Chapter IX

EDUCATION

1. Education has played a central role in the life and well-being of societies. A nation's progress is intricately linked to the vitality and impact of its education system, from the pre-school to the post-doctoral levels. Globally, the education industry absorbs 5 per cent of world GDP but generates much more in return. Today, more than ever, investment in education yields immeasurable economic and social rewards for individuals and nations linked in a global economy. Education, while by no means the only or magical door to opportunity, remains one of the principal ways to achieve fuller human development and thus to reduce poverty and exclusion.

2. The promotion of universal public education has long had as its goals nation-building and national integration, the fostering of shared values, the socialization of children and the channelling of young people into productive roles as adults. These objectives continue to drive the global effort towards universal education. In addition, education has increasingly become an economic imperative. Globalization, changing manufacturing and labour market structures, new information technologies and ever-expanding frontiers of research in the life sciences are combining to reshape most aspects of life. Today's information age creates opportunities that hinge on knowledge and skills, making education increasingly an important determinant of a nation's international competitiveness in the global economy. It also demands greater adaptability to rapid and unforeseen change in the organization of life and commerce. In the new millennium of knowledge-based societies, education has become crucially important as an economic force and requires life-long learning.

3. The international community made a series of commitments to education throughout the last decade.[1] The 1990 World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, was a landmark in global education policy. But actions have fallen far short of words. The Education for All assessment for 2000, tracking the Jomtien goals, found that more than 113 million children have no primary education. A staggering 880 million adults have entered the new century illiterate. Gender discrimination still plagues education systems. Women make up two thirds of all illiterate adults. This is exactly the same proportion as 10 years ago – a pointer to persistent gender bias in education. Issues of unequal quality and access, especially for girls, the rural poor and linguistic, ethnic and other minorities, bedevil education systems in rich and poor countries alike. They overshadow the considerable headway made by some countries in expanding primary education over the last 10 years. The quality of learning and the acquisition of skills and values fail to meet the aspirations and needs of individuals and societies.[2] Far from being a basic human right, as declared in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, there are widening disparities in access to education across and within countries.

4. Poverty is a major underlying factor in the inability of Governments to achieve target goals in education. The overall public expenditure by countries on primary education averaged less than 1.7 per cent of GNP in 1998. One tenth of countries surveyed in the 2000 Education for All (EFA) assessment reported spending less than 0.7 per cent and one tenth more than 3.6 per cent.[3] Even more importantly, total GNP in many developing countries, especially in the poorest among them, is low, implying very low levels of public educational spending in these countries. In per capita terms, even if these countries raise their education share in total GNP to that of the developed countries (about 5 per cent of GNP), the figures would still be far from being adequate to provide access to basic education for all. The external debt burden of many Governments has exacerbated the crisis in health and education spending in many developing countries. Poverty is thus a barrier to education, while denial of education locks countries into a cycle of poverty and exclusion.

5. Several other developments have complicated the task of attaining universal education goals. Intractable conflict is a reality in many parts of the world, generating a rising number of refugees and displaced persons, many of them women and young children whose education is inevitably interrupted. In addition, the voluntary and forced movements of people and mingling of languages and cultures are a challenge to educational policy-makers in every region. The world has 30 more countries today than it did a decade ago. There have been dramatic shifts in the political, economic and social landscape of central and eastern Europe. All these changes have an impact on national education systems. Demographic trends also pose challenges. More than one fifth of the world's population are adolescents. This is the highest proportion in history (see chap. IV) and places unprecedented pressure on school systems. The

HIV/AIDS pandemic is not only a profound human and social tragedy but also an economic threat, given its devastating impact on entire generations. HIV/AIDS kills more than two million adults each year, leaving children to cope without parents and grandparents, teachers and health-care workers.[4] Public and private financial resources that could have been invested in education have to be diverted towards the prevention of HIV/AIDS and care for AIDS patients, exacerbating the constraint of poverty on education. The education industry has also to contend with new information and communications technologies that are transforming human institutions and interactions on the one hand and creating a widening digital divide on the other.

