

Promising Directions

The most promising opportunities for strengthening management and improving efficiency in DMCs will vary by the conditions and needs of each country. As pointed out by Bray and Lee (1997), the countries of developing Asia include the world's largest (PRC, India) and smallest (Nauru, Tuvalu), some of the poorest (Cambodia, Nepal) and richest (Singapore; Hong Kong, China). They also include a range of colonial histories and current styles of government (socialist, capitalist). Yet, a common theme across virtually all countries in the region is the importance assigned to education as an instrument of maintaining current or securing future prosperity. Central to that effort are the people who manage and administer the education system.

While good management alone cannot improve education, it is a necessary prerequisite to the success of other intended fixes. Five opportunities for strengthening education management seem to cut the widest swath across a region marked by such diversity.

Training for School-Level Administrators

Decentralization has raised the stakes for head teacher training. As the preceding analysis suggests, one effect of decentralization is to put greater management responsibility on those least prepared to accept it. The management skills of district education officers and school head teachers will need substantial strengthening if education systems are simultaneously to decentralize and raise quality. The training needs to concentrate on three dimensions:

- (i) *The Technical Skills Associated with Managing a District or School.* To manage a district or school, administrators need skills in such areas as budgeting, monitoring expenditures, planning, program implementation, evaluation, and report writing. While this training is similar to much of what is already offered, the need continues.
- (ii) *Knowledge about the Pedagogical Process.* Decentralization tends to place head teachers in a more pivotal role in making (or shaping) the trade-offs among instructional inputs and classroom practices. As argued earlier, if education quality is to improve in a decentralized environment, head teachers need to operate from a clear understanding of which instructional inputs and processes contribute to greater student learning and what can be reduced without seriously affecting student learning.
- (iii) *Community Relations.* Community relations involve more than tapping additional money from local citizens. One finding from research on school administrators in highly decentralized education systems is that when more

power and authority are shifted to the head teacher and community, powerful local elites exercise enormous influence, often in their own special self-interest (Spring 1998). For instance, local elites may assert pressure for curriculum tracking that benefits their own children at the expense of the less affluent or powerful. There may be pressures toward vocationalization of the curriculum, again in ways that favor the business and industrial interests of the elite. Head teachers often come under the influence of these elites either to curry favor or out of fear for their jobs. For head teachers to exercise meaningful leadership when caught in the turmoil of factional community pressures, considerable skill and good sense are required.

The job of the head teacher is essentially the same in all countries. Likewise, the technical knowledge (budgeting, project implementation, evaluation, etc.) is largely the same. One possibility to be explored is that *training of education managers for these levels could be designed and probably delivered on a cross-national, perhaps regional, basis*. This might be done in conjunction with a twinning arrangement between a regional training site, selected DMC universities, and one or more international universities. The goal is to provide well-designed training to large numbers of “head teacher trainees” at convenient sites. This would not duplicate what is currently available. Indeed at present, administrative training is almost overlooked in all but a few DMCs.

Regional administrator training centers offer an additional advantage. Given the growing ease of communications and importance of regional cooperation, it is imperative that education managers understand organizational structures and operations beyond their own. They need personal experience, seeing how other nations’ systems operate. The content of regional training can offer that experience. While top officials already tend to have regional and international perspectives, it is important that managers farther down the administrative chain also develop those broader perspectives. Old ways will prevail if incumbents cannot gain new perspectives.

Use of Information in Planning

Information collection and use (often discussed as EMIS development) have been a priority of many DMCs and a central feature of international assistance across the region. Many countries are already reaping the rewards of having better information on their education systems to guide their planning and program management. While no longer a “new” initiative, it continues as an important one. The recent economic difficulties in the region increased the competition among sectors for funds. Only as the education sector is able to demonstrate its accomplishments and its continuing needs will it be able to compete successfully for funds. The effective use of information is an essential ingredient in the ability of education officials to make their case.

Education managers across Asia need continued and expanded training in data interpretation, and in the utilization of quantitative data in planning, policy analysis, program management, monitoring, and program evaluation. Much good

training of this type has already been provided in the region. However, the turnover of education officials on the one hand, and the rapid introduction of new techniques (particularly computer-based planning tools) on the other, result in a persistent need for more training. While much of this type of training has been conducted on the job with the assistance of international experts, DMCs might explore other models that would allow more cross-national sharing of expertise and training within the region. Again, this could be developed into a *regional* training program for education planners. Successful models for ways to deliver training on a regional basis already exist, though not in education administration – for example, the Regional Center for Innovation and Technology (INNOTECH) in the Philippines and the Asian Institute of Technology in Thailand. Developing training that can be offered across 20 to 30 countries makes greater sense than developing the same essential training 20 to 30 different times, as each country repeats the process for itself.

