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# External Policy Influence and Higher Education Reform in Ethiopia: Understanding Symbolic Power of the World Bank

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# External Policy Influence and Higher Education Reform in Ethiopia: Understanding Symbolic Power of the World Bank

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## Abstract

Increasingly national policy processes are intersected with and affected by global policy actors and ideas. In aid-recipient countries, donors use financial and non-financial means to influence national policy decisions and directions. This paper is about the non-financial influence of the World Bank (WB) in the Ethiopian higher education policy reform. Using Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power as a 'thinking tool', the paper aims to shed light on forms of symbolic capital that the Bank uses to generate a 'misrecognisable' form of power to regulate the HE policy process in Ethiopia. The findings show that the WB transforms its symbolic capital of recognition and legitimacy to establish a 'shared misrecognition' and thereby to make its policy prescriptions less coercive and acceptable to local policy agents. The Bank uses knowledge-based regulatory instruments to induce compliance to its neoliberal policy prescriptions. The paper therefore underscores the value of symbol power as an analytical framework to understand elusive but critical roles donors play in policy processes in aid recipient countries.

**Keywords:** Pierre Bourdieu, capital, Ethiopia, education policy, higher education, symbolic power, the World Bank

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# Influencia de la Política Exterior y de la Reforma de la Educación Superior en Etiopía: Entender el Poder Simbólico del Banco Mundial

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**Resumen**

Los procesospolíticos nacionales cada vez están más entrecruzados y afectados por ideas y actores de la política global. En los países receptores de ayuda, los donantes utilizan medios financieros y no financieros para influir en las direcciones y las decisiones de política nacional. Este artículo es sobre la influencia no financiera del Banco Mundial (BM) en la reforma de la política educativa superior etíope. Utilizando el concepto de Pierre Bourdieu de poder simbólico como herramienta de pensamiento, el documento pretende arrojar luz sobre las formas de capital simbólico que el banco utiliza para generar una forma 'poco reconocible' de poder para regular los procesos de política educativa superior en Etiopía. Los resultados demuestran que el BM transforma su capital simbólico de reconocimiento y legitimidad para establecer un "mal-reconocimiento compartido" de tal modo que sus prescripciones de política sean menos coercitivas y aceptables para los agentes políticos locales. El Banco utiliza instrumentos normativos basados en el conocimiento para inducir el cumplimiento de las prescripciones de su política neoliberal. El artículo, por lo tanto, pone de relieve el valor del poder simbólico como un marco analítico para entender el esquivo pero crítico papel de los donantes papeles en los procesos políticos en los países receptores de ayuda.

**Palabras clave:** Pierre Bourdieu, capital, Etiopía, política educativa, educación superior, poder simbólico, Banco Mundial

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In the age of neoliberal globalization, education policy is no longer an exclusive affair of the nation-state. With increased involvement of international organizations and regional agencies such as the World Bank (WB) and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), national education policies and practices are unavoidably shaped by a 'globally structured educational agenda' (Dale, 2000). For example, the WB uses financial and non-financial pathways of policy influence to induce its policy prescriptions into national education systems of aid-recipient governments.

However, more often than not the focus of empirical and theoretical investigations related to the impact of the WB on national education policies tends to be financial aid and associated conditionalities. As such, non-lending (specifically symbolic) aspect of the Bank's influence remains under researched, if not neglected. This paper tries to address this gap. It seeks to shade light specifically on how the Bank uses its symbolic power in its involvement in Ethiopian HE reform process from the late 1990s to mid-2000s. The paper explicates how the Bank manages to infuse its potentially controversial neoliberal policy prescriptions into national reforms, and why national policy agents, despite strong alignment with external forces, claim ownership of policy agenda.

In addressing those issues, I draw on critical policy analysis to review relevant policy documents from the Government of Ethiopia and the WB. Viewed from a critical policy analysis perspective, policy is not simply a text – it is a discursive process in which agents contest and struggle to construct and circulate their messages through various instruments, including research and consultancy (Ball, 2005; Ozga, 2000; Taylor, 2004). Agents, which may be located within and outside the state, struggle over meanings and priorities in the context of unequal power relations; and the influence of each agent is determined by its position (or capital) in the policy field (Bourdieu, 1989, 1998; Mangez & Hilgers, 2012). Those with the necessary resources (e.g., funding, knowledge, recognition and legitimacy) can define certain issues as valid policy concerns while neglecting or discrediting alternative 'problems' and strategies. Therefore, a critical policy analyst should be conscious of both the power relations in policy making, and the role of the social setting in mediating the meaning of the policy and its implementation and effects (Bacchi, 2009; Gale, 2001). In other words, it is imperative to recognize the value-laden nature of policy, illuminate who is systematically privileged or excluded, and analyse the hidden structure of power in the discursive dissemination of policy ideas.