6. The following sections summarize major developments and policy issues in education.

Progress in enrolment and efficiency and quality issues

7. Despite considerable barriers, primary school enrolment figures have gone up worldwide. Among the encouraging findings of the EFA 2000 assessment are: the number of children in school rose from 599 million in 1990 to 681 million in 1998; the number of out-of-school children fell from 127 million to 113 million over the same period; and the number of children in pre-school education rose by 5 per cent in the last decade. Globally, 87 per cent of young adults (aged 15 to 24 years) are literate. Much of these increases in enrolment have occurred in developing countries, specifically the world's nine high-population countries (Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Nigeria and Pakistan) which account for half the world's population and 70 per cent of its illiterates.[5]

8. Worldwide, enrolment ratios at all levels of education have increased for both male and female in the past 20 years (see table IX.1). At the primary level, sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and South Asia are the regions that have not achieved universal enrolment, although the ratios improved in all but sub-Saharan Africa. Even in the poorest of developing countries, namely the least developed countries, progress has been made in raising enrolment rates at all levels.

9. Enrolment rates and total enrolment are useful indicators of educational access. But they tell only part of the story. They fail to reveal efficiency of educational systems. One reason is that they are typically recorded at the beginning of a school year and do not capture attendance and dropouts during the year. For example, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa are two regions with the highest enrolment in the past decade – a total of 33 million students. But fewer than three out of four pupils reached grade 5. In the least developed countries, about half reach this level and many drop out by the second grade. Another aspect of the internal efficiency of educational systems that enrolment rates fail to account for is the repetition rate. Repetition of school years inflates gross enrolment rates. Thus, higher enrolment rates should be interpreted with this point in mind. Indeed, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) estimated that in many countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America, repeaters constitute more than 20 per cent of enrollment.

10. Most importantly, enrolment rates do not indicate the quality of education. In fact, the EFA 2000 assessment shows that quality has often been a casualty in the drive for universal education, in turn perpetuating a cycle of dropout and repetition. The overall rise in primary enrolment in developing countries must therefore be seen in perspective, with high dropout rates and wide disparities across social and economic strata.[6] Indeed, persistent low enrolment, high dropout rates at the primary level and poor performance in many countries have prompted rethinking of the primary school model as the only basis of education and led to the exploration of non-formal complementary methods.[7]

Relative priorities

11. Most developing countries endorse the goal of universal primary education. The priority accorded to primary education as a key instrument of formal learning is premised on the belief that an emphasis on early childhood education, rather than secondary and tertiary levels, lays the foundation for a child's initiation into social and economic life. Universal primary education is seen to have a far-reaching impact beyond "schooling" and to be critical to the transformation of societies and the modernization process. Furthermore, primary education is a prerequisite for higher levels. There is also much empirical evidence supporting the argument that primary education plays an important role in launching initial economic growth in poor countries (see, for example, *The World Economic and Social Survey 2000*, chap.VI, "Education as a prerequisite for sustained growth" United Nations publication, Sales No. E.00.II.C.1).

12. The importance of primary education notwithstanding, negligence of secondary and even tertiary education is not warranted. Much of the impetus to spread primary education in developing countries has come from donors, notably the World Bank, who see it as being cheaper than secondary or tertiary education and providing the best rates of return. But the evidence from many developing countries challenges this hypothesis. Rates of return for one period may not be valid for another and can fall in times of economic crisis. Moreover, the perceived

Table 1

Table 1

economic benefits of primary education – higher national productivity from an educated population, fertility decline and improved family hygiene and sanitation from educated girls – flow from higher levels of schooling as well and certainly not from primary education alone.[8] Further, the expansion of primary education does not eliminate illiteracy, even in countries that have achieved significant progress in gross enrolment at the primary level: illiteracy is the negative result of incomplete education.[9]

13. Debtor Governments that have followed donor-driven prescriptions to expand primary education have often done so by curtailing secondary education and vocational training – a troubling trend given their mutually reinforcing effects. Good and accessible secondary education invigorates the demand for primary school participation.[10] It is also obvious that teachers at the primary level need to be trained in secondary and tertiary educational institutions in order to provide quality teaching. In addition, the wider the reach of primary schooling the more the pressure will be, especially from parents and influential sections of society, to expand secondary and tertiary education. Thus, neglecting higher learning can compromise the quality of primary education and stifle demand for primary education in the longer run.

