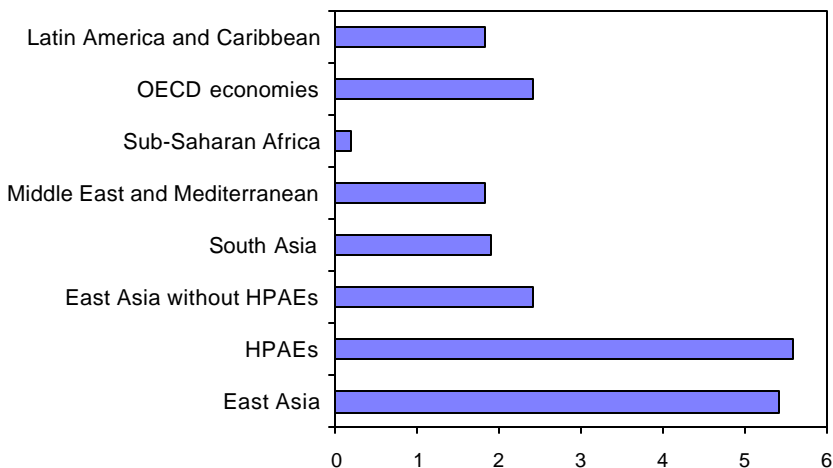


Introduction

Economic growth in Asia over the last three decades has been very striking. According to a 1993 World Bank report, between 1965 and 1990 the 23 economies of East Asia grew faster than all other regions in the world. And within East Asia, the eight high-performing Asian economies (HPAEs) – Japan; the four newly industrialized economies (NIEs) of Hong Kong, China; Republic of Korea; Singapore; and Taipei, China – plus Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand, achieved growth more than twice as fast as the other regions of the world, about three times faster than Latin America and South Asia, and five times faster than Sub-Saharan Africa.

However, this comparison has already underscored variations of growth within Asia. As Figure 1 shows, if the HPAEs are excluded from East Asia, the growth rate in East Asia would not be so impressive. Moreover, the annual growth of gross national product (GNP) per capita in South Asia was only 1.7 percent between 1965 and 1990. Thus, despite general improvement in Asia's economic development, reports on the region are full of cautious notes.

Figure 1: Average Annual Growth of Gross National Product per Capita, 1965-1990
(percent)



HPAEs = High-Performing Asian Economies.

OECD = Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development.

Source: World Bank 1993, 2.

A 1997 Asian Development Bank (ADB) report on the changes and challenges in emerging Asia remarked (p.268) that:

Life in Asia has changed remarkably during the last 30 years, and mostly for the better. On average, all standard indicators of the quality of life, such as poverty and mortality rates, have improved sharply.... [However] these changes have not been uniform.

The report added (p.268) that:

More striking than the improvements in Asia's quality of life are the region's disparities. Differences between countries, between regions within countries, between rural and urban areas, between ethnic groups, and between the sexes are large. In many instances they have increased during the last 30 years. Life expectancy and other indicators of health and nutrition, for instance, were already higher in East Asia than South Asia in the early 1960s. Although they have improved in both subregions, East Asia has achieved more. Hence on many counts human well-being within Asia is divergent rather than converging. Within many countries the story is similar: the situation in many parts of the inland provinces of the People's Republic of China is less favorable than in the coastal provinces. In South Asia especially, women's well-being lags far behind that of men.

The report's observations match those of many other documents. The 1990 Jomtien Declaration of the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) commenced its preamble by highlighting the failure to achieve access and equity in education:

More than 40 years ago, the nations of the world, speaking through the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, asserted that "everyone has a right to education." Despite notable efforts by countries around the globe to ensure the right to education for all, the following realities persist:

- Over 100 million children, including at least 60 million girls, have no access to primary schooling;
- Over 960 million adults, two thirds of whom are women, are illiterate, and functional illiteracy is a significant problem in all countries, industrialized and developing;
- Over one third of the world's adults have no access to the printed knowledge, new skills, and technologies that could improve the quality of their lives and help them shape, and adapt to, social and cultural change; and
- Over 100 million children and countless adults fail to complete basic education programs; millions more satisfy the attendance requirements but do not acquire essential knowledge and skills.

At the same time, the world faces daunting problems: mounting debt burdens,

the threat of economic stagnation and decline, rapid population growth, widening economic disparities among and within nations, war, civil strife, violent crime, the preventable deaths of millions of children, and environmental degradation. These problems constrain efforts to meet basic learning needs. The lack of basic education among a significant proportion of the population prevents societies from addressing such problems with strength and purpose.