The discussion is presented in three major sections. The first section briefly introduces the concept of symbolic power and identifies two forms of symbolic capital of the Bank which generate a subtle form of power that influences national policy decisions. The second section considers the key question that the paper endeavours to address: how has the Bank used its knowledge-based symbolic power to infuse its policy prescriptions in the Ethiopian HE system? Finally, the third section briefly discusses the ‘shared misrecognition’ of the symbolic power of the Bank and its consequences in the policy arena.

## Symbolic Capital of the World Bank

Depending on how it is exerted, expressions of power range from coercive (e.g., physical power applied by an armed force) to persuasive (e.g., the use of legitimacy and recognition to influence public policy decisions). In a policy process, the capability to impose one’s own classifications, categories or discursive constructs cannot be possible without what Pierre Bourdieu calls symbolic power. According to Bourdieu (1989, p.17), symbolic power is a kind of power that exists in the form of recognition and legitimacy of other forms of power including economic, cultural and social ones. It “is defined in and through a given relation between those who exercise power and those who submit to it, i.e. in the very structure of the field in which belief is produced and reproduced”(Bourdieu, 1991, p.170). He further explains:

> Symbolic power – as a power of constituting the given through utterances, of making people see and believe, of confirming or transforming the vision of the world and, thereby, action on the world and thus the world itself, an almost magical power which enables one to obtain the equivalent of what is obtained through force (whether physical or economic), by virtue of the specific effect of mobilisation – is a power that can be exercised only if it is recognised, that is misrecognised as arbitrary (Bourdieu, 1991, p.170).

In a policy network, symbolic power manifests when the dominant agent defines and justifies the pattern and object of relationship in the field: that is, who should be included and why, and how agents in the field should interact and relate in the process, etc. Symbolic power is a power which is subtle enough to be unrecognised as domination/imposition but important enough to be recognised as legitimate and hence acceptable relationship (Bourdieu, 1986). Those subjected to it believe it is legitimate and even 'commonsensical'.

Symbolic power emanates from symbolic capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) identifies four forms of capital: economic (money and property), cultural (dispositions, cultural goods, academic credentials, etc.), social (membership in a group, obligations, acquaintances and networks), and symbolic (acknowledgement of other forms of capital). Society uses different mechanisms and institutions, including the market and the school, to gain access to and convert one form of capital into another (Bourdieu, 1986, 1990). For instance, economic capital is critical to acquire other types of capital through enabling the possessor to invest in cultural goods and build networks. On the other hand, cultural capital (e.g., educational credential) helps its bearer gain economic advantage in the form of employment and earnings; and economic capital and cultural capital, when transformed, result in legitimacy and recognition (symbolic capital) which allows its owner to exert obedience to its preferences without visible coercion or manipulation (Bourdieu, 1986, 1989, 1990). Bourdieu defines symbolic capital as any form of capital (economic, cultural or social) that when:

> perceived by social agents endowed with the categories of perception and appreciation permitting them to perceive, know, and recognise it, becomes symbolically efficient, like a veritable magical power; a property which, because it responds to socially constituted "collective expectations" and beliefs, exercises a sort of action from a distance, without physical contact (Bourdieu, 1998, p.102).

Agents (e.g., international and regional organisations in the global education policy field) generate their symbolic power from their institutional delegated authority and financial and knowledge resources. I identify two key forms of symbolic capital of the WB: legitimacy and recognition. The Bank transforms its symbolic capital to produce the power that secures the compliance of the aid-recipient governments to its policy menu.

***Legitimacy*** – In creating international organizations (IOs) such as the World Bank, nation-states cede considerable part of their power in order to put agents in charge of certain tasks (Moutsios, 2009). In essence, IOs are supposed to represent the collective will of their members, and hence it is assumed that they embody and protect some widely shared values and norms, and use the delegated power to ensure that these principles are conferred and implemented. Given their normative resources (mainly their delegation and moral authority), IOs often believe that one of their principal functions is to influence the behaviour of states to make sure that they comply with the global existing or emergent rules, regulations, practices and norms, which they spread, inculcate and enforce (Barnett & Finnemore, 1999, 2005). Basically, they produce social relations that require new regulations and thereby constitute the global governance. Related to this, IOs such as the WB have also a complicated bureaucracy that gives the institutions an impartial technocratic appearance, a feature which enables them to carry out their tasks effectively. To be authoritative in their fields of engagement, IOs need to:

> […] be seen to serve some valued and legitimate social purpose, and, further, they must be seen to serve that purpose in an impartial and technocratic way using their impersonal rules. The authority of IOs, and bureaucracies generally, therefore, lies in their ability to present themselves as impersonal and neutral – as not exercising power but instead serving the others (Barnett & Finnemore, 2004, p.21).