14. In short, the relative priority to be given to different levels of education has sparked a vigorous debate. Although the proper emphasis in each country will depend on such factors as the level of development and availability (or often lack) of resources in the country, it can be said that neglecting secondary and tertiary levels is a near-sighted policy mistake, the crucial importance of primary education notwithstanding.

Supply and demand

15. Despite the persistent problems of quality and equity, any analysis of education must examine the factors that keep educational levels down in many countries where they need to be raised to achieve economic and social development.

16. On the supply side, many macro level factors are behind the inability of developing and least developed countries to raise enrolment rates and improve the quality of education. Weak national economies, inflationary pressures, the burden of debt servicing, restructuring of public finances, the demands of rapidly growing populations, widespread poverty, poor management of education budgets and misallocation of resources at national and regional levels are some of the major barriers to be overcome.

17. Faced with a shortage of resources and a change in the general direction of social economic policies towards more extensive use of market instruments and less state involvement, many Governments undertook education reforms in recent years driven by austerity measures aimed at making education more cost-effective. These have taken the forms of decentralization, privatization at the secondary and tertiary levels, and the imposition of user fees and other charges in the public sector, including basic education.

18. In many developing countries, the financing of public education has been privatized. Households pay for about one third of total primary school spending in the Philippines, and one half in the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Viet Nam.[11] In transition countries, the withdrawal of support from enterprises and state farms has exacerbated the crisis in public education spending that resulted from the drastic decline in government revenues due to severe economic recession. In countries undergoing structural adjustment, the imposition of fees in public schools has been part of “cost-recovery” measures. Evidence is mounting that these privatization measures and imposition of user fees have tended to reduce access, especially for the poorest. These and other means by which the state has withdrawn from its role as primary provider of basic public services have had crippling effects on education in developing countries as a whole.

19. The situation in the economies in transition is particularly alarming. Public resources for education have fallen steeply since 1990. Spending has decreased in real terms from 25 to 75 per cent in countries where data are available – by 33 per cent in the Russian Federation, 47 per cent in Lithuania and 75 per cent in Bulgaria.[12] In the Caucasus and Central Asia, enrolment has fallen at every level of schooling. Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, in particular, have seen substantial falls in enrolment rates at the primary and lower secondary levels. According to United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) estimates, as many as one in seven children of primary school age are out of school in Croatia, Georgia, Latvia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Half a million children aged between 8 and 10 are now missing from each grade in the school system.[13]

20. By contrast, direct interventions by the state to remove cost barriers have demonstrably improved access in other developing countries. For example, the Ugandan Government’s 1997 policy to universalize primary education relieved parents from paying half the school fees. As a result, enrolments nearly doubled in the 1997-1998 school year. In Malawi and Pakistan, relaxing or abolishing the requirement for school uniforms spurred poor families to enroll their children.[14]

21. Civil war and ethnic strife have affected access to education in a number of countries. Displacement,

disease and destitution are all consequences of long and large-scale wars, with dire consequences for children. The withdrawal of autonomy in the province of Kosovo in former Yugoslavia resulted in 300,000 children of ethnic Albanian origin being taken out of the educational system. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, between one third and one half of school buildings were destroyed during the war. Ethiopia has one of the lowest enrolment rates in the world. Less than one third of boys aged between 6 and 11 years and 10 per cent of girls are in school. In Rwanda, more than 60 per cent of teachers were killed or fled the country.[15]

