

Part II

Problem

Structural Inequalities

Structural inequality occurs when individuals' access to resources and opportunities, and the possibilities to exercise their agency, is constrained due to categorical attributes such as ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, religion, physical ability, or rurality. A structural basis of social inequality highlights how systemic biases embedded in institutions, organizations, and policies generate unequal relationships that place members of a certain group in privileged positions over others. Structural inequalities are different from any other forms of inequality in that they are reproduced and have a reproduction effect across domains of life and generations. In the face of entrenched systemic disadvantage, individual talent, ability, and effort have little to do with one's position in the society. For instance, persisting inequality in education (as expressed in disadvantages in access, quality, and outcome) is closely associated with disadvantages in health, income, and agency freedom. Hence, transforming structural inequalities necessitates substantive policy responses that match the condition and needs of the policy targets.

In order to understand the relevance of policy instruments to address the problem in question, one needs to critically examine ideologies, cultural norms and political assumptions underpinning policy processes and institutional functioning. In this respect, a structural analysis of educational inequality is useful to problematize categorical factors affecting people's access to and success in education. It sheds light on how different forces within educational institutions interact with broader issues such as political affiliation, historical legacies, geographical location and cultural norms and expectations to perpetuate injustice in the system. The three chapters in this second part of the book show how structural factors of inequality such as a repressive gender culture (Chap. 4), political and geographical peripherality (Chap. 5), and neoliberal policy orientation and the politics of control (Chap. 6) contribute to the persistence of inequality in Ethiopian HE.