When it comes to membership in a global institution such as the WB, the institutionalized delegation “ensures the concentration of social capital” (Bourdieu, 1986, p.250) that enables the delegated agent to exert power in a way its members accept it as legitimate. The delegated authority provides the Bank with a symbolic capital expressed in the form of a belief in the legitimacy of its words and decisions. As Bourdieu (1991, p.170) rightly argues:

> What creates the power of words and slogans, a power capable of maintaining or subverting the social order, is the belief in the legitimacy of words and those who utter them. And words alone cannot create this belief.

The symbolic significance attached to the WB as a special UN agency has enabled it to assume a critical position in the global education policy and development field. Drawing on this legitimacy, the Bank produces and disseminates 'knowledge' or 'truth' on what it thinks is a shared concern. For example, it jointly sponsored the World Conference on Education for All (held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990), the World Education Forum on EFA (held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000), and the Millennium Summit that defined development goals to be achieved by 2015 (held in New York, in 2000). In other words, the Bank uses its symbolic resources, including its legitimacy, to exert its constitutive and regulative effects as expressed in its roles in defining a policy problem, and identifying strategies and actors to solve the problem.

***Recognition*** – Symbolic capital of the WB manifests when other agents confer recognition on its cultural and economic capital. In this sense, symbolic capital can be any form of capital insofar as it is represented symbolically. For example, it can be in the form of recognition that stems from the Bank's a) strong financial resource, and b) knowledge and expertise in its fields of engagement.

The strong financial capacity of the Bank is a key source of its recognition. When it comes to education, the Bank is the largest external financial source for educational expenditure in developing countries in general and in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) in particular (Jones, 2007). The Bank provides about one-fourth of all external funds for education in those countries (Domenech & Mora-Ninci, 2009). In the last twenty years (1990-2010), the WB committed a total of nearly US$42 billion for education, and in 2010, its financial commitment for the sector reached US$5.04 billion and the share of HE grew to a record amount of US$835 million. Poor countries with annual per capita income of less than US$1175 (in fiscal year 2012, see World Bank, database1), including most of the SSA countries, are eligible for WB's concessional loans and grants (World Bank, 2007).

This begs the question: how does the Bank transform this economic capital into symbolic capital? The act of gift expresses and legitimises hierarchy. Bourdieu (1998, p.102) argues, "the acknowledgment of debt becomes recognition, a durable feeling toward the author of the generous act." For Bourdieu, gift giving (which may include grants and concessional loans in the case of donor-recipient relationship) is a "mechanism through which power is excercised and simultaneously disguised" (Bourdieu, 1991, p.23). In his Introduction to Bourdieu's *Language and Symbolic Power*, John Thomson elaborates how economic capital is translated into symbolic power:

> By giving a gift – especially a generious one  that cannot be met by a counter-gift of comparable quality – the giver creates a lasting obligation and binds the recipient in a relation of personal indebtedness. Giving is also a way of possessing: it is a way of binding another while shrouding the bond in a gesture of generosity. […] It is a power which is softened and disguised, and 'which conceal domination beneath the veil of an enchanted relation' (Bourdieu, 1991, p.23).

Notwithstanding implicitly, the giver and the recipient know that the generous act should be acknowledged appropriately. By providing large amount of grant associated with the policy process, the Bank appears to reveal hierarchies where it holds some form of superiority over the recipient governments. In so doing it secures the necessary recognition. In other words, "in one move, the gift transaction could reinforce relations of power and dependence, yet be intuitively perceived by both participants and observers through the common – and highly legitimate – lens of 'charity'(Eagleton-Pierce, 2011, p.18).

Again, in carrying out their tasks, IOs depend on specialized knowledge derived from professional training and experiences in the field. In fact, one of the reasons that nation-states create IOs is because they "want important social tasks to be done by individuals with detailed, specialized knowledge about those tasks" (Barnett & Finnemore, 2005, p.173). In a policy process, the effective use of symbolic power necessitates two basic conditions: the possession of the necessary symbolic capital and the credibility of the evidence upon which the proposed policy agenda rests.