22. Related to these economic and political supply-side factors are shortages of schools and teachers, inadequate school buildings, high student-teacher ratios, inferior and unavailable learning materials and poorly trained and/or low-paid teachers. A 1995 UNESCO-UNICEF study in selected least developed countries revealed that in 10 out of 14 countries surveyed, one third or more of students are in classrooms without blackboards. In eight countries, more than 90 per cent of students attend schools that have no electricity or water.[16] There has been little progress in improving teacher-pupil ratios.[17] In 1998, three quarters of countries reporting in the Education for All 2000 assessment had pupil-teacher ratios below 37:1 (roughly the ceiling for effective teaching). This was only slightly fewer than in 1990. The number of schools with ratios above 50:1 rose slightly, to about 11 per cent of all countries for which data are available. Some of the highest pupil-teacher ratios are in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia.[18]

23. The HIV/AIDS epidemic is also taking a toll on the educational systems of many developing countries, especially those of highly infected sub-Saharan African countries. Infection rate has been high among the better-educated, including teachers, at the early stage of the crisis in these countries. The loss of teaching staff to the disease has had a devastating impact on the education system in such countries as Uganda and Malawi, where qualified teachers were already short of meeting the demand of providing quality basic education for all.

24. The past decade has seen too little investment in the professional development of teachers and in their conditions of service, prompting large numbers of qualified and talented teachers to opt for other better paid work. In sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, teachers' salaries have dropped by more than one third in real terms since the mid-1980s. Poor pay and social status lower teacher morale and affect the quality of instruction and student achievement. One study in the United States ascribed the wide disparities in achievement between black and white students in different schools to the varying qualifications of teachers.[19]

25. The low quality of education tops the list of factors on the demand side that inhibit enrolment. Faced with persistent poverty, poor families find education, provided by ill-equipped and far-flung schools with teacher apathy and absenteeism, irrelevant to their daily struggle for survival. The opportunity cost of child labour then becomes a key consideration. Children's paid work and household tasks can be critical to family income and well-being. In the countries of South Asia, where children are recruited at very early ages to work in families, fields and factories, more than 50 million children are out of school. Further, enrolment rates in this region have not kept pace with its population of school-age children, rising due to high fertility and improved child survival. In countries of sub-Saharan Africa with rapidly growing populations and sharply declining health and poor quality of education and other services, 42 million primary-school-age children are out of school.[20]

26. In many countries with transition economies, the development of an unregulated informal economy, especially in retailing and services, may provide opportunities for child labour. In developing countries, roughly 250 million children work and many of them do not go school. A study of school wastage in Brazil showed that the primary cause of school dropout was the need for the child to work to help support the family.[21] In Latin America as a whole, families, while aware that working at an early age reduces a child's educational attainment, still attach great significance to the income contributed by working children and adolescents. Without their earnings, the incidence of poverty in these households would rise 10 to 20 per cent.[22]

27. Opportunity costs, like direct costs, rise with age and education. As children get older, they are more employable outside the home and their potential wages increase. The need to work is the reason for more than 30 per cent of 15 to 18-year-olds not attending school in Bolivia, Chile, El Salvador and Venezuela.[23]

28. Another important demand side factor at the macro level is the labour market opportunity for workers with basic education. If the unemployment rate for the educated is high, as is the case in most of sub-Saharan Africa, demand for education would be reduced as parents and children are discouraged by the dim prospects of earning a reward for their education. This results in the poverty-low education-low productivity-low earnings trap. By contrast, when the national development strategy creates employment for workers with education and the labour market rewards educational attainment accordingly, demand for education will be stimulated. East Asia serves as an example of successfully implementing a development strategy that utilized national labour resources while further encouraging the pursuit of education.

29. At the micro level, household poverty prevents families from meeting school expenses, thus constraining their demand for education. Families face a wide range of direct costs in sending their children to school, even in countries where primary and secondary education are officially free. Direct out-of-pocket expenses include uniforms, books, school supplies and transportation. Schools may also request fees, tuition, levies to parent-teacher associations and cash or in-kind donations. All of these tend to increase both in absolute terms and relatively to household income as children go from primary to secondary school.

