

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The social and economic development of nations is fundamentally an education process in which people learn to create new institutions, use new technologies, cope with their environment, and alter their patterns of behavior. Education and schooling improve the capabilities of individuals and the capacity of institutions, and become a catalyst for all the closely interrelated economic, social, cultural, and demographic changes that are defined as national development. However, if opportunities for schooling are unevenly distributed across population segments through inequitable selection practices, the formal education system may perpetuate and legitimize divisions based on gender, status, wealth, or socioeconomic role. Nonetheless, as a whole, education (including nonformal education as well as formal schooling) is a process of providing enlightenment and skills, as demonstrated by the profound influences of education on individual aspirations and achievements. In short, while equity in access to schooling remains an important challenge in many developing member countries (DMCs) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), education is clearly a powerful instrument of social policy, which has substantially promoted society's objectives.

This study examines the trends and potential problems in education among DMCs. Of foremost importance are the changes taking place in education quality, equity and access, finance, and management, as well as their implications for policy, strategy, and external assistance.

Regional Social, Demographic, Economic, and Education Changes

In some cases, social, demographic, and economic changes among DMCs are perpetuating intraregional diversity; in others, they are contributing to commonality in issues and policies. Social changes have affected family size, family roles, intergenerational relations, and raised people's consciousness of gender inequities. Alongside other demographic shifts, Asia is experiencing a dramatic decline in mortality and fertility rates. At the same time, there have been clear intraregional

distinctions in demographic shifts, which in turn have yielded disparities in economic performance. At least until Asia's recent financial crisis and the economic downturns in some transition economies in the region, Asia has outpaced all other regions in terms of economic growth. However, within the region, it appears that the differences in demographic patterns have generally contributed to more rapid development in East Asia vis-à-vis South Asia. In addition to gaps between DMCs' growth rates, key distinctions remain in the incidence of poverty and in patterns of employment by sector. For example, traditional non-mechanized agriculture still dominates some economies, while technology- and knowledge-intensive industries are rapidly expanding in others. Finally, variations in demographic transitions within Asia as a whole have also had important consequences in terms of society's development, including progress in education.

DMCs in East Asia well exceed world averages on many development indicators, including life expectancy, per capita gross domestic product or gross national product (GDP or GNP), and literacy. Other DMCs, particularly those in South Asia, such as Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Nepal, and Pakistan, have not fared so well. Haq (1997) refers to South Asia as "the poorest region, the most illiterate, the most malnourished region, the least gender sensitive region, the region with highest human deprivation, and the most militarized region in the world". However, predicted downturns in South Asian population growth rates and youth dependency ratios, if realized, may help improve conditions in the subregion during the next few decades. In particular, these should allow for increased investment in education, at least per school-age child, if not also in aggregate terms.

Regional gross enrollment rates continue to grow at all education levels.⁴ For primary education, the mean gross enrollment rate (GER) among the DMCs was 101 percent in 1995, suggesting that, in many DMCs, primary education is nearly universal.⁵ However, despite

⁴ Following efforts to improve and revise the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), UNESCO adopted the use of "primary", "secondary", and "tertiary" education, in place of the labels "first-level", "second-level", and "third-level" used in previous publications, even where prior ISCED definitions continued to be applied (see UNESCO 1998b). Herein, despite variations in terminology by country and data source, the terms primary, secondary, and tertiary are used synonymously with first-level, second-level, and third-level, respectively. See also Appendix 2.

⁵ Calculation for 1995, based on UNESCO data in Table 1.6. GER is defined as the total enrollment in a given level of schooling, regardless of pupils' age, divided by the population of the age group that officially corresponds to that level of education, and thus can exceed 100 percent.

significant overall enrollment growth, a large number of poor children, especially girls, remain in the school-age cohort not enrolled in school. Regional trends also obscure large intraregional differences in secondary school enrollments. For example, only 32 percent of boys and just 11 percent of girls in Afghanistan are enrolled at this level, compared to GERs of 101 percent for both boys and girls in the Republic of Korea. By 2010, approximately one third of DMCs are projected to have GERs of more than 50 percent for secondary education. Tertiary education is projected to be the fastest-growing level through 2010, but is expected to continue to exhibit the greatest gender gap in enrollments.

Over the past few years, DMC governments have increased education expenditure as a share of current government expenditure, with a slight increase in capital education expenditure as a percentage of total education expenditure. Public expenditure on education as a share of GNP across DMCs ranges from less than 2 percent to approximately 8 percent. Like all education indicators, expenditure figures tell, at best, an incomplete story. Many types of financial support for schools and other education programs are not included within typically reported expenditure figures. Also, and more subtly, there is room to maneuver within the same amount of available fiscal resources: talented administrators, imaginative teachers, and enthusiastic parents can obtain additional returns on a given level of resources.

Emerging Changes in Education Governance, Policies, and Strategies

Major changes, often encouraged by international agencies, are taking place in education governance among most DMCs. To varying degrees, at different speeds, and following a range of paths, education responsibilities are being devolved alongside, in some cases, decision-making authority. The expectations are that decentralization and localization of education services will relieve some of the burden on central bureaucracies. Among the key potential benefits are an increased resource base and higher levels of participation by parents, the community, and sometimes the private sector in the education system, resulting in greater effectiveness and efficiency. Moreover, allowing parents and community members direct involvement in decisions affecting education is likely to ensure the overall relevance of the

education content. This general trend may have profound effects on many facets of the education system, e.g., the actors involved in education decisions; strategies for change; opportunities for localizing curricula; operational meaning given to such concepts as quality, efficiency, and relevance in education; and how education services are financed. Decentralization may have an equally profound effect on the direction and content of the roles of international agencies.