In other words, knowledge is a key component of symbolic power. In this regard, the World Bank has equipped itself with a cadre of well-trained and experienced professionals. With more than US$30 million annual budget for research and a large team of researchers graduated from top PhD programs of world elite universities, the WB is indeed the largest development research institution (Goldman, 2005). The Bank produces knowledge on wide-ranging issues of poverty reduction, economic efficiency and environmental protection; and across sectors from agriculture, urban development, education, power, and infrastructure development to public administration and private enterprise. Its knowledge circulates widely in the form of development reports, sector strategies, country assistance strategy papers, policy statements and project evaluations. Barnett and Finnemore (1999, pp.709-710) argue:

> This expertise, coupled with its claim to 'neutrality' and its 'apolitical' technocratic decision-making style, have given the World Bank an authoritative voice with which it has successfully dictated the content, direction, and scope of global development over the past fifty years.

The WB uses knowledge as an instrument of regulation when it exercises its power of agenda setting through what it misleadingly calls "knowledge sharing" and "analytical and advisory activities" (World Bank, 2002, 2007). Its expert authority and extensive experience in the field of development policies (including education) has enabled the Bank to present itself as rational technocrat, and hence to emphasise the objective nature of its knowledge, and thereby to make people willing to give in to its evidence-based policy prescriptions.

In addition, the Bank's recognition heavily weighs in the global development aid. Its voice is loudest among the international donors and "its message shapes or becomes the common message" of other development agencies (Samoff & Carrol, 2003, p.38). The approval of projects by the Bank affects the commitment of other bilateral and multilateral donors to that particular country. The WB also plays a critical role in coordinating donors to channel their voices and money in a consolidated way.

To sum up the section, the essence of symbolic power lies not in the possession of financial and non-financial resources but in the capacity of the agent to transform the resources in a way that they become misrecognisable and hence legitimated instruments of regulation in a social interaction, including policymaking. In this regard, the WB is equipped with the necessary means of policy imposition. The symbolic capital it has acquired in the form of legitimacy (as a special agency of the UN and subsequent impartial position), and recognition of its financial capacity and expertise (represented by its policy professionals and extensive field experience) have given the Bank a symbolic power, "the power granted to those who have obtained sufficient recognition to be in a position to impose recognition" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.23). Such recognition has enabled the Bank to assume a monopoly over legitimate naming of reform agenda and goals in the education sector of aid-recipient countries. The next section deals with the Bank's specific techniques and processes used to legitimate its policy prescriptions in the Ethiopian HE policy reform.

## Symbolic Power in Action

In this section, I try to show how the WB uses its symbolic power to diffuse its policy agenda into the Ethiopian HE reform. In the face of strong criticisms on the negative consequences of direct policy impositions and conditionalities associated with the Strategic Adjustment Programs that dominated the development discourse in low-income countries throughout 1980s and 1990s, the WB seems to be heavily relied on soft means of policy regulation to sell its neoliberal policy agenda repackaged in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). In 1996, the Bank redefined itself as a "knowledge bank" that would provide knowledge-based policy services to combat poverty (Klees, 2002). This is a shift that gives priority to the use of evidence-based policy prescription as the viability of a symbolic power partly depends on "the degree to which the vision proposed is founded in reality" (Bourdieu, 1989, p.23). In the Ethiopian HE policy reform process, the WB has exercised its symbolic power in two ways: disguising policy prescriptions in consultancy and research, and setting frame references through analytical reports, sector reviews, and thematic workshops. They are discussed in turn as follows.

**Disguising policy prescriptions**

Before committing funds to a particular project, the WB conducts sector reviews, produces project appraisal and commissions policy consultancy and research related to the sector in question. As Jones (2004, p.188) writes, "… *Bank education loans* are bound up with the *Bank's ideas about education*, especially how education can relate to development and to poverty reduction" (emphasis added).

In Ethiopia, in the late 1990s, the Bank commissioned expatriate consultants to devise a new HE financing system. First, it assigned Professor Bruce Chapman, the architect of income-contingent HE contribution scheme first implemented in Australia in 1989, as a leading consultant to investigate the possibilities and modalities of introducing tuition fees in public universities in Ethiopia. In his report, Chapman concludes, "A charge is justified, and the best mechanism is collection depending on a graduate's income" (1999, p.11). Furthermore, the Bank commissioned a Washington-based HE policy organization, the Institute for Higher Education Policy, to "design a workable budgeting formula" for Ethiopia (Merisotis, 2003, p.2). The consultancy report by the Institute recommended a simplified block grant budgeting system that enables the government to use policy-driven funding priorities to steer public HEIs toward meeting specific goals and requirements. The proposed financing system was also thought to be instrumental in improving the performance of the institutions, and making them more efficient and competitive.

