

Contextual Features

ADB's DMCs are listed in Table 1, which also contains data on their populations, per capita gross national product (GNP) in US dollars, real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in purchasing power parity (PPP) dollars, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index. These figures show wide variations, which impose limits on the extent to which the Asian and Pacific region can be considered a single entity. For example, the population ranges from just 10,000 in Tuvalu to 1.2 billion in the People's Republic of China (PRC). GNP per capita ranges from \$220 in Nepal to \$32,810 in Singapore; real GDP per capita ranges from PPP\$1,050 in Bangladesh to PPP\$28,460 in Singapore, while the Human Development Index ranges from 0.371 in Solomon Islands to 0.888 in Singapore.

In addition to these variations exposed by numerical data are variations arising from politics, religion, and geography. Elaborating on this point:

- *Political systems.* Some states (PRC, Lao People's Democratic Republic [Lao PDR], and Viet Nam) remain officially committed to a socialist ideology, while others (e.g., Cambodia, Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia) have officially abandoned socialism, and yet others (e.g., Fiji Islands, Malaysia, Philippines) have always had capitalist societies. Political ideology has major implications for the structure of education financing.
- *Religion.* In some parts of the region the dominant religion is Christianity (e.g., Philippines, Vanuatu); in others it is Islam (e.g.

Table 1: Basic Statistics for Developing Member Countries

<i>Economy</i>	<i>Population (million)</i>	<i>GNP per capita (\$)</i>	<i>Real GDP per capita (PPP\$)</i>	<i>Human Development Index</i>
Afghanistan	26.0	250	—	—
Bangladesh	125.6	360	1,050	0.440
Bhutan	0.6	430	1,467	0.459
Cambodia	10.9	300	1,290	0.514
China, People's Republic of	1,230.4	860	3,130	0.701
Cook Islands	0.02	4,972	—	0.822
Fiji Islands	0.8	2,460	3,990	0.667
Hong Kong, China	6.8	25,200	24,350	0.880
India	955.2	370	1,670	0.545
Indonesia	199.9	1,110	3,490	0.681
Kazakhstan	15.8	1,350	3,560	0.740
Kiribati	0.08	920	—	0.515
Korea, Republic of	46.0	10,550	13,590	0.852
Kyrgyz Republic	4.7	480	2,250	0.702
Lao People's Democratic Republic	4.8	400	1,300	0.491
Malaysia	21.7	4,530	8,140	0.768
Maldives	0.3	1,180	3,690	0.716
Marshall Islands	0.06	1,890	—	0.563
Micronesia, Federated States of	0.1	2,070	—	0.569
Mongolia	2.4	390	1,310	0.618
Myanmar	46.4	—	1,199	0.580
Nauru	0.01	3,450	—	0.663
Nepal	21.7	220	1,090	0.463
Pakistan	135.3	500	1,560	0.508
Papua New Guinea	4.4	930	2,654	0.570
Philippines	73.5	1,200	3,520	0.740
Samoa	0.2	1,140	3,550	0.590
Singapore	3.13	32,810	28,460	0.888
Solomon Islands	0.4	870	2,310	0.371
Sri Lanka	18.6	800	2,490	0.721
Taipei, China	21.6	13,310	—	—
Tajikistan	6.0	330	1,126	0.665
Thailand	60.6	2,740	6,690	0.753
Tonga	0.1	1,790	—	0.647
Tuvalu	0.01	1,337	—	0.583
Uzbekistan	23.3	1,020	2,529	0.720
Vanuatu	0.2	1,340	3,480	0.425
Viet Nam	76.7	310	1,630	0.664

— Data not available.

Note: Data refer to the most recent year available – in most cases around 1997.

Sources: ADB 1999; United Nations Development Programme 1999a, 1999b; various national sources.

Indonesia, Malaysia); elsewhere it is Buddhism (e.g., Myanmar, Sri Lanka), while in one (India), Hinduism is a major force. In other countries, religion has largely ceased to be an important factor in society but has recently shown signs of resurgence (e.g., the PRC, Mongolia). Religious affiliations may have implications for the nature of sponsoring bodies for education institutions, and for aspects of community financing.

- *Geography.* Some parts of the region are very densely populated (e.g., Hong Kong, China; Singapore), while others are sparsely populated (e.g., Kiribati, Mongolia). Again, some countries are scattered archipelagos (e.g., Indonesia, Solomon Islands), while others are basically single blocks of land (e.g., Bangladesh, Pakistan). Population density influences the ease with which institutions can gain economies of scale, while the existence or absence of scattered islands is a determinant of the primary means of communication.

The importance of these factors will become evident at various points in the booklet, for they both determine and explain similarities and differences. Very few policy formulations can be uniformly applicable to the whole of the Asian and Pacific region. It therefore becomes necessary to identify particular policies which are appropriate for particular subregions, countries, and even provinces or districts.

However, it is also possible to identify some overarching commonalities. For example, almost all societies face issues concerning the role of the state in education. Likewise, almost all societies face issues related to expansion of access, and to supply of and demand for highly trained personnel. In addition, all societies both benefit from and have to grapple with the advances in technology which, among other effects, may change curricula and modes of delivery in education. Also, all societies have to address tensions between well-established institutions and the new structures which may become necessary.

One striking feature, particularly during the period since the early 1990s, has been the advance of capitalist modes of operation in almost all parts of the region. This has been especially obvious in the states which formally abandoned socialism, but has also been evident in most of the states which officially maintained socialist regimes. Moreover, the advance of capitalist modes of operation has been apparent even in countries which have long operated capitalist economies but which have had government-protected education systems. The chief manifestation of the change has been the advance of privatization in countries as different as India and Singapore.