Two cautions need to be observed. First, the training must be engaging and effective, resulting in the development of substantive skills in the trainees. This requires training that builds in an opportunity to *practice*. Intermittent training interspersed with opportunities for supervised application is a must. Second, as discussed earlier, training often “fails” because recipients, once trained, re-enter work situations in which they are not rewarded for (or may even be barred from) implementing their training. To be effective, the design of the training needs to go beyond the classroom, to assist the recipients in implementing their new knowledge and skills in their own workplaces.

Use of Technology

The widespread introduction of the Internet and the cellular phone is revolutionizing communications across the region. Such progress cuts two ways: schools can now access information resources that were beyond educators’ dreams only a few years ago. This could contribute to improved learning opportunities for students. However, in countries with large numbers of underqualified teachers, this opportunity will be lost. Poorly qualified teachers are not able to make use of this type of technology even when it is available. The resulting gap between employer needs and graduates’ skills will widen the economic gap between countries in the region.

To be competitive in the labor force, school graduates will need skills in (or at least exposure to) the newer forms of communication and information transfer. Again, this is a type of *teacher* training that can be designed and probably delivered on a region-wide basis, which is more sensible than trying to develop different curricula and training facilities for each DMC. However, if such training is to be successful with teachers, then school and system administrators also need to understand the technology and its demands on the instructional setting.

The wealth of information already available to DMCs through the Internet carries the same risks as the development of education management information systems – the explosion of information can swamp the system, leading to ineffective use or nonuse of the very resource expected to revolutionize education. Carefully structured curricula that show administrators and teachers

how to use information from the Internet to strengthen their management and enrich pedagogical practice are urgently needed. Web sites specifically designed to provide such information to teachers and education managers in developing countries are needed. Similarly, student-to-student electronic mail (e-mail) exchanges between schools in different countries or regions of the same country can do much to make education interesting for children, but establishing such connections and networks needs structure and work. Such web sites could be developed in conjunction with the regional training institutions for education administration, discussed above.

Conduct of Comprehensive Education Analyses

During times of rapid change, it is easy for education managers to focus on individual high-profile problems (textbook distribution, teacher training, etc.) and, in doing so, to lose sight of larger system relationships crucial to the longer-term health of the education system. At regular intervals, system administrators need to step back from the day-to-day issues to examine how the various components of the education system are working together. UNICEF calls these studies *comprehensive education analyses*; USAID refers to them as *sector assessments*. They are not to be confused with the more focused studies conducted by the World Bank, ADB, or other international donors as part of project appraisal missions. These comprehensive education analyses are data-based analyses of education systems, typically conducted by teams composed of both local and international experts, and involving a great deal of local discussion at each stage.

These comprehensive system studies were in vogue during the 1980s but tended to lose favor, in part from criticism that the conclusions from country to country were very similar. This was unfortunate since many of the problems facing education officials across the regions *were* similar and the studies highlighted problems that could only be identified by this type of analysis. Many DMCs (e.g., Indonesia, Nepal) have experience in conducting these comprehensive studies and made effective use of the results in their subsequent national education planning activities. The reason to bring them back into greater prominence now is that (i) many of the dynamics of education in the region are changing, (ii) many countries now have much better data on which to base such studies, and (iii) more education officials within DMCs have the training and experience to participate in this type of study.

Participation in National Development

DMCs need to continue efforts already under way to increase the private financing of higher education in the region. Students can, and often should, be expected to bear a greater share of the cost of their post-secondary education. This is understandably unpopular with students and can be expected to cause protest and some disruption.

Even as this occurs, however, colleges and universities need to give more attention to ways in which they can increase their attractiveness for the continued investment of public funds. Specifically, they need to become more effective partners in the economic and social development of their own countries. As the economic pressures in Asia mount, future support for higher education is likely to be tied to those institutions demonstrating their relevance in new ways. These institutions have the intellectual reserves, the cross-sectoral perspective, and the long-term staying power for the task; but to date these assets have not been well harnessed.

For their part, higher education institutions in DMCs have often harbored a healthy skepticism about becoming closely involved in the applied aspects of national development. Institutions get politicized, governments change, and punishments are exacted. But the risks are changing. The growing danger now is that universities will be judged irrelevant by their own national governments and will have increasing difficulty in competing for public funds. In too many cases, graduates' skills have been poorly matched with labor force needs, faculties have disdained involvement in community outreach activities, and institutional status has been viewed as more important than program relevance.

Long-term institutional strength requires financial self-sufficiency which, in turn, depends on a strong national economy. Helping foster a strong economy is a way of creating a necessary condition for long-term institutional revitalization. In addition, the involvement of educators in key development issues increases the relevance of both the faculty research and instruction they provide. This contributes to a further payoff: attention to development priorities can build political support as the public and the private sectors come to value higher education as a first-line resource in solving the complex national issues they face. This can lead to the political support the institutions need in the competition for both public and private funding.