Conclusion

The above review suggests that access and equity in education continue to be a significant problem in DMCs, despite general economic and human development. The major facets of inequity, in terms of gender, income, region, and ethnicity, are pervasive. This is especially the case in South Asia, where most countries have low HDI, GDI, and GNP per capita. This underlines the point made at the beginning of the booklet that inequity has a strong association with human poverty, and is not necessarily associated with high economic growth.

Below is a summary of the observations drawn from the analysis. The issues identified represent problems faced by DMCs, and additional resources and extra efforts are required to enhance access and equity in education in these countries.

Gender-Related Equity

In respect to gender perspectives, the major observations are:

(i) In most DMCs, the proportion of female illiterates is larger than that of male illiterates. In many countries, the proportion of female illiterates has grown.

(ii) Primary gross enrollments in general approached gender parity by the 1980s.

(iii) About half the DMCs approached gender parity in secondary enrollments in the 1990s. Among DMCs with higher male enrollments, the male/female ratios are mostly below 2:1, with the exception of a few South Asian countries.

(iv) Gender disparity is more obvious in tertiary enrollments and favorable on the male side, with the exception of a few East and Southeast Asian countries. The largest gap between male and female was 5:4 in Bangladesh.

(v) There is also gender stereotyping in tertiary education, with females focusing on humanities and social sciences while males focus on mathematics, science, engineering, and architecture. Subjects that lead to a better prospect of professional and economic status are still dominated by men.

(vi) In terms of economic and political participation in society, females are severely underrepresented in parliamentary seats or ministerial positions, as well as managerial positions. They are quite well represented in

professional occupations, but may be concentrated in the field of education.

(vii) There is a clear gender gap in wages, with females sharing only 35 to 40 percent of the earned income. But despite this disparity, the impact of additional schooling on earnings is higher for females than males.

(viii) All DMCs have GEM values lower than their HDI and GDI values.

(ix) While there is a relationship between HDI and GDI, there is no relationship between HDI, GDI, and GEM. This implies that economic and human development does not necessarily link to female empowerment. This fact further suggests that economic development is not a sufficient boost for female empowerment, and attention should be given to the sociocultural dimension of female empowerment.

Income-Related Equity

In respect to income-related equity, the major observations are:

(i) South Asia has the highest incidence of income poverty, and is home to one third of the income poor in the developing countries. However, the NIEs have achieved a large reduction of income poverty.

(ii) The proportion of the income poor has declined in the last two decades, but the number of income poor has increased.

(iii) The Gini index in many DMCs falls within the range of 30 and 40. Income inequality has declined, but some societies have experienced widened income inequality. Indonesia and Hong Kong, China are in the latter category.

(iv) Enrollment rates of the income poor are notably lower than those of the nonpoor; and the higher the level of education, the wider the gap between the poor and the nonpoor.

(v) Poor females are the most vulnerable in school nonattendance and noncompletion.

(vi) Additional household financial contributions to education are becoming a more notable phenomenon. This creates an additional barrier for the income poor to attend schools.

(vii) The concept of "low payoff, high opportunity costs" constitutes a significant barrier to education not only among the income poor in rural areas, but also in fast-growing areas such as parts of the PRC.

Region-Related Equity

In respect to region-related equity, the major observations are:

(i) Region-related equity is inseparable from gender and income equity. In this sense, the most disadvantaged group in terms of access to education is poor rural girls.

(ii) Notable gaps persist in literacy, enrollment, and school completion rates between urban and rural areas.
(iii) The gap is even more conspicuous among females. For example, in Afghanistan the urban female literacy rate is 9.5 times higher than the rural female rate.
(iv) The urban-rural gap is also wide in school completion rates. It has been as great as 45.9 times in Pakistan and 15.6 times in Nepal.
(v) A few countries have achieved close to equal enrollment rates between urban and rural areas. However, even in these countries the gap becomes evident at the tertiary level, especially among females.
(vi) Other types of disparities can be related to regional differences based on economic growth, proximity to the political center, and historical significance of the regions.
(vii) Decentralization and liberalization of economy can aggravate regional disparities in economic development and in education enrollments.
(viii) Migration of the labor force to more prosperous urban regions has created pressures on education. The migration of males to urban regions leaves females behind, putting pressure on rural enrollments for females, while large floating populations create pressure on education provisions for the children of such populations in major cities. This has been evident, for example, in Guangzhou and Shanghai in the PRC.
(ix) Different regional economic conditions have led to different education expenditures between regions, therefore creating disparities in education resources and facilities between regions.
(x) Conditions of schools in rural regions are generally poor, and they may not offer complete years of schooling, even at the primary level.
(xi) The issue of urban poverty is increasingly felt in Asia, and there is evidence that the demand for household financial contributions to education is higher in urban areas than rural areas.