30. These expenses hit poor households the hardest. Studies demonstrate that the share of household income allocated to education is not only substantial but also larger for lower-income groups, with disparities increasing at the secondary and tertiary levels. For example, in Ecuador education spending by families below the poverty line accounted for over 3 per cent of their total income for each child, while non-poor households devoted only 2.3 per cent.[24] In India, an average 7 per cent of household income is spent on primary education. Direct primary school costs in Indonesia account for 38 per cent of per capita incomes for the poorest quintile, compared with 17 per cent for the richest.[25]

31. Households in central and eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union also make financial outlays on schooling despite free public education. Expenditure on textbooks is a major concern, especially in the countries of the former Soviet Union. In Georgia, for example, where textbooks are free only for refugee families, a set of books for a seventh grade student costs twice the monthly average wage. The cost of school uniforms and bus fares has increased in real terms with the liberalization of prices and removal of subsidies that previously ensured access to even the poorest families.[26] In OECD countries, such as Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, household expenditure on student living expenses, books and other supplies exceeds 0.5 per cent of GDP.[27]

The gender gap

32. Supply and demand factors can combine to produce especially detrimental effects on girls' educational attainment. Where gender bias exists, such factors as household poverty, distant or inaccessible schools and the opportunity cost of education result in more girls than boys being pulled out of school or not being sent to school at all. Traditions that assign girls roles as housekeepers, babysitters and wives at an early age, taboos on sending girls to male-dominated schools, and gender-unfriendly school environments and curricula also contribute to keeping girls' enrolment down.

33. Girls account for 60 per cent (roughly 67 million) of the 113 million children not in primary school. Despite progress made in the absolute number of girls enrolled in primary schools, net enrolment ratios of girls lag behind those of boys, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, the Arab States and North Africa, and South and West Asia. These are also the regions that have the widest gender disparities for young adults aged 15 to 24 years.[28] The global gender enrolment-gap has dropped by only one percentage point over the past decade – from 8 in 1990 to 7 in 1998 – illustrating entrenched obstacles to girls' schooling in large parts of the world. In Africa as a whole, girls comprise almost 60 per cent of out-of-school children, pointing to a gender gap as wide as it was 10 years ago. In sub-Saharan Africa, the gender gap has risen from 10 to 12 percentage points over 1990-1998. Behind this average figure lie huge disparities – from 16 per cent girls' enrolment in Mali to 100 per cent in South Africa and Malawi.[29] Two thirds of 44 million children out of school in this region are girls.[30]

34. The gender enrolment-gap in countries of South and western Asia was also 12 in 1998, though down from 17 in 1990. It remains wide in the Arab States and North Africa, which have made relatively more progress, reducing the gender gap from 17 to 9 over the same period.[31] Governments in the Arab States consider the gender gap the strongest explanatory factor for the spread of illiteracy in their States.[32] Girls' enrolment has fallen in regions in economic decline, as suggested by a rise in the gender gap from 3 to 4 in eastern and central Europe.[33] During the Asian financial crisis, Jakarta saw a 19 per cent drop in girls' enrolment in junior secondary school.[34]

35. By contrast, the enrolment of girls has risen rapidly in regions where gender bias and poverty are not pervasive. In East Asia and Oceania, the enrolment-gap has dropped from 2 to 1 in the past decade.[35] In some regions, the gap may have closed because of lower enrolment of boys. In Latin America, 60 per cent of girls are enrolled, compared to 47 per cent of boys.[36]

36. It is worth repeating here that enrolment rates alone tell only part of the education story because dropout rates could be high, as pointed out above. With regard to dropout rates, a gender gap is also evident in figure IX.1.

37. In industrialized countries, where enrollment rates have reached 100 per cent for both girls and boys, there are still pronounced differences in the educational attainment of men and women in the older age groups. The proportion of women with only primary or lower secondary education is much greater among 55-to-64-year-olds than among 25 to 34-year-olds.[37] More importantly, even with higher educational attainment,

figure 1

young women earn less than young men with similar levels of education.

38. The education of girls and women is increasingly viewed as an investment with high social and economic returns, in addition to achieving equity objectives. Many countries are addressing cultural and political obstacles to gender equality and are rendering education systems more sensitive to gender issues. The provision of incentives for girls' attendance is a proven strategy for gender equality in education.

