



EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT: QUALITY AND EQUITY CONCERNS

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Introduction

The issue of development came into prominence when large number of countries in Asia and Africa attained political freedom, after world war-II. Initially the development both in theory and policy was focused on achieving sustained growth in per capita GDP. During 1950s and 1960s many developing countries realized their growth targets but quality of life of majority of people did not improve much. There was a growing disillusionment with growth, which was not benefiting all sections of society. As a result, in 1970s issues of poverty and inequality came into focus. During the last two decades, an alternative view is propagated by UNDP, which measures progress in terms of human development. In measuring human development, average achievement in education (knowledge) of a particular country is taken as one of the three basic dimensions of human development; the other two being health and decent standard of living measured in terms of per capita GDP in purchasing power parity terms.

In fact, education is both an input as well as an indicator of development. Sen (1999) defines development in terms of the expansion of human capability which is recognized as the central feature of the process of development. In this context education plays an important role in improving the quality of life through expanding human capabilities. Birdsall et al. (2005) also argue that access to basic education is an end in itself, a human right, and a vital part of individuals' capacity to lead lives they value, moreover, they recognize it as an important instrument with which people can improve their lives in many other ways. Education enhances the capacity of the people to participate in the political process and thus come together for other social and political rights and to demand accountability from their governments.

However, access to education and other resources is not uniform across different social groups and gender. Women face a number of constraints which put them in a disadvantageous position. These constraints include disproportionate burden of reproductive work, restrictions on mobility, lower say in decision making, oppressive social norms and other cultural and ideological constraints. Children from poor and socially disadvantaged families also suffer from resource crunch and quite often discrimination in schools. These constraints reduce opportunities available to them to improve their knowledge and skills, increase productivity, and hence affect their ability to successfully compete with relatively better placed sections in different income earning activities.

Returns to Education

The role of human capital in increasing productivity has been realized by economists since long. T.W. Schultz appreciated the importance of investment in human capital to transform the low productivity traditional agriculture into modern agriculture. He argued that to produce an abundance of farm products required that the farmer has access to and knowledge to use what science knows about soils, plants, animals and machines. The knowledge that makes the transformation possible is a form of capital and it entails investment; rapid and sustained growth in agriculture rests heavily on particular investments in farm people helping them acquire new skills and new knowledge. Jamison and Lau (1982) also observed that earnings of farmers are higher in settings in which education helps them take advantage of new seed and other technologies. Education also plays an important role in enhancing earnings of small business owners and self-employed workers (Schultz, 1993, 2001).

Based on a survey of large number of studies Psacharopoulos (1991:8-5) concludes that compared with developed countries, returns to education are much higher in developing countries because of scarcity of human capital and barriers to allocation of funds for human capital investment. A typical pattern discovered by Psacharopoulos in these studies is that returns decline with increase in the level of education. Thus returns to university education. Another pattern which emerges from the review is that investment in the education of females yields higher rate of return than that in male education. This is despite the opportunity cost of women's labour is lower and a major component of the cost of education is income forgone during the study period. The patterns of return established in this review are upheld in latter study also (Psacharopoulos, 1994).

Another review based study (Birdsall et al., 2005:23-30) brings out somewhat different results. The authors observe that wage returns to education vary by level and differ across very high relative to private returns to primary and secondary education. In growing economies this often reflects the fact that the demand for education workers exceeds the supply, especially for university graduates, because educational opportunities are still limited. It also reflects the fact that those who achieve higher levels of education probably benefited at lower levels from higher quality schooling, which enabled and encouraged them to continue and which ensured that they have more of the human capital that makes them more productive.



In fact, returns to education are not confined to higher wages and incomes. Mothers with primary education have better access to the information they need to help keep their children healthy. Education, particularly girls' education has social returns to society at large as well, since society captures some of the benefits of improved health, lower fertility, and threat – home education that educated mothers transfer to their children.

However, benefit of education is conditioned by the political, social, and economic context. Schools and education systems in themselves do not necessarily guarantee faster economic growth. Rapid increase in average education in Latin America, and much of Africa has not spurred growth in the past three decades. Pritchett (2001) argues that where the relationship between “more” education and faster growth has failed to materialize; one or more of the following factors may be responsible. First of all, if education systems are weak, more spending and higher enrollment may not translate into learning and concomitant increases in the human capital stock. Secondly, problems in other policy spheres (macroeconomic instability, civil unrest, market distortions) may prevent gains in education from being translated into economic growth. Thirdly, the effect of education on growth will be minimal if technological progress or some other key complementary fact, such as adequate infrastructure or contract enforcement, is missing. Further, as long as the stock of human capital remains below some threshold, marginal increases in education for a few people may be ineffective in producing growth.