Again, before releasing the fund for its *Post-secondary Education Project* (2004-2009), the Bank conducted a sector review on the HE system and published its report entitled: *Higher Education Development for Ethiopia: Pursuing the Vision* (World Bank, 2003). In the report, the Bank has articulated problems, and outlined its 'policy options' which include encouraging the private sector, and decentralisation of the governance of the public HE. The Bank argues that the emerging role of the state as the steering agent of HE is timely and necessary (World Bank, 2003). In the neoliberal reform context, the primarily role of the state should be guiding HE systems in accordance with the global and local economic realities, including labour market demand.

In other words, the WB used knowledge to legitimize its predefined policy agendas. With a cover of evidence-based (research-informed) policy process, the Bank championed the introduction of user fees in HE in Ethiopia and called for decentralised governance of public universities with a new steering role of the state. Following the recommendation of the Bank, the government endorsed many of the neoliberal policy elements and incorporated them in the newly ratified Higher Education Proclamation (No.351/2003; revised in 2009, No.256/2009). Among other things, cost-sharing and 'performance-based budgeting' (funding formula) system have been introduced in Ethiopian HE. With the introduction of new regulatory frameworks and financial incentives, the role of the state has also shifted from direct control to 'steering from a distance'.

In fact, notwithstanding the Bank's effort to use research and consultancy as vectors of its agenda, conditions of aid to HE are not secret. For the Bank to approve funding for projects and programs in HE in developing countries, two key criteria should be met: (a) the need to reform, and (b) willingness to reform (World Bank, 2002). That is to say, the involvement of the Bank depends on the gravity of the problem that necessitates reform, and the political commitment of a government to accept and implement reform prescriptions (or policy options, as the Bank prefers to call them). In practice, the need to reform is a result of an intentional construction of a policy problem by the Bank. In its financial and non-financial involvements, the Bank is proactive, not reactive – it contacts aid-recipient governments with packages of program loans and policy initiatives (Torres, 2009). It commissions sector reviews and produces analytical works to show problems of a particular sector, and outline strategies to address them. Most often, it also indicates its interest to approve project or program funding if necessary. Against this backdrop, poor governments in Africa have little reason not to show willingness to reform. In other words, the Bank uses its knowledge power to initiate interest for reform and uses its financial power to implement the required reform in those countries.

**Setting frame of references**

Pierre Bourdieu argues that a struggle in a social space uses discourse as "a structured and structuring medium tending to impose an apprehension of the established order as natural (orthodoxy) through the disguised (and thus misrecognised) imposition of systems of classification" (1991, p.170). In policy terms, the constructs/structures are used as means of understanding and framing issues to be addressed. They define the policy problem and impose solutions that are taken up as 'commonsensical', the 'right' and legitimate way to solve the problem. To illustrate the cases with an example, I take *knowledge-intensive (economic) growth to end poverty* as one of the key discursive constructs that has come to influence development plans in general and education sector development programs in particular in Ethiopia.

As a way of setting frame of references of policy discourses in aid-recipient countries, the Bank introduces its ideologically loaded discursive constructs through analytical reports and thematic workshops. Also drawing on its delegated authority (legitimacy), and economic and cultural capital, the Bank produces policy reports across a range of issues (including HE) and disseminates its values and assumptions through international, regional and national thematic conferences and workshops.

To begin with the analytical reports, starting from the late 1990s, the WB has consistently presented its knowledge economy discourse in its major publications: *Knowledge for Development* (1999), *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century* (2000), *Constructing Knowledge Societies: New Challenges for Tertiary Education* (2002), and *Accelerating Catch-up: Tertiary Education for Growth in Sub-Saharan Africa* (2009). One of the central messages of the reports focuses on the importance of knowledge-based economic growth to end poverty. In *Can Africa Claim the 21st Century*, the Bank insists that the economic productivity landscape is changing globally, and knowledge and information have come to be crucial factors of growth. Hence, for its economic growth, Africa can no longer depend on its natural resources but on its flexible and skilled labour force that can effectively compete in the 'free market' and make use of the global economic openness (World Bank, 2000). The Bank not only emphasised the significance of knowledge in the emerging global economic order, but also recommended that the developing world should narrow the knowledge gap through *acquiring, absorbing,* and *communicating* knowledge (World Bank, 1999). In stressing the centrality of knowledge in national economic productivity, the report contends:

> Poor countries – and poor people – differ from rich ones not only because they have less capital but because they have less knowledge (World Bank, 1999, p.1).

