# Part III
# Policy

**Actions and Inactions**

Policy is a complex and multifaceted concept. There is no simple way to define the term. In its normative character, policy is 'a declaration of desirability' where policymakers define 'problems' in need of public attention. In this book, policy more broadly includes action plans, proclamations, strategies, and high-level decisions and directives made in response to a shared concern at systemic or institutional level. Relatedly, a policy process entails a value-laden and contested cycle of diagnosing a policy problem, assembling evidence, specifying alternative strategies and instruments, authoritatively selecting viable strategies from the options, setting the criteria with which to evaluate them, implementing the decisions, and evaluating outcomes of the policy. In this book, the focus is particularly on the distributional implications and consequences of higher education policy.

Taking higher education in Ethiopia as a case, the three chapters in this part of the book aim to show how policy actions and inactions work to regulate the distribution of resources and opportunities in Ethiopian society. Chapter 7 summarizes key equity instruments in education policies of the Imperial Government of Haile Selassie I (r.1930–1974) and the Military Regime of Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974–1991) and discusses HE equity provisions under the current EPRDF Government (1991–present). Chapter 8 problematizes the framing of the problem of inequality in key recent education policy documents and argues that when it comes to the persistence of structural inequality in Ethiopian HE, policy inaction plays a critical role. Equity policy instruments that are (a) silent on poverty and repressive cultural values as factors of inequality and (b) undermined by the neoliberal reform agenda of marketization and deregulation are less likely to transform the problem of injustice. Hence, Chap. 9 presents a case for reframing the problem of inequality in HE as a form of capability deprivation rather than as a lack of access.