Initial leave of literacy and education also play an important role in initiating and sustaining growth. East Asia's experience over the past five decades also suggests the role other factors play in ensuring that education contributes to growth. Educational systems were relatively good, market and other distortions were limited, technology was adapted, and investment in infrastructure and other complementary inputs was high. In this context, education contributed to high and relatively equitable growth (Birdsall, Ross, and Sabot 1995).

Indian Experience

Compared with East Asian countries India lagged much behind in literacy and education. The development of basic education was significantly more advanced in all those East Asian countries with successful growth-mediated progress at the time of their economic breakthrough compared with India – not just at that time but even today. Adult literacy rates (age 15+) South Korea, Hong Kong and Thailand in 1960 were around 70 compared with 28 for India. Even in 1990 these rates were over 90 in these East Asian countries but less than 50 for India. China is also much ahead of India; in 1990 and 1999, China's literacy rate was 28 and 27 per cent higher respectively than that of India (Dreze and Sen, 2002: 73-77).

Young population of the India is considered as an important asset when ageing is becoming a major problem in developed nations. Over half of India's population is of below 25 years age and it forms around one-fourth of world young population. However, numbers alone are not important; quality of human resource is also importance. In today's world uneducated and malnourished worker find little place in productive employment. India, despite having edge in young population, lags behind other countries, including some developing nations, as far as education and health levels of the people are concerned.

It is argued (Chadha,2004) that for ensuring competitive levels of productivity in various sectors, particularly in the context of fast changing technologies, products and market strategies, India will have to improve its human capital levels. A poor human capital base of a vast segment of India's labour market, most markedly for its rural areas, is indeed the basic problem of the economy. Chadhaempha sizes the fact that the sector which are big from the point view of employment – agriculture being the main example –are also the ones that suffer a fairly sizable handicap of low quality of workforce. This is so when new agriculture is highly technology intensive and numerous soil related and environmental issues have to be resolved at the farm household level. The study estimates that even by 2009-10 there will be large number of illiterate job seekers and between 15 to 25 per cent persons in urban rural areas in 5-9 and 10-14 age groups will not be attending school.

Education is also an important tool for reducing inequalities and poverty. Broadly shared education ensures that growth itself will be broadly shared. Education that reaches the poor, women, and marginalized ethnic groups brings private benefits to them as well as benefits to society as a whole by reducing inequality, diminishing discrimination, and creating more cohesion in the long run. It is contended (Birdsall et. 2005:25) that educating the poor is particularly important for triggering broader social change. Education has a special quality: the human capital acquired through formal education cannot be expropriated. In that respect it is different from land or financial assets. Education that reaches the poor can contribute to a more equitable pattern of growth.

In India, elementary education has been declared as a fundamental human right. With the launching of SarvaShikshaAbhiyan (SSA) in 2000. It is envisaged that all children, in the relevant age group, will complete five years of primary schooling by



2007 and eight years of schooling by 2010. All gender and social gaps at primary stage will be bridged by 2007 and elementary level by 2010. Universal retention is to be achieved by 2010.

Substantial gains have been made in literacy and education levels in India during the last fifty years. From around 16% in 1950, literacy rate increased to over 65% in 2001. Progress in enrolment in primary and upper primary schools since 1990 is also noteworthy. Total enrolment at primary stage increased from 97.4 million in 1990 to 122.3 million in 2002-03 (GOI, 2004). At the upper primary levels, the increase in enrolment during this period was from 34 million in 1990 to 46.95 million in 2002-03.

However, we have to be cautious about the fact that at primary levels where students are generally not failed till fourth standard and fee in Government and aided schools is very Gazdar, 1997) based on the functioning of primary schools in rural Uttar Pradesh revealed that in order to avoid being transferred, teachers ensure that enrolment does not fall below the official norm. Teachers, if necessary by paying fees out of their own pockets, in the names of children who have actually dropped out (or have never been enrolled in the first place), are able to maintain inflated register and reduce the chances of being transferred.

A variety of efficiency related indicators are used to check the retaining capacity of the education system. Dropout rate is one of these indicators. A very high school dropout rate is a matter of concern. However, over a period of time the dropout rate in primary and upper primary classes has been decreasing, though slowly (GOL, 2007). For classes I to VIII, the dropout rate was 51 per cent during 2004-05. This means more than half of the students do not complete 8 years of schooling. A very large number of these dropouts belong to the poorer sections of the society. Thus, India is unlikely to achieve the target that 'all children. In the relevant age group, complete five years of primary schooling by 2007 and eight years of schooling by 2010'.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) emphasizes the need to address the quality concerns in school education on priority basis. Improvement in provision of infrastructure and human resource is another important concern. However, quality of learning is quite poor in our schools. A study by Pritchett and Pande (2006) based on data from four states viz. Karnataka, Rajasthan, Kerala and West Bengal, brings out that the quality of learning is both low and highly variable.

