

INTRODUCTION

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 in a broad sense improves the capabilities of individuals and capacity of institutions and becomes a catalyst for all the closely interrelated economic, social, cultural, and demographic changes that are defined as national development. Precisely how these changes occur is not fully known, which often frustrates attempts at national policy and planning. However, there is substantial evidence that, in a supporting environment, schooling and other forms of education can make major contributions to economic productivity and the complex processes of technology dissemination, individual earnings, reduction of poverty, development of healthy families, gender equity, creation and sharing of values, responsibilities of citizenship, and quality of life.

Yet, researchers and scholars also find a negative potential impact of education. It has been argued that, if opportunities for schooling are unevenly distributed across population segments, then the formal education system may perpetuate and legitimize divisions based on gender, status, wealth, or socioeconomic role. (Recent empirical studies include Glick and Sahn 2000, Thomas et al. 1996, and Handa 1996.)

Further, formal schooling, along with modern media and aspects of global culture, appear to draw children and youth away from their cultural origins and traditional family customs. And parents from some communities, when faced with a variety of school fees and chronic unemployment of graduates, have sometimes withdrawn their children from school to help them seek an alternative path for their future.

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 DMCs, education is clearly a powerful instrument of social policy, and has substantially promoted society's objectives.

This volume focuses on the broad role of education in national development in Asia. The emphasis is on trends, issues, and envisaged

problems within the education system and in the external relations of education with the environment. The foremost concerns are the implications for policy and planning. The volume is organized into five chapters. The first chapter briefly sketches the demographic, economic, social, and education patterns of the region. Descriptions are offered by region, individual developing member countries (DMCs) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), and DMC groupings. The second chapter examines the relationship among education, economic growth, poverty, and social change. This chapter includes a brief review of the education characteristics of the set of countries with successful economies and education systems, focusing on Asia's newly industrialized economies (NIEs) of Hong Kong, China; Republic of Korea (hereafter Korea); Singapore; and Taipei, China. The third chapter analyzes issues and trends related to education quality, equity and access, and finance. Included in this chapter is a discussion of policy issues by level of education. The fourth chapter analyzes the significantly changing regional patterns of control and responsibility for education decisions. This chapter provides two national case studies of the decentralization of education governance in DMCs; identifies the possible risks and problems associated with these changes; and analyzes conditions for sustaining new approaches to policy, planning, and practice. The fifth and final chapter summarizes DMC trends in major policy areas, and suggests responsive strategies and policies. Finally, the appendixes provide a statistical overview of key education indicators for the region.