



Shaky Pillars or Strong Pillars?

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Key messages

- Living in rural Ethiopia reduces the chances of enrolling in higher education.
- Children from poor households are less likely to enrol higher education in Ethiopia.
- Children who performed well in Mathematics are more likely to enrol in higher education.



Source: <https://www.sslcourses.co.uk>

- Academically strong but poor individuals at the age of 12 are less likely to access higher education between ages 19 and 22 compared to an academically weak but rich individuals at the age of 12.

What are the issues?

Currently, Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest enrolment rates for higher education as well as the lowest tertiary gross enrolment ratio in the world. This is worrisome given the global clamour for the expansion of access to education as encapsulated in the 4th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4). A major reason for relegating higher education to the background in development initiatives was the paucity of empirical evidence that it enhances economic growth and development.

Why are the issues important?

Substantial empirical evidence now exists in the literature that shows that higher education is a determinant of income, can produce both private and societal benefits, facilitates economic growth, and improves technological catch-up. There is also, now, a general recognition that higher education is a key driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy, which has made higher education more important than ever before in a developing region like Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Thus, access to higher education provides a pathway to sustainable growth and development, which is also in line with the 4th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 4).

Although more recent evidence on the benefits of higher education has led to an acknowledgment of the importance of higher education in Ethiopia and other SSA countries, little or nothing is known about the life-cycle determinants (i.e., how education and wealth from an early stage of life affect education opportunity in the future) of access to higher education in Ethiopia and the wider SSA region. Apart from current socio-economic factors, early child and family characteristics could play an important role in determining access to higher education.

What should policy makers do?

We find that young people who live in rural areas are less likely to enrol in higher education, compared to those who live in urban areas. We also find that children from poor families are also less likely to enrol in higher education when compared to their counterparts from high income families. Similarly, children with weak academic background are also less likely to enrol in higher education when compared to their counterpart with strong academic background. Most

importantly, we find that children who were academically strong at the age of 12 but from poor families were less likely to enrol in higher education between the ages of 19 and 22 when compared to children who were academically weak at the age of 12 but from rich families.

This finding that an academically strong but poor individuals at age 12 is less likely to access higher education is not likely a case of the poor being rationed out by price since academic performance in entrance exam is the primary filter mechanism that determines who accesses higher education in Ethiopia. What seems more likely in the Ethiopia context, and perhaps in many other SSA countries, is that individuals are rationed out by not having the resources to continuously invest in tutoring and study to do well in entrance examinations. Therefore, early intervention that provide direct financial support to academically strong but poor children could significantly increase higher education enrolment in the future. There is need to engage in more rural education development programmes and also employ more teachers to train students in Mathematics. Failure to provide financial support to academically strong children with shaky economic foundations could have both individual and societal implications. At the individual level, such young people who could not access higher education could be stuck in poverty over time. Again, there could be loss of productivity at the society level in the long run due to untapped human capital.



Mission

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