Using the mathematics examination for illustration, they found that between 50 to 80 per cent children did not have adequate basic primary schooling competencies. Interestingly, highest proportion of students getting less than 50% scores is in Kerala; the state having high literacy and enrolment rates. In West Bengal, where proportion of not reaching Grade V is high but of those scoring less than 50% is low; overall around half of the students achieve adequate competency levels in basic primary schooling. Along with dropout rate, this is a subject of serious concern for the government and civil society.

As stated earlier, progress in literacy and education and improvement in the quality of learning depends upon a number of factors, which include socio-economic status of the family, accessibility to school, infrastructural facilities, teacher competency and the teaching learning process. Above all, motivation and accountability of the teachers are the most important factors influencing both quality and quantity of education. Teacher absenteeism is a serious issue in most states in India.

Some researchers have highlighted the lack of infrastructural facilities, prevalence of teacher absenteeism and other problems faced by the elementary education in some states of India. Dreze and Gazdar (1997) investigated the functioning of primary schools in rural Uttar Pradesh. The study discovers that the existence and accessibility of schools does not seem to be the main cause of persistent education backwardness in this region. However, there are other serious problems. Most of the sample schools had dilapidated buildings, without much furniture. The most commonly used part of the school building was the veranda, where children of all grades were often huddled together. None of the sample schools had a female teacher. In fact, the absence of female teachers may act as a serious constraint in the expansion of girl's education. Dreze and Gazdar (1997: 69) argue that parents often have greater confidence in sending their daughters to school if the school has some female teachers. The presence of female teachers is also important in so far as schooling is as much a socialization experience as a process of formal learning.

The pathetic physical condition of the sample schools is in sharp contrast with the claims made by the government of India in connection with the expansion of schooling infrastructure under Operation Blackboard (OB). Minimum infrastructural facilities to be provided under the 'Operation Blackboard' scheme, initiated in 1987-88, include '(i) a building comprising at least two reasonably large all-weather rooms with verandah and separate toilets for boys and girls, (ii) at least two teachers in



every primary school, as far as possible one of them a woman, and (iii) essential teaching learning equipment including blackboards, maps, charts, toys and equipment for work experience'. Department of Education claimed that by the end of 1993-94 OB had been implemented in 99.9 per cent of the country's primary schools (Dreze and Gazdar, 1997: 65).

The existence of infrastructural deficiencies has also been pointed out by the Public Report on Basic Education in India (Probe Team, 1999). The Probe Report is based on the survey of schools from 234 randomly selected villages of Bihar, MP, Rajasthan, UP and HP, along with a sample of 1376 households from these villages. The Report observes that the main issue, as far as school availability is concerned, is the absence of an upper primary school in 71% of the surveyed villages. This is a serious problem because parents are often reluctant to send their daughters to school outside the villages. Moreover, quite a significant proportion of schools do not fulfill the norms established under OB launched in 1987-88. For instance, only 58% schools in the sample villages had at least two pacca classrooms and 12 per cent had a single teacher. Only a small number of schools had a library (23%), maps and charts (41%), or any usable teaching kit (33%). Nearly three-fifths of the sample primary schools were without a functional water supply, 89 per cent lacking a functioning toilet and non-had separate toilet for boys and girls. Report remarks that only one-fourth of sample primary schools attain a more liberal benchmark (than the benchmark set by OB), with the following components: (1) at least two all-weather rooms, (2) at least two teachers and (3) at least some teaching aids.

Teacher absenteeism is an endemic problem prevalent in almost all the states in India. Dreze and Gazdar (1997: 62-67), during their enquiries conducted through unannounced visits to 15 schools in four districts of UP (Moradabad, Rae Bareli, Pratapgarh and Banda), found that two-thirds of the teachers in the sample schools were absent, for one reason or other, at the time of unannounced visits of the survey team. In some cases, particularly when the school had only one teacher, the absence of teacher implied that the school remained closed for the day. Another aspect of the problem of teacher absenteeism observed by Dreze and Gazdar is that most teachers come late and leave early. The team rarely found a school to be open on time in the morning or after 12.30 (lunch break) in the afternoon. Further, the study found that teachers actually performed very little teaching even when they were present. A similar conclusion is also reached by the Public Report on Basic Education in India (Probe Team, 1999: 44-49).

Another important study (Kremer et al, 2005) is based on nationally representative data on teacher absence from unannounced visits to Indian primary schools. The study covered 20 Indian states, representing 98 per cent of the population, or roughly one billion people. Three unannounced visits were made to each of 3700 schools. The survey focused on government- run primary schools, but also covered rural private schools and private-aided schools located in villages where government schools were surveyed. Main conclusions of this study are worth reporting.