Normatively, the Bank believes that HE plays a critical role in supporting national economic growth and poverty reduction efforts through training qualified professionals, producing new knowledge, and "providing the capacity to access existing stores of global knowledge and adapt this knowledge to local use" (World Bank, 2002, pp.4-5). According to the Bank, HEIs support knowledge-driven poverty reduction through supporting the development of human resources and innovation system of the nation. In pushing its reform prescriptions to aid-recipient governments in the region, the Bank stresses:

> A more knowledge-intensive approach to development is emerging as an attractive option for many African countries. In fact, it is possibly the only route that could permit sustained, outward-oriented development (World Bank, 2009, p.xxii, emphasis added).

In aligning HE with poverty reduction strategies of aid-recipient countries in Africa, the Bank further stresses,

> The name of the game now is knowledge-intensive development. It calls for a new outlook – one that is more strategic and nationally integrated – on the nature of the contribution that education can make to industrialization, to exports, to the building of a more resilient economy, and to confronting the twenty-first century challenges […] This new outlook, together with the policy interventions it implies, comprise a pathway to the vital skills and increased knowledge that African economies are certain to require if they are to increase their competitiveness and thereby sustain their recent growth. (World Bank, 2009, pp. xxx-xxxi, emphasis added).

In its policy reports and sector reviews, the Bank underscored the significance of knowledge and skills in its new development plan to aid-recipient countries, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. The convergence of the Bank's poverty reduction strategy and knowledge economy optimism has resulted in what I refer to as a knowledge-intensive poverty reduction discourse that guides the Bank's financial and policy involvement in HE policy reform in SSA. When it comes to Ethiopia, the Bank's HE policy research team, after reviewing the system, concluded that poverty alleviation through economic growth would not be attained without a well-functioning HE system that provides quality human capital.

> Poverty alleviation in Ethiopia requires sustained economic growth, good governance, and political stability in order to be effective. Growth derives from skilled human resources and national productivity increases leading to greater country competitiveness in the regional and global economy. Productivity gains are generated by national innovation systems in which tertiary education institutions play a fundamental role. […] Therefore, if poverty is to be reduced, Ethiopia's tertiary institutions will have to improve their performance and expand their service delivery (World Bank, 2003, p.3).

The national poverty reduction strategies and plans echoed the same assumption that education and training can make an individual worker more productive, and that in the aggregate, more productive workers will stimulate and bring about economic development. Among the salient themes and conceptual constructs prevalent in the texts are human capital, knowledge-intensive development, globally competitive economy, and poverty reduction (FDRE, 2009; MoE, 2002; MoFED, 2002, 2010). In line with the Bank's long-held ideological disposition, human capital formation is viewed as a panacea for economic problems in Ethiopia. The government underscored the importance of human capital formation for the economic growth and competitiveness. The fourth national development plan of the government, officially called Growth and Transformation Plan (2010/11-2014/15), states:

> Expanding human capital and improving human development outcomes is still a central pillar strategy of Growth and

> Transformation Plan. The Government has been taking measures to improve the human resource development as healthy, productive, and trained human resource is essential for the implementation of government policies, strategies and programs (MoFED, 2010, p.8).

As a clear expression of the increased optimism about the knowledge-intensive development discourse, the country has increased the number of public universities from two in 1999 to 32 in 2013; and it spends more than 1.5% of its GDP on HE, and this is one of the eleven top spending on the system in the world, and is the highest expenditure in SSA (UIS, 2010). In a country where over 40% of the adult population is illiterate and the HE enrolment rate is still less than 5% (UIS, database1), it is crucial to question whether or not this 'knowledge economy' optimism is well founded. Furthermore, economic productivity of a worker does not come solely from his or her education. Such factors as political stability, cultural values of the society and availability of physical resources are equally vital inputs of development. It is also necessary to ensure that the public investment is not unfairly skewed to HE on the cost of the lower level education.

Thematic conferences and expert meetings are critical parts of the knowledge aid project of the WB. The Bank sends its 'policy missionaries' to internationally organized conferences as well as regional and national thematic workshops[1] to disseminate its views on HE policy and practice. In principle, the thematic conferences and workshops aim at bringing various stakeholders together to debate on policy agenda and alternatives, and thereby to build consensus on key carefully articulated policy options and priorities. In practice, most often, the terms of reference of thematic conferences and commissioned sector reviews are set by the Bank, and there is little or no space to accommodate emerging, divergent views and perspectives. The fora help the Bank to not only facilitate exchange of ideas and views among the interest groups but also marshal evidence to enhance the credibility of the argument.