39. Experience shows that girls benefit from measures that reduce direct and opportunity costs. Such measures include eliminating school fees, school uniforms, providing scholarships for girls, creating child-care for younger siblings, adjusting school hours to fit girls' schedules of work at home, modifying home technology, such as accessible water wells and grain and grinding mills, to reduce girls' and women's work burden. For example, the Bangladesh Government has introduced affirmative action to recruit female teachers, provided free education for rural girls up to grade eight and instituted scholarship programmes targeted at girls in secondary school. In China, offering day care for younger siblings in rural schools has improved girls' enrolment. Benin has exempted girls in rural areas from paying school fees and Burkina Faso allows pregnant teenagers to attend school. Experience in a range of countries shows that bringing schools closer to homes and making them safer and improving the relevance of curriculum can boost girls' school attendance.

40. Some countries have experimented with educating girls for non-traditional occupations. In Nigeria and the Gambia, girls are actively encouraged to enroll in science, mathematics and technical courses through the development of clubs and special incentives at the tertiary level. Supportive national policies and innovative partnerships between Governments, local communities, NGOs and donors have also brought girls to school. Guinea is one example.[38]

Access and equity

41. In addition to gender, social class and wealth are important cross-cutting factors that determine enrolment. The economic conditions discussed above disproportionately affect provision and access in rural areas and for poor families. In almost all regions, children from ethnic, religious and linguistic minorities, and migrants, the severely handicapped and remote rural populations are conspicuous by their absence in the classroom. For example, the northern uplands and central highlands of Viet Nam, with a higher concentration of ethnic minority groups, have lower rates of school enrolment and completion compared to wealthier regions to the South-East. In China, these rates are also far below the national average in the 25 provinces with the largest ethnic minority population. Among tribes and lower castes in India, the literacy rate for children aged 7 and above is 41 per cent, compared to 49 per cent for Muslims and nearly 60 per cent for Hindus.[39] Only about one third of minority children in the Niger are in school.[40] In most developing countries, there is also a rural/urban gap (see Figure IX.2).

42. Equity in education is not a concern that applies only to developing countries. In the United States, the achievement gap between white and minority students has driven reform proposals, such as taxpayer-financed vouchers for private-school tuition and standard testing methods. But disputes remain over whether these measures will remedy the high dropout and repetition rates that plague inner-city schools or pave the way for dismantling the public school system. Critics contend that vouchers – tax credits or direct payments to help poor students attend private schools – are a quick fix that helps only a small portion of the population without overcoming historic inequities in the school system. Even with vouchers, private schools will still exclude "problem" students. Neither vouchers nor the standard testing methods advocated by some politicians as a means of quality and accountability address long-standing public school concerns, such as overcrowding, under-funding, the lack of qualified teachers and the absence of bilingual education.

43. Linked to questions of access is the quality of education. Low standards plague the bulk of educational systems everywhere and have proven hard to remedy. In many countries, Governments have come to the conclusion that quality education is still a privilege of a few.[41] School reform initiatives, such as improved curricula, teaching methods and evaluation techniques and an overhaul of teacher education, have tended to be sporadic. The bias in services toward urban areas does not necessarily mean a higher standard of learning. In fact, rapid urban growth rates and widening linguistic and cultural differences place immense strain on existing services. Crowded classrooms, perfunctory instruction and inadequate learning materials are a blight on educational systems in diverse settings – from major urban centres in developing countries to inner cities and other under-served areas in the more developed regions.

