

Introduction

Over the coming decade, the developing member countries (DMCs) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) will have an unprecedented opportunity to redirect energy and resources from rapid expansion of education systems to improvement of quality. This opportunity is a by-product of the progress that many countries have made in achieving widespread (verging on universal) access and of the booming regional economy that can help finance quality improvement (ADB 1997; Lewin 1998). The bad news is that not all countries in the region have shared in this Asian miracle and, among those that have, strong competing forces are making compelling demands on the resources needed for continued system improvement. Whether the enormous success of the last 20 years will continue or will erode in the face of these new pressures will depend largely on the quality and wisdom of those who administer, manage, and guide the system at all levels – from senior ministry officials to rural school principals. Yet many countries of the region consider the management of their education systems to be weak. Virtually all shortfalls in education systems are attributed, at least in part, to weak management capacity. The need to improve school administration has been one of the most widely advocated and least examined elements in the effort to strengthen education.

This booklet examines trends and issues in education management and efficiency across DMCs, and suggests ways through which governments can strengthen the administration of their education systems.

It offers five generalizations about the administrative and managerial challenges facing education leaders in Asia, and then highlights particular management issues that affect the major subsectors of education (primary, secondary, vocational, and higher). The next section lays out nine issues that can be expected to dominate the education landscape over the next decade, and the implications of each for education managers. The booklet then looks at the recruitment and professional development of education managers. The key question in this section is, given the widespread recognition of the problems of education and all the training that has occurred, why does management capacity remain so weak? The last section discusses the role of international assistance agencies in strengthening education management and administration in the region.

Throughout the booklet, special attention is given to two sets of questions:

- (i) Given that weak management capacity has been so often identified as a problem, why do such serious deficiencies in management persist? Have previous studies misunderstood the problem, offered the wrong solution, or both?

- (ii) If education in the region is to continue making the progress that has marked the last two decades, how will the management and administration of education need to change over the next decade?

In this booklet, *management* and *administration* are used synonymously to include such activities as planning, program implementation, coordination, personnel supervision, monitoring, and evaluation. *Leadership* refers to an individual's ability to articulate a vision and move an idea or program forward in ways that encourage others to participate and support the idea. Ideally, a good administrator is both a competent manager and an effective leader. But the connection is loose at best. Managers who are able to handle the technical aspects of planning, program implementation, and monitoring may lack the ability to excite or mobilize those around them. Charismatic leaders may have a dismal record in following through with the detail. Both sets of skills are necessary if education in DMCs is to continue to develop within the vortex of pressures it already faces.

One of the notable findings of this study is the sparseness of information and analysis about education management across the region. While weak management is frequently cited as a major impediment to improving education quality and delivery, few studies actually report on the personal characteristics, career development, or professional problems of administrators at any level. The lack of data may reflect a low regard for administrators. Or, it may be because many of the studies were commissioned by the very administrators who might be embarrassed by a critical analysis of administrators' skills.