The study found that 25 per cent of teachers were absent from school and only about half were teaching, during unannounced visits. Absence rates varied from 15 per cent in Maharashtra to 42% in Jharkhand, with higher rates concentrated in the poorer states. The authors also observe that higher pay is not associated with lower absence. In fact, they found that older teachers, more educated teachers, and head teacher are all paid more but are also more frequently absent; contract teachers are paid much less than regular teachers but have similar absence rates; and although relative teacher salaries are higher in poorer states, absence rates are also higher. Teacher absence is more correlated with daily incentives to attend work: teachers are less likely to be absent at schools that have been inspected recently, that have better infrastructure, and that are closer to a paved road. The study finds little evidence that attempting to strengthen local community ties will reduce absence. Teachers from the local area have similar absence rates as teachers from outside the community. Locally controlled non-formal schools have higher absence rates than schools run by the state government. The existence of a PTA is not correlated with lower absence. Private-school teachers are only slightly less likely to be absent than public-school teachers in general, but are 8 percentage points less likely to be absent than public-school teachers in the same village.

Summarising the findings of eleven case studies based on data from different states of India, Vaidyanathan and Nair (2001) conclude that there are indeed many dedicated teachers who are doing wonders with the meager resources available, and there are examples of teacher-initiated educational campaigns. However, the fact remains that in practically all the villages, complaints of absenteeism of teachers, irregular classes and indifferent teaching were widespread. The governmental machinery of supervision and inspection is practically defunct. The communities most directly affected have no effective mechanism to redress grievances under the existing arrangements.

Government schools cater essentially to poor children and poor parents and communities do not have a voice in the running of these schools and thus cannot persuade teachers to do their job honestly. In fact 'social distance' between teachers and children in government schools is wide and social attitude and community prejudices play an important role in determining



the ability and willingness of teachers to emphasize with children (Ramachandran, 2005). Systemic issues like corruption in appointments, transfers, special assignments etc. have also vitiated the teaching environment. Ramachandran argues that in such a situation building networks with patrons and supporters is more important than doing duty honestly.

Another issue afflicting some schools is discrimination against students from under-privileged groups. Probe Team (1999) highlighted this problem of unequal treatment of different sections of the population. The Report observed that discrimination against under-privileged groups is endemic, in several forms. In some schools children of different social backgrounds often receive unequal treatment. In few schools dalit children had to sit separately from other children. And in some instances children of some castes sat on benches while others sat on the floor. Far more widespread than these cases of blatant discrimination, however, are subtle forms of unequal treatment in the classroom. This can take various forms, such as telling dalit children that they are 'stupid', making them feel inferior, using them for menial chores, and giving them liberal physical punishment.

Dreze and Gazdar(1997: 85) also observe different forms of discrimination against children of disadvantaged castes. Some examples of these are: (1) discrimination against schedule-caste settlements in the location of schools, (2) teachers refusing to touch schedule-caste children, (3) children from particular castes being special targets of verbal abuse and physical punishment by the teachers, (4) low-caste children being frequently beaten by higher cast classmates.

Asian Development Bank (ADB) carried out a study (ADB, 2007) over a period of 5 years (2001-05) interacting with poor using the method of participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) and encompassed 842 locations 72 districts spread over seven states in India. It covered over twenty thousand poor persons and brought to light some interesting facts. Among other concerns of the poor, the study attempted to understand the issues relating to performance of various institutions on wide range of criteria. The study observes that in state-run schools, free books and lunch are distributed in many locations. Despite this the poor weigh the cost of education, including forgone child earnings, against their perception of benefits that they think they can get from the education. One important reason for the poor not sending their children to school is that they do not find education useful. Though there is a feeling that education may help in earning money, they do not see any evidence around them. Secondly, there is a shortage of infrastructure and of teachers that acts as a barrier to pursuing sustained education. In many cases, teachers "manage children" rather than teach them. Moreover, children of poor families are treated badly by teachers, with the result that they drop-out gradually. In some cases children from certain social groups are asked to sit away or are asked to do manual work, which again encourages them to drop-out.

Conclusion

What emerges from the above is that the current education system is reinforcing rather than reducing existing inequalities in India. The children of the rich study in well-functioning private unaided schools and acquire more and better education than the children of the poor. Number of schemes have been introduced to reduce social and gender gaps, but as discussed above, on the ground level such schemes are making little impact. In the absence of a concerted policy, effective monitoring, and accountability in the education system, increasing access of the poor to good education, which almost always means making societies more inclusive and egalitarian, may not happen. Poorly functioning government schools catering to the poor children on the one hand and select few getting quality education in costly private schools on the other is creating a situation which may defeat the agenda of 'inclusive growth' laid down by the Eleventh Five Year Plan. The way education system works is creating a vicious cycle thus locking out generations of the poor. To change it requires political Will, institutional reform, and additional investments in education.

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