To conclude the section, most often, to study education systems and policies in Africa, the Bank commissions expatriate experts who basically share its values and assumptions. Even when local experts are involved in such research projects, the terms of reference, benchmarks and indicators are set by the Bank and they tend to simply reaffirm the official views and positions of the Bank, and have little effect in presenting alternative views on the question in hand. In explicating how the WB regulates knowledge production and use in SSA, Samoff rightly notes:

> To release funds, it commissions research. […] the research bears the strong imprint of those who have commissioned it. Their assumptions, understandings, and expectations are embedded in the framing questions and the detailed terms of reference. This combination of funding and research constitutes a financial-intellectual complex that is difficult to challenge or deflect (Samoff, 2005, p.20).

In other words, the process of knowledge production and dissemination is simply a way of 'manufacturing consent' on Bank's policy priorities and agenda. Policy reports and analytical works serve to facilitate policy initiatives and changes, and as such they are, in the words of a senior official in the Bank, "primarily vehicles for selling projects" (quoted in Goldman, 2005, p.135). The Bank uses knowledge-based policy regulatory instruments mainly to legitimatise its predefined policy choices. As a result, not surprisingly, findings and recommendations of commissioned sector reviews and policy studies at different levels and localities conform to the Bank's discourse of market rationality and human capital formation. In the case of Ethiopia, the WB has effectively used these knowledge-based regulatory instruments to publicise its key reform agenda, including cost-sharing, privatization, diversification of the system, and quality assurance.

## Denial of Policy Imposition

As highlighted in the forgoing discussion, a key feature of symbolic power is the "shared misrecognition" that it manages to establish in the process of interaction between agents (Bourdieu, 1990, 1998). It elicits the consent of both the dominant and the dominated regarding the legitimacy of the terms of their engagement. In the context of the interaction of development aid providers and aid recipient governments, the shared misrecognition refers to the mutual denial of political and economic interests present in the interaction. The shared view (of the Bank and national policy agents) that research and consultancy services are technical support of knowledge-sharing signifies the case clearly. Both the WB and government officials decline to recognise to the form and degree of Bank's influence or imposition in the reform process.

In the context of the relationship between the WB and national policy actors, this 'shared misrecognition' or 'doxical relationship' has resulted in what Davies and Bansel (2007, p.254) refer to as "calculated invisibility of neoliberalism". For HE policymakers within the WB, the Bank's role in the HE reform process of aid-recipient governments is no more than a facilitation of policy changes (Hopper, Samli & Bassett, 2008; Samli & Bassett, 2010). More specifically, it is a facilitation of "the cross-fertilization of relevant regional experiences" (World Bank, 2002, p. xxvii). However, the control of knowledge and other resources by the Bank creates a hierarchy in itself. When such dialogue is eventually attached to critically needed funding, it can hardly be truly reciprocal. It is merely a one-way persuasion, if not an imposition. As such, in practice, the Bank plays an agenda setting role. Its policy prescriptions seldom need consensus. In pushing its reform alternatives to the Government of Ethiopia, the WB forcefully states its position as:

> The Ministry of Education and its higher education reform implementation team are therefore urged to do *all that is in their power* to ensure that these essential policy and regulatory requirements [diversification of revenue sources, formula funding, decentralised governance, etc.] are put in place and effectively implemented (World Bank, 2003, p.81, emphasis added).

Accordingly, these recommendations were endorsed by the government and echoed in subsequent key reform documents (Committee of Inquiry, 2004; FDRE, 2009).

A closer examination of the role of the WB in Ethiopia's recent HE reforms shows that he Bank has (a) influenced the course of HE policy reforms through its discursive instruments and technical assistances, and (b) financed the implementation of the reforms through its project funds. However, there is a strong tendency among government officials to distance themselves from the Bank and its neoliberal policy prescriptions. Asked to comment on the relationship between the government and the WB on restructuring the HE system, a senior government official in the Ministry of Education (Ethiopia) preferred to emphasise his government's ownership of the reforms:

> HE reforms in Ethiopia do have Ethiopian premise. We have our own causes. It is part and parcel of the national development plan. We strongly believe that education in general and HE in particular is a key factor in the country's development and transformation. […] our reforms are Ethiopian both in form and mission (Interview, 23 Oct. 2011).

