

TA COMPLETION REPORT

Division: AWEH

TA NO./NAME: 5560-REG: Dropout of Primary Students in South Asia			TA AMOUNT APPROVED: \$500,000.00	SOURCE: Japan Special Fund
			REVISED AMOUNT: no change in amount	
EXECUTING AGENCY: Institut de Recherche Sur L'Economie de L'Education (IREDU)			TA AMOUNT UNDISBURSED: \$109,764 ^a	TA AMOUNT UTILIZED: \$390,236
DATE: APPROVAL: 21 December 1993	SIGNING: N/A	FIELD: 18 April 1994	CLOSING:	
			ORIGINAL: 30 April 1996	ACTUAL: 30 April 1998 ^b
TA DESCRIPTION				
<p>The educational efforts of the Governments of South Asia and donors were being constrained by an estimated 30 to 40 percent dropout of students entering primary school and it was felt that the high levels of wastage and subsequent low attainment of functional literacy needed to be rectified. Consequently, it was necessary to find cost effective strategies to keep children in school through completion of the primary cycle. But before effective educational interventions could be made, the magnitude and causes of dropout needed to be ascertained. Thus, the RETA was designed to quantify the magnitude and identify the endemic causes of dropout and to delineate appropriate interventions to raise retention rates of primary school students in South Asia. The RETA was designed to undertake a survey of about 25,000 primary students in 400 randomly selected schools (mostly public and about 80 percent rural) to determine statistically significant factors keeping students in school. Further, the RETA was expected to enhance domestic research capabilities so that sustainable, country specific research could be designed and implemented.</p>				
TA OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE				
<p>The objective of the RETA was to identify the school and nonschool factors that influence students' school attendance and achievement, and to study retention rates among primary school cohort groups. On the basis of these data and analyses, the study would identify the various school and non-school factors causing dropout with a view to formulating and costing prevention measures for application in primary schools. The RETA covered five South Asian countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan). A commencement workshop and a final workshop were planned.</p>				
TA INPUTS EVALUATION				
<p>The Institut De Recherche Sur L'Economie De L'Education (IREDU) in Dijon, France was contracted to prepare and supervise the implementation of the national surveys in the five countries. Ten person-months of international consultants were planned but the amount required to complete the data preparation and analysis was increased by four person-months because national data files were late in arriving and required extensive revision and formatting. IREDU prepared the survey instruments, tests, and common procedures to be applied by the various research institutes in conducting the study; visited each national center, and assisted in translating, developing implementation schedules, training survey monitors, and refining the data before analysis was undertaken in Dijon. The terms of reference for the TA were satisfactory and the performance of the consultants in France and the surveyed countries was good. The commencement workshop in Dhaka was well attended by 12 Government and Research Institute staff from all five participating countries, 4 IREDU staff, and 3 Bank staff.</p>				
TA OUTPUTS EVALUATION				
<p>The TA produced a useful data base, survey questionnaires and tests, and country reports. These outputs were of a high caliber. The national reports prepared by private national research institutes utilized macro level statistics as well as descriptive data from the survey. The international reports comparing each country on a common set of statistical regression analyses were also technically good. The final workshop in Manila in November 1996, attended by over 40 participants, produced interesting insights on the interpretations of trends and patterns in</p>				
<p>^a Savings resulted from nonparticipation by Myanmar which withdrew from the study and by unutilized funds for travel. Subject to final billing for cost of printing the RETA Report.</p> <p>^b Data collection took an extra year to process in the field and evaluate by the Executing Agency before conducting the Final Workshop. Additional time was required to consolidate cross-national findings for the Final Report.</p>				

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South Asia. A consolidated report on the findings of the TA was printed for distribution to a wide audience in the Asia Region. The TA provided valuable data for use by national research centers. National reports prepared by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, Bangladesh; the Royal Institute of Management, Bhutan; the Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development, Nepal; and the Institute of Development Economics, Pakistan were used by their respective Ministries of Education to develop educational policies to reduce dropout.

The collaboration of the national research institutes with IREDU in France helped to transfer survey technology to South Asia and helped to highlight the need for quality interventions in primary schooling to halt the massive dropout of students who learn little before leaving school. The internal efficiency loss due to repetition and dropout was calculated to average about 30 percent in South Asia. This wasted expenditure on students was acknowledged to be very costly for the Governments already facing severe financial constraints in provision of basic education to all children. The potential for efficiency gains, through relatively inexpensive interventions was also recognized.

Other outcomes of the study revealed that students who dropout usually are those who have repeated a grade once or more and who have fallen behind in their studies. Rural students are significantly more likely to dropout once in school, but girls do not dropout in statistically greater numbers than do boys. In the case of Nepal, it was found that the primary education system was both inefficient and the academic learning of students was poor while in Pakistan, academic levels were reasonable to acquire minimum competency but the system was inefficient in allocating resources wisely. The consensus reached by the national participants was to promote community-based schools, nonformal school programs for overage children to give them a second chance to complete primary schooling, consolidate schools to raise the teacher-pupil ratio, and encourage quality education with the expectation that children would perform better and parents would welcome the additional benefits of literacy and life skills derived from quality. Other low cost interventions included strengthening parent-teacher cooperation, altering the school calendar to accommodate the planting season, and providing awards for school attendance and academic performance.

TA OVERALL ASSESSMENT/RATING

The TA was generally successful in meeting its objectives. The TA provided valuable data and insights which will be useful in planning for measures to reduce dropout. Many participants were unaware of the magnitude of dropout in South Asia and the financial drain on the system because they viewed dropout as the natural consequence of a learning process where some succeed while others fail. Participants did not recognize the connection between dropout and the poor performance of teachers. Further, some participants did not see the cost implications of dropout because they did not realize the double loss accruing to money wasted on the individual dropout who left without acquiring literacy, and on the individual who was denied access to schooling due to the seat occupied by the future dropout.

KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The Bank had difficulty controlling the data processing schedule which slipped beyond the intended two-year time period by almost an additional year. However, the delay did not adversely effect the outcome of the TA. The lessons learned suggest that adequate resources including sufficient time and staff are essential for ongoing supervision and capacity building whenever undertaking survey research in multiple countries and involving thousands of students and hundreds of schools with statistical analyses conducted outside the region. The TA might have improved on the linkages between the private research institutes and Ministries of Education because in most of the countries there was little collaborative effort. A final lesson learned suggests that high dropout should be viewed as an indicator of system failure rather than the fault of the student.

FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Bank prepared a report entitled, "Combating Primary School Dropouts in South Asia" for wide circulation to highlight the problem of the dropout in South Asia and the need to emphasize cost effective methods for Governments and communities to experiment with over the coming years. As more than 40 million children in South Asia are at risk of not completing primary school each year, the Bank can assist the developing member countries (DMCs) to reduce dropouts by undertaking dropout prevention components in all primary school projects in the region taking the findings of the RETA into account. In Pakistan, a primary school improvement project is proposed to help address this problem. In Nepal, the Government is addressing the issue in their sector development program and in Bangladesh the forthcoming Third Primary Education Sector Project will focus on the reduction of dropout. The Bank should also call attention to the situation in India where in some states, the levels of dropout exceed that of Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nepal.