge and skills from different interrelated disciplines and professions will help to come up with relevant and versatile solutions to the problems or enhance the development process of a given society or individual.

Sociologists' Professional Engagement

Sociologists in Ethiopia play key roles as community change agents. Most members of ESSSWA (143 sociologists) work in the non-government sector followed by academic institutions, while the number of sociologists working in the public sector is very limited. The graph below shows the distribution of ESSSWA members' area of engagement in 2013 (ESSSWA, 2012/13).

The graph shows that the potential of sociology as a profession is not adequately tapped in the public, private and academic sectors. The expansion of higher education and the provision of post graduate studies is an opportunity to focus on and guide the contribution of sociological thought to address the challenges and design of an alternative future.

ESSSWA Sociology members area of engagement



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