Effective education systems have at least five characteristics: sound education governance and management, high-quality schools and training programs, continuing attention to equity, availability of multiple sources of finance, and well-developed descriptive statistics and indicators. The following is a brief summary of these characteristics with associated policies and strategies that can help achieve them.

A. Education Governance and Management

Policy 1: Strengthening Institutional Infrastructure in the Center

The challenge to DMCs may be broadly defined as capacity building of institutions and processes related to education governance and management. Capacity building in this context extends from the policy environment at the central level to school-level management.

Strategies

- Define and communicate a national vision, with clear articulation linking key strategic priorities; develop laws, policies, and guidelines; and prepare strategic and implementation plans for long-term technical assistance to provincial and local management levels.
- Further develop research and development, monitoring, and evaluation functions in the center.

Policy 2: Improving Education Planning and Policy Capabilities of Provincial and District Institutions

In many DMCs, decision-making authority and overall responsibility for management of the education system are increasingly being devolved to provincial and district levels. Despite certain advantages of

decentralization, such as increased local ownership of and accountability for education, it has also raised important difficulties related to resource allocation, personnel selection and promotion, and the ability to evaluate schooling systems.

Strategies

- With technical assistance from the center, develop plans and programs at the provincial or local level for providing individual training and for building institutional capacities, in order to assess education needs, monitor progress, and provide supervision.
- With technical assistance from the province level, further develop planning capabilities at the district and community levels, including development of networking across districts and of local resources.

Policy 3: Restructuring School-Level Management

Under any form of education governance, some of the important planning for, and much of the implementation of, school improvement takes place at the school and community levels. Reforms in education governance have little chance of success without strong school management.

Strategies

- Retrain head teachers and staff in new requirements for managing a school, covering financial management, instructional supervision, community relations, and strategic planning, including development of information and communications networks.
- Develop school-level systems for monitoring education quality, including needs assessment technologies, quality and efficiency indicators, and data-analysis capabilities.

B. High-Quality, Equitable, and Adequately Financed Education Systems

Education systems are made up of interdependent levels and institutions. In planning their future, DMCs will need to envisage not

only high-quality basic education, but high-quality secondary and tertiary education as well.

Policy 1: Basic Education

In light of its contribution to social equity and economic productivity, basic education—defined broadly herein to include not only primary and lower secondary education, but also preschool and nonformal education (i.e., literacy, numeracy, and basic life skills training for adults and out-of-school youth)—has been granted the highest priority in the national schooling systems of many DMCs. Nonetheless, a fundamental question remains, namely: What kind of basic education? For DMCs that are primarily agricultural and use a low level of technology, the meaning of basic education may be different from its meaning for the more technologically advanced DMCs. For the latter, basic education will include a more complex set of skills and understandings.

Strategies

- Develop sector or subsector analyses of skills most needed by citizens for work and everyday life, and assess the capability of schools to provide such skills.
- Develop and implement an integrated set of national instructional strategies, including teacher incentives; this should involve local administrators and teachers, and will vary by schooling development level, and according to local and regional factors.
- Develop special programs of financial support, scholarships, and other assistance for the poor, including interventions to address barriers to schooling facing poor girls in particular.
- In coordination with other relevant social sectors, provide education opportunities to the physically and learning impaired.
- Based on strategies drawn from education research, introduce innovations and a new delivery system, e.g., multigrade classrooms, multishift schools, distance learning, low-cost technologies, active learning approaches, and alternative school calendars.

Policy 2: Secondary Education

Expanding enrollments and evolving requirements of changing economies demand an increased focus on secondary education.

Strategies

- For countries seeking to extend basic education beyond the primary grades, initiate planning with appropriate lead-times to avoid shortages of teachers and prevent inadequate implementation of programs.
- As secondary education expands, develop public and private, cost-effective, school- and workplace-related learning pathways that respond to different demands.
- Develop entrance and exit standards, as well as provision for transferability, across schools and programs.
- Further enhance the quality and relevance of secondary education through a focus on conditions and inputs that, research suggests, are most critical for classroom instruction.
- Develop gender-specific strategies to increase enrollment of girls, including revision of textbooks to avoid stereotyping, conduct of awareness campaigns, recruitment of female teachers, and, if necessary, introduction of girls' schools.

Policy 3: Tertiary and Continuing Education

Among the three levels of education, higher (i.e., tertiary) education will show the greatest percentage of growth from 1990 to 2010, especially in low- and middle-income DMCs.

Strategies

- Further develop tertiary education that is responsive to other parts of the system in terms of standards, admission criteria, and curricula.
- Encourage, through privatization, multiple delivery modes and multiple channels of financing for an increasingly heterogeneous and flexible range of institutions.

- Develop a special concern for, and priority to, women's access and treatment in higher education.
- Promote continuing, adult, and lifelong learning opportunities that respond to (possibly evolving) individual needs.

C. Descriptive Statistics and Education Indicators

The devolution of education dialogue and decision making, and the emergence of local strategic education planning, require new kinds of information to be made available and analyzed at the provincial, local, and school levels.

Policy: Strengthening the Policy Relevance of Regional Education Indicators

Carefully designed education indicators can help policymakers, administrators, and citizens better understand the education progress at all levels of the system. Such indicators further allow DMCs to evaluate their own progress against the performance of others.

Strategy

- Over time, develop (i) a regional education indicator system; (ii) new information collection and processing capacities at the provincial and district levels; and (iii) on-site assessment and monitoring capabilities at the school level.