Sociocultural-Related Equity

In respect to sociocultural-related equity, the major observations are:

(i) Inequity is by and large influenced by sociocultural perceptions and traditions, particularly in relation to gender.
(ii) While some minorities are quite successful, for example, the Chinese outside the PRC and the Koreans in the PRC, in most cases ethnic minorities are disadvantaged in terms both of enrollments and of school completion. Moreover, the higher the level of education, the smaller the proportion of the minorities in school. Subtle tensions between ethnic groups may pose a problem for further advancement of the minorities in society.
(iii) In most cases, minorities reside in remote areas and in rural areas, and are among the income poor. As the areas in which they reside are unfavorable for economic development, they tend to suffer long-term poverty.

(iv) In addition to language, the low self-esteem of the minorities may affect their education achievements.
(v) Gender disparities are largely a sociocultural issue: where they have to choose, families will give priority to boys for education.
(vi) The dominance of the patriarchal society continues to pose difficulties for females to change their life chances, despite the state of the economy, and despite the levels of education attainment.
(vii) Gender stereotyping in the curriculum and in the choice of fields of study continues to sustain difficulties for females to enhance their life chances.

Patterns of Access and Equity by Country Groupings

Grouping of DMCs by high-HDI-high-GDI, medium-HDI-medium-GDI and low-HDI-low-GDI reveals some patterns in access and equity:

(i) Universal primary education has generally been achieved in DMCs, but about half of the children have no access to secondary education in the medium-low HDI and GNP per capita countries, and tertiary education is a privilege for a very small proportion of people in these countries.
(ii) In terms of literacy and education enrollments, the high-HDI-high-GDI economies have distinctly higher rates than other DMCs.
(iii) In relation to public current expenditure, the lower the ranking in the HDI and GDI, the higher the proportion of public current expenditure on tertiary education, further illustrating that a small group of privileged students are consuming a relatively large proportion of education spending in low-performing economies. On the one hand this pattern demonstrates a large extent of inequity in low-performing economies; on the other it implies that only the rich can afford higher levels of education.
(iv) In terms of gender-related equity, despite DMCs all having low GEM ranks compared with other parts of the world, the NIEs in general have higher GEM ranks than the low-performing economies. However, individual DMCs may have significant deviations. For example, the Republic of Korea has very high HDI and GDI ranks but a very low GEM rank. In contrast, the PRC and Philippines have relatively low HDI and GDI ranks but relatively high GEM ranks. This also implies that gender empowerment relies not only on the economy, but also on the willpower of the government and the capacity of society to change sociocultural perceptions.
(v) The gender gap in income share may not be correlated with a country's HDI, GDI, or GNP per capita ranks. The Group L and H economies have a larger gender gap in income share than the Group M economies.

(vi) In low-performing economies, the gender gap is low in illiteracy but wide in enrollments; the pattern is reversed in NIEs. This implies that in poor countries, both genders may suffer similarly when there is no chance for education. However, when there is a chance for education, the chance goes to the boys.

(vii) The Group L and M countries have average proportions of rural population much higher than the three Group H economies, implying that if rural education is a problem at all, it is a pervasive problem in DMCs.

(viii) In terms of political and economic participation, while females in the medium- and low-performing economies can be active politically, they are passive economically and administratively. However, in the NIEs, females' empowerment capability is not enhanced as their proportion in parliamentary seats is the lowest among the three country groupings.

The above observations suggest that "education for all" will continue to be an agenda item in Asia, and that projects to improve education in disadvantaged contexts should be extended to cover more areas in the medium- and low-performing economies that constitute the majority of DMCs. Countries in South Asia should receive greater attention and external help for improvement in their education provision. In addition to economic strengthening, efforts have to be made to change the sociocultural context into one favorable to the disadvantaged.

The improvement of access and equity in education requires political will and commitment. No doubt, a country's general improvement in economic conditions can be helpful for reducing poverty and improving the general living conditions and life chances of the disadvantaged. However, this does not necessarily lead to such an outcome. *Emerging Asia* (ADB 1997, 268) points out that economic growth does not explain all of Asia's diversity. Some countries and regions with relatively low incomes per person have disproportionately high standards of health, education, and nutrition.