The *Human Development Report 1997* produced by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) pointed out (pp.2-3, 38-9) that the progress in reducing poverty over the 20th century had been outstanding and unprecedented, but that the advances had been uneven and marred by setbacks. The report specifically highlighted the many facets of disparities that are still pervasive, namely income disparity, gender disparity, rural-urban disparity, and ethnic disparity.

In the context of these observations, this booklet has two major objectives. The first is to review trends of access and equity in education in the developing member countries (DMCs) of ADB. The second is to discuss trends of access and equity by country, in order to understand the various aspects and degrees of access and equity that can be related to characteristics of economic and human development.

A review as such is important because education plays an important role not only in economic development but also in the improvement of social equity. In many ways, social equity is inseparable from economic development, as improved education for all enhances the overall quality of human resources within an economy. Concerning this, ADB's *Framework and Criteria for the Appraisal and Socioeconomic Justification of Education Projects* (1994a, 5) pointed out that:

- Education can play a direct role in poverty reduction by enhancing the marketable skills of the economically disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, and by expanding their ability to take advantage of income generation possibilities and available social services.
- Education plays a key role in promoting the interests of women and increasing their diversified impact and contribution to national development goals. Women must have equal access to, and participation in, education activities.
- Through its impact on employment opportunities and earning potential, education alters the value placed on children and the willingness of parents to invest more in each child's development.
- Education contributes directly and indirectly to a higher level of socio-cultural and economic development that provides sufficient resources to address environmental issues.

The first four major sections of the booklet analyze various aspects of access and equity in DMCs over the last 20 years. The framework of analysis follows the social equity indicators set out by the above *Framework and Criteria* document (ADB 1994a, 13), namely:

- **Gender-Related Equity.** This refers to the opportunities of the traditionally disadvantaged gender group, i.e., females, in their access to various levels of education, in their opportunities for success in education, and in their opportunities to make use of education as an asset for enhancing their life chances.
- **Income-Related Equity.** This refers to the financially disadvantaged groups, i.e., the income poor, in their access to various levels of education and their opportunities for success in education.
- **Region-Related Equity.** This refers to the education opportunities of the people living in disadvantaged regions. In most cases, the disadvantaged regions are rural, but they can also be economically backward regions within an economy, and also the income poor within urban areas.
- **Sociocultural-Related Equity.** This refers to the education opportunities of socioculturally disadvantaged groups. In most cases, they are ethnic minorities within the economy, but sometimes women are also regarded as “minorities” in certain respects, and their education opportunities are limited by sociocultural perceptions of women that are unfavorable for them to receive education.

Addressing these specific aspects of equity in education coincides with a conception of education and human rights. Article 3 of the 1990 World Declaration on Education for All pointed out that:

- Basic education should be provided to all children, youth, and adults. To this end, basic education services of quality should be expanded and consistent measures must be taken to reduce disparities.
- For basic education to be equitable, all children, youth and adults must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning.
- The most urgent priority is to ensure access to, and improve the quality of, education for girls and women, and to remove every obstacle that hampers their active participation. All gender stereotyping in education should be eliminated.
- An active commitment must be made to remove education disparities. Underserved groups, such as the poor; street and working children; rural and remote populations; nomads and migrant workers; indigenous peoples; ethnic, racial, and linguistic minorities; refugees; those displaced by war; and people under occupation, should not suffer any discrimination in access to learning opportunities.

The agenda of the World Declaration on Education for All is by nature a concern for access and equity, covering the gender aspect and the underserved groups (or disadvantaged groups in this context). In addition, current conceptions of human rights include a variety of aspects, such as economic rights, social rights, and cultural rights; all these aspects are related to equal access to education provision for all. The framework for analysis in the booklet

is therefore tuned to these various aspects of equity and rights in relation to education.

Following this analysis, the booklet explores patterns of access and equity by country groupings. DMCs are categorized into three major groups, mainly based on the Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) accorded to them by UNDP, as published in the *Human Development Reports*. The first group (Group L) consists of South Asian countries having low HDI, low GDI, and low GNP per capita. The second group (Group M) consists mainly of countries having medium HDI, medium GDI, and medium GNP per capita. However, there are some variations in this group in terms of regional locations and income. More than half of them are located in Southeast Asia and the Pacific, and two thirds of them have medium GNP per capita; but the others are scattered regionally and fall into the low GNP per capita category. The third group (Group H) consists of the four NIEs, having high HDI, high GDI, and high GNP per capita.

These indicators are adopted in order to permit understanding of the threefold relationship between economic development, human development, and education opportunities. In general, the HPAEs are located in East Asia, and the obviously low-performing economies are located mainly in South Asia. However, the less distinctive high-performing or low-performing economies, and those in the middle range, are more difficult to distinguish.