Kembata Tembaro families and their neighbors strive to send their children to school, even under very difficult conditions. Families in the region value education and they work hard to make schooling possible for their children.

There are tuition-free government schools (grades 1-12) in Ethiopia in both urban and rural locations. Attendance requires students to have a uniform and basic school supplies, which families must purchase. These costs are barriers to education for many poor families. Additionally, early childhood education (preschool and kindergarten) is not government-subsidized. All options are private and, therefore, tuition-based.

In addition, some rural families do not send children to school because the boys are required to do farm work and the girls must travel long distances to collect firewood and water. Establishing income-generating activities for adult members of the household can be instrumental in freeing up children’s time to attend school. Learn more about income-generating activities on Roots Ethiopia’s website: www.rootsethiopia.org.

Preschool and Kindergarten

Preschool and kindergarten education in Ethiopia focuses on all-around development of children in preparation for formal schooling. Preschool education lasts two or three years and caters to children between the ages of four and six years old. Preschool and kindergarten are not prerequisites to attend first grade in government-sponsored schools; however, private schools are free to set their own requirements.

There are no publicly funded preschools or kindergartens in Ethiopia. Cities have an assortment of private preschools and kindergartens but there are fewer institutions in rural areas. Typically, the children from poor, urban families or those living in rural areas do not attend preschool at all.

There is no government-sponsored preschools or kindergartens in the Kembata Tembaro, Hadiya, or Silte regions. Preschools and kindergartens are all privately run programs, owned by private organizations or churches. They are typically concentrated in towns with larger populations, such as Hadero, Doyogena or Hossana, or in villages adjacent to these more populated areas. Kindergarten is a highly valued opportunity, establishing basic literacy skills in youngsters before formal education begins at the age of seven.

Parents are responsible for all preschool and kindergarten expenses. The cost depends on demand and also on the quality of education. The schools vary in cost and require tuition, uniforms, school supplies and the ability for the family to provide a ‘sack lunch’ for the student. Private schooling is more expensive in urban areas.

Primary School (Grades 1-8)

Children ages seven to 14 attend primary school. Primary school relies on an eight-year curriculum, divided into two phases. The first phase covers first through fourth grade, while the second phase extends from fifth through eighth grade. Many localities combine the two phases into one physical building or compound. The goal of the first phase is functional literacy, while the second phase prepares students for further general education and training.

Admission to government-sponsored primary school is open to all students and is free of charge, but there are hidden costs. Primary school students and their families are responsible for the purchase of school uniforms, books and supplies. The government distributes a severely limited number of books and educational materials to school libraries. Books and teaching materials are scarce. Both private and public schools in the region suffer from underfunding, understaffing and facilities that are in a state of disrepair. There is an acute shortage of teaching materials, which contributes to the poor quality of education in the region.

Teaching is conducted in local ethnic languages. National examinations are conducted in eighth grade to certify completion of primary education. The Eighth Grade National Exam is designed to ensure the quality of primary education and mastery of a nationally established curriculum. The Ministry of Education of Ethiopia ensures that both private and public schools follow the same course of curriculum and testing. Failure on the exam means repeating a year. After a second failure, the student can no longer attend a government school.

In Kembata Tembaro and the surrounding regions, those who fail the examination join the ever-growing ranks of unemployed youth. There are not sufficient vocational training centers, run by either private or public organizations, to absorb these students.
There are private primary schools in some communities. These schools vary in cost. In addition to tuition, families are expected to provide a uniform, school supplies and a ‘sack lunch’ for their student. Private schooling is more expensive in urban areas.

Secondary School (Grades 9-10)

Secondary education consists of two years of general education. Schooling at this level is intended to help students identify their areas of interest for further education, for specific training and for employment. In addition to the core subjects, students are able to choose from a wider array of courses, some of which are technical or vocational in nature.

At the end of 10th grade, students sit for the National Exam (known as the Ethiopian General Secondary Education of Certificate Exam/EGSECE). This is a critical exam and cannot be repeated. Only students who pass this exam can proceed to high school. Students are tagged for college preparatory, vocational or technical programs based on the results of this exam. Students who complete 10th grade but do not earn high marks on the exam can seek further technical training or enter the local labor market. Technical and vocational training is institutionally separate from the regular educational system, forming a parallel track.

There are very few technical or vocational schools in Kembata Tembaro or the surrounding regions. As a result, youth unemployment is rampant and rural poverty is pervasive in the region. Most students who leave school have no basis of livelihood, cannot support themselves and become destitute. Some students migrate to other parts of the country seeking seasonal farm jobs.

There are private secondary schools in some communities. Fees vary and require the family to provide a uniform, school supplies and a ‘sack lunch’ for the student. Private schooling is more expensive in urban areas.

High School (Grades 11-12)

High school education or upper secondary education enables students to choose the best course of study for their intended career path, customizing their program based on their higher education goals.

Students can attend any number of high school models, provided they are available in their communities. At the conclusion of 12th grade, students take a national exam (Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Exam/ ESLCE), which determines if they can attend a government college or university.

If students score high enough on the exam, they can attend college or university for free. Those students who do not achieve high scores can seek admission to private colleges and universities in major cities. However, it is difficult for the average Ethiopian student to afford the tuition fees of private colleges and universities. In addition to tuition, students are responsible for the purchase of books, materials, food and accommodations.

There are private high schools in some communities. Many students are keen to attend them as they believe that their exam preparation will be more thorough and their chances of qualifying for a university placement will be greater. As in other parts of the world, private high schools attract students by emphasizing their students’ average ESLCE scores and the schools’ college placement rates.

Higher Education

Institutions of higher education include universities, colleges, teacher training programs and polytechnic institutes. Diploma programs generally last two years. First-degree programs take four to five years of college or university study to complete.

For more information on how you can help educate children in Ethiopia, visit rootsethiopia.org.