44. In the European region, there are calls to reform the teaching profession with such measures as performance pay, short-term contracts, competition among schools and higher standards for entry to the profession. Trends towards greater performance appraisal of students and teachers in industrialized countries are subject for heated debate.[42] Questions of quality of education, however, go beyond teacher performance, enrolment rates, teacher-pupil ratios, curricula and teaching materials. These proxy measures do not provide sufficient insights into what students are learning. In recent years, countries and some states

Figure 2

within them have put in place a range of projects and initiatives to assess learning achievement. With few exceptions, these have yielded relatively scant data on learning outcomes or on the personal or social value of what is being taught.[43]

45. Access and quality are both important to equity. Both are linked and need to be seen in relation to who benefits from education and who pays for it. The way education is organized favours the rich over the poor in a range of circumstances. The education budgets of many developing countries place greater priority on costly higher education to the detriment of primary and secondary education, a situation that policy has started to address in recent years. Heavy subsidization of upper secondary and higher education, which typically caters to the better off, works against the poor. Public spending on higher education is particularly inequitable because the subsidy per student is higher than at lower levels although most university students are drawn from high-income families (see table IX.2). Moreover, economic analysis shows that private returns (in the form of higher pay) to higher education are great, so that private costs (user fees) should also be high. In reality, public higher education is almost free in most countries.[44] A very small proportion of this expenditure is recovered through fees – as low as 5 to10 per cent in India and Nepal. Higher education spending in East Asia and Oceania and South Asia is as much as six times that on primary and secondary education. Less than one quarter of Venezuela's education budget goes to primary and secondary education, while three quarters is spent at tertiary levels.[45]

46. Even at the level of primary education, where public spending is said to favour the poor, it is often the affluent that benefit. One third of public expenditure on primary education benefits the richest fifth of the population and only 13 per cent of the poorest.[46] Since most children who drop out of primary school are from poor families, the relatively better off who stay on also benefit from a growing per capita subsidy.

47. Public support for private education is an important facet of the debate over access and equity. In many OECD countries, private schools depend on Governments for subsidies. In Denmark, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, between 25 and 40 per cent of public resources at the tertiary level go to households in the form of scholarships, grants and loans, including special subsidies to students in cash or in kind, such as free or reduced-fee travel on public transportation. In New Zealand, Norway and Sweden, student loans account for 16 to 33 per cent of public spending. In some countries where tertiary education is expanding and students pay tuition fees, including Australia, Norway and the United Kingdom, public transfers to the private sector are seen as a means to increase access for low-income students.[47]

48. But in many developing countries and economies in transition, subsidies to private schools serve to subsidize higher-income families that can afford fees charged by these often exclusive establishments.[48] In Indonesia, a study has found that most rural private schools were as dependent on government subsidies as public schools.[49] Private schools in Hungary get the same subsidies as public schools. Some countries provide tax relief, as in Kazakstan, where private schools do not pay taxes on profits. Several countries in Latin America provide significant tax advantages to parents who send their children to private schools.

49. The competition between state and private schools for public funds and the equity implications of a growing chasm between public and private schools have prompted some States to take distributive measures. For example, Brazil applies a 2.5 per cent tax on salaries of private sector employees and channels the revenue toward primary education. A special tax on alcohol, tobacco and interest payments in the Republic of Korea's 1982 national budget helped finance 15 per cent of the education budget within five years, following which the tax was extended for another five years. Nepal, China and Botswana also have special levies for education.[50] Governments in South and East Africa have offered tax and other incentives to the private sector to support primary education, expanded distance and mobile education, Koranic schools and other alternatives, made more use of rental textbooks and sought greater involvement of civil society through decentralization.[51]

The role of education

50. Education plays an important role in promoting socio-economic mobility in society. Even in societies with rigid cultural or political barriers to such mobility, education often acts as one of the few legitimate channels. Thus, education is an equalizing force in society. For this reason, measures to promote education among the poor are viewed as crucial components of poverty reduction strategies.

51. Education can be an instrument for fostering a society of shared values. However, it can be a force for dissension if it reproduces a pattern of social or ethnic inequality and isolation. This has historically been the experience of colonized nations, where an educated minority acted as proxies for the rulers and who then possessed much valued professional and administrative capabilities at independence. Successive generations of such social groups tend to enjoy privileges that come from cultural and political domination. They may even control the means by which school systems are funded and structured to the advantage of their children. Unequal allocation of education can be a cause for serious friction, particularly in ethnically stratified

Table 2

societies where privileged groups have higher educational attainments than subordinate groups.