This denial of influence is related to a claim for ownership of agenda. Legitimacy is a critical concern in policymaking. In democratic societies, at least in principle, politicians cannot afford to ignore public interest in their national policies and programs. Direct or indirect participation of citizens is needed to justify use of public resources. Hence, policymakers need to claim ownership of agenda and decisions to show commitments to meet public expectations. In this regard, by denying external influence, the national agents are assuring their capability to determine their own policy direction.

Another key aspect of the subtlety of symbolic power is linked with externalization of policy ideas to unidentified sources. As a way of claiming legitimacy, policy agents deny direct external influence, and when they recognise such an influence, they externalise it to unspecific sources or to "general principles of scientific rationality" (Schriewer, 2000, p.331). In Ethiopia, national policy agents have accepted key discursive constructs such as human capital formation, knowledge economy, economic efficiency, strategic expansion, etc. as "universalised" web of ideas rather than ideologically loaded structures of a particular global agent, that is, the WB. In this regard, the Government's narrow instrumentalist view of education as a preparation for an increasingly globalized economy and labour market, and a pillar of the poverty reduction effort cannot be fully understood without locating it in the broad neoliberal discourse of the Bank. This act of externalisation of policy ideas is partly attributed to the 'invisibility' of the symbolic power that produces compliance to the external prescriptions. In addition, externalisation of policy ideas serves other equally important concerns. It enables policymakers to legitimize controversial reform agenda (as was the case with the introduction of the cost-sharing policy in Ethiopia), and neutralises the obligation of considering alternative strategies by competing local voices.

## Conclusion

There is an extensive body of literature on the forms and consequences of donors' policy imposition on aid-recipient countries in Africa and elsewhere. Most often critics of external policy prescriptions focus on how educational development aid providers use their financial resources to influence policy decisions in poor countries. However, I argue that as global policy agents tend to heavily rely on knowledge-based policy regulatory instruments, the widely held assumption that donors influence policies directly through funding and associated conditionalities is inadequate.

Findings of this study underscore the vitality of Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic capital and symbolic power to understand subtle forms of power that external policy agents (e.g., the OECD, the WB, etc.) exert on national education policy fields. For instance, the WB is increasingly using less visible means of policy imposition; and this invisibility seems to have inhibited the capacity of policy-makers and scholars to critically assess the Bank's role in the national policy processes. The paper argues that for a fuller account on the role of the WB on national education policy processes of aid-recipient countries in Africa, it is imperative to appreciate the significance of the Bank's symbolic capital. As such, the paper underscores that Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic power is instrumental in understanding the dynamics of the interaction of agents of unequal power in national education policy fields.

Drawing on the case of Ethiopia, the paper shows that in a symbolic power relation, misrecognition is central because the domination or imposition needs to be disguised in a way that the social agent does not perceive it as such. This subtly coercive relationship results in what Bourdieu (1990, 1991) calls symbolic violence which is a sort of domination exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity –

the dominated takes for granted the disguised/invisible imposition as a legitimate condition. The 'doxical relationship' that the Bank manages to establish through its elusive form of power in turn gives aid-recipient governments a ground to claim ownership of policy ideas. In other words, the 'shared misrecognition' is of strategic importance for the parties involved – it enables the policy prescriptions to go unchallenged through the national process disguised as local 'inventions' that fit local needs.

# Notes

1 In SSA, the list of such events organized in the last ten years include, *Improving Tertiary Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Things that work* (23-25 September 2003, Accra, Ghana); *Higher Education for Francophone Africa's Development* (13-15 June 2006, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso); *Cost and Financing of Tertiary Education in Francophone Africa: Training Session* (2-4 July 2007, Cotonou, Benin); *African Union AMCOST (African Ministerial Council on Science and Technology ) Meeting* (12 - 16 November 2007, Mombasa, Kenya); *International Conference on Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Africa* (15-17 September 2008, Dakar, Senegal); *Capacity Building Workshop on the Licence-Master-Doctorate (LMD) Reform for Francophone Countries* (19-20, Sept 2008, Saint Louis, Senegal); *The Partnership for Higher Education in Africa* (PHEA) *University Leadership Forum* (23-25 Nov. 2008, Accra, Ghana); *12th General Conference of the Association of African Universities (on Sustainable Development in Africa: The Role of Higher Education)* (May 4-5, 2009, Abuja, Nigeria); *Conference of Ministers of Education in Africa (COMEDAF IV)* (24 – 25 September 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia); *National Conference on World-Class Universities* (27 September 2010, Abuja, Nigeria); and *Workshop on Sustainable Financing and Governance of Regional Initiatives in Higher Education in Africa* (21 March 2011, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso) (see World Bank, database2).

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