52. In countries experiencing or emerging from ethnic conflict and newly independent States forged on national identity, education assumes a critical role in maintaining peace within borders and fostering tolerance of diversity. Curricula that misrepresent history, stereotyping in textbooks and by teachers, and teaching that panders to minority identity or majority hegemony can both sow the seeds of ethnic strife and stoke its aftermath. The use of language as a tool of repression, especially of ethnic minorities or indigenous peoples, has often been viewed as an act of cultural aggression and deterred minority children from going to school. [52]

53. The imposition of a majority language in school instruction in multilingual countries can also have a unifying effect in some instances, as in Senegal, or accentuate divisions, as in Turkey. To a large degree, this is determined by state policies towards other languages and the extent to which they are acknowledged to be important for the collective national identity. State education policies, on the grounds of assimilation and standardization, have often eliminated minority identity, as seen in Serbian efforts to counteract Albanian self-affirmation.[53]

54. On the other hand, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines have made efforts to sustain and enrich cultural heritages by using indigenous languages and local resources, involving diverse communities in what is taught and including natural history and culture in the curriculum.[54] In Romania, Slovakia and Hungary, minority groups are entitled by law to set up cultural and educational institutions, including education in the minority language at all levels. Some universities in Hungary have introduced lessons on the history and culture of the Roma in the curriculum and set up training programmes for teachers. One university in Romania has a preferential system to enable Roma students to obtain higher education.[55] Issues of ethnicity and language are closely related to inequalities between rural and urban areas and tensions between the dominant language group and others. Studies have shown that bilingual schools have higher attendance and promotion rates and lower repetition and dropout rates.

55. The way education is organized can lead to social exclusion. Undue emphasis on academic results stigmatizes academic underachievement and shuts out opportunities for students who grade poorly. Academic failure can generate exclusion and in some cases violence or aggression in schools. Underachievement and dropout affect large proportions of students, even in countries where education spending is among the highest in the world.[56] Some educators have pointed out that it is not more time in school – often a political response to the public clamour for better performance – but the quality of the hours devoted to classroom teaching that is the deciding factor in learning. Lengthening school time without improving the quality of instruction could even lower achievement when students are bored and poorly taught.[57] The pursuit of a blanket policy or target can sometimes have the effect that more education for some increases rather than reduces inequality by concentrating resources on the few to the exclusion of the many.[58]

56. In some countries, the nature of what is taught at different levels is under scrutiny to assess how far it equips the young for life. In several central and eastern European (CEE) States, for example, a broad-based secondary education is now seen to be more useful in a transition to a market economy and to provide the better path to tertiary education. This is a shift away from the technical and vocational training into which children were channeled by age 14 in CEE countries under a planned economy.[59] Elsewhere, vocational education targets under-privileged youth in an effort to enable them to be self-employed – as, for example, youth polytechnics in Kenya, the national open apprenticeship scheme in Nigeria and the barefoot college in India.

57. The role of education in life-long learning processes has assumed critical new dimensions in the context of globalization. The ever-expanding need for a highly skilled workforce that can adapt to the demands of rapid technological change has led to a growing focus on the workplace. For example, France, Germany and Sweden offer enterprises tax incentives to expand job training and retraining. Attaining functional literacy is a challenging task even for developed countries that have achieved total literacy. By some estimates, 18 per cent of adults in 12 European and North American countries cannot meet the basic reading requirements of a "knowledge-based" society.[60] Rapid changes brought about by scientific and technological progress place great emphasis on a broad general education combined with selected in-depth work that can lay the foundation for lifelong learning.

58. The spectacular growth in information technology networks and multimedia systems can facilitate the expansion of non-formal and distance-learning initiatives, provided equipment becomes affordable and basic infrastructure is in place. While enlarging access in some domains, the new technology can create deep cleavages within countries between those who can use the new tools and those who have no access to them. Depending on an individual's access to technology, the emergence of information societies is viewed by some experts as a threat to democracy and

education.[61] The digital divide can accentuate the rich-poor, rural-urban and male-female gaps created by inequalities in access to education.

NOTES

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