

Session 3: Realising the Potential for Poverty Reduction

Parallel Group 3B: Topic Paper 3

Future Policy Choices for the Education Sector in Asia

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1. Achieving Basic Education: The Success Stories

The Chancellor's report, *From Commitment to Action: Education* recognises that: 'Developing countries have made significant progress towards the education goals over the past decade. Fifty million more children are now enrolled in primary school than ten years ago. The gender gap has been reduced in many countries. Several large-population countries have taken bold steps to reduce their illiteracy rates'.²

The progress in Asia is laudable with 92 per cent of boys and 92 per cent of girls enrolled in primary education in East Asia and the Pacific; 85 per cent of boys and 79 per cent of girls in South and West Asia; 91 per cent of boys and 89 per cent of girls in Central Asia by 2002–3.³ The corresponding figures by region in 1990/1 were 98 per cent and 94 per cent in East Asia and the Pacific; 87 per cent and 58 per cent in South and West Asia; and were 85 per cent and 84 per cent in Central Asia, respectively. The considerable improvement in the enrolment rate is the result of a large number of initiatives across Asian countries that range from national programmes to non-governmental initiatives and vary in their approach to education as well as their scale and mode of operation.

The strategies for achieving Universal Primary Education (UPE) have hitherto focussed on the expansion of enrolment and advancing towards gender parity in primary education.⁴ The increased spread of the educational net has been the result of numerous national educational programmes in Asian countries using a wide range of approaches and instruments as well as initiatives being undertaken by non-governmental organisations (Levine and Birdsall 2005). The expansion of the educational net alongside changing perceptions regarding the relative and absolute benefits of educating boys *and* girls are critical to the achievement of UPE and depend on the identification and sustainability of path-breaking approaches in this sub-sector. The experience of success in individual Asian countries provides the map to future policy choices in the educational sector.

¹ This paper was prepared by Shailaja Fennell, University of Cambridge.

² DFID from *Commitment to Action: Education*, September 2005: 2.

³ UNESCO Institute of Statistics.

⁴ The Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Declaration of Education For All (EFA) both regard universal access to primary education and the achievement of gender parity as the utmost priority as a global education goal.

1.1. Case Studies

1.1.1. Bangladesh

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) began as a relief organisation in 1972 and developed a microfinance programme for poor rural households in 1977. Demand from these families for education for their children spurred the organisation to set up the BRAC Education Programme (BEP) in 1985, with an initial 22 rented single-room schools, with no or low fees, little or no homework and using a non-formal approach to schooling so as to accommodate the pre-existing income generating work commitments of the children in the community. There was a strong emphasis in the BEP on advancing the education of girls through encouraging the training and employment of more female teachers. Today BRAC schools number over 31,000 with girls comprising 65 per cent of the primary children that BRAC schools provide for. The Non-Formal Primary Education System (NFPE) for primary school children and the Basic Education for Older Children (BEOC) that was developed by the BEP were replaced by the adoption of a formal schooling model under the programme of the BRAC Primary School (BPS) in 2004 indicating the success of the BEP in mainstreaming rural children into the national education system.⁵ The success of BEP through the 1990s was supported by strong government commitment to UPE with the launching of several government initiatives to extend the coverage of primary education through the building of new schools, establishment of community and satellite schools, teacher training schemes and the provision of free tuition for girl students.

1.1.2. India

In India, the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) was launched by the Government of India in 1994 with the objectives of providing universal access to school as well as reducing the overall drop out rates and gaps in enrolment and improve the learning achievement by gender and social group. The programme was the most intensive educational intervention ever attempted by the central government and had a strong gender component with a low level of female literacy being a primary selection criterion for the districts chosen in the seven states of Assam, Haryana, Karnataka, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and Tamil Nadu during the first phase (Jalan and Glinskaya 2003). The results of the DPEP programme indicated that there was greater enrolment in DPEP districts than non-DPEP districts and that primary enrolment of girls increased at a faster rate than boys in the DPEP districts. The evaluations of DPEP carried out by Indian educational institutions have shown a varying degree of success in moving towards the goals of UPE⁶ and recent academic research points out that the methodological approach to selection and implementation within the DPEP programme make it difficult, if not impossible to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the programme (Duflo 2003). The programme was however a valuable opportunity to examine the weaknesses and strengths of the Indian education system and an attempt was made to address the problems of evaluation in the formulation of the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) by locating it at the district level to provide a strong administrative basis for the collection and monitoring of educational statistics. The SSA programme was introduced in 2001 with the ambitious target of achieving universal primary enrolment by 2003. The target was unlikely at the outset but the emphasis on enrolment spurred on campaigns with both state

⁵ www.brac.net/education.htm.

⁶ DPEP State reports, Central Institute of Education, Delhi University.

government educational departments as well as non-governmental organisations. Pratham was one such educational initiative that was founded in 1994 with the objective of bringing children into the school system and is today active in 13 states of India and works with a million children. The Pratham approach is to support learning and they began with the setting up of pre-school centres in urban slums (*balwadi*) with local teachers, who have passed the lower secondary examinations (*balsakhis*) to support young pre-school and primary school aged children in acquiring basic literacy. The methods of educational intervention that Pratham have devised include an accelerated learning method and the launch of an Annual Survey of Education Report (ASER) that covers 485 districts in the country and drawing on a sample of 332,971 children in 191,057 households.⁷ The Azim Premji Foundation, a non-profit educational initiative headed by the Chairman of Wipro, a leading Indian IT company, has also been a strong partner of state educational system and has run a Learning Guarantee School programme alongside the SSA programme of the central government. It has also been collaborating with other non-governmental non-profit education initiatives to enhance areas of concern such as the quality of primary education and teacher training through national meetings of educational experts.⁸

1.1.3. Nepal

The Cheli-Beti programme to encourage girls to attend school was started in 1981 as part of a scheme to create a comprehensive rural development project to encourage participation of communities. Cheli-Beti had a strong impact with its policy emphasising the value of girls' education through engagement with the community and used a non-formal approach to education. The government's Basic Primary Education Project (BPEP) introduced in 1992 built on the success of Cheli-Beti by providing further support for the enrolment of all primary children and with an increased emphasis on the quality of education. The emphasis on the education of the girl child has been enhanced by the provision of free primary education for girls from deprived areas and free textbooks for all girls in primary schools with non-formal options for girls who have been excluded from or have a truncated primary school record (Wils et al. 2005).⁹

1.1.4. South Asia

The experiences of South Asia in moving towards universal primary enrolment through a radical emphasis of girls' education and the dove-tailing of governmental and non-governmental programmes inspire hope for the attainment of the goal of UPE. It is particularly heartening to see that governments have drawn on the local successes of non-governmental organisations to ensure the expansion of their own programmes in difficult environments where access is hard to come by. On the other hand, South Asia has a long way ahead before it is on an equal footing with other sub-groupings in Asia. The persisting problem of access is indicated in the figures on out-of-school children showing that South Asia had one-third of the 99.8 million children who are out of school in 2002/3.¹⁰

⁷ www.pratham.org/.

⁸ www.azimpremijifoundation.org/.

⁹ Asian Development Bank, Country Strategy and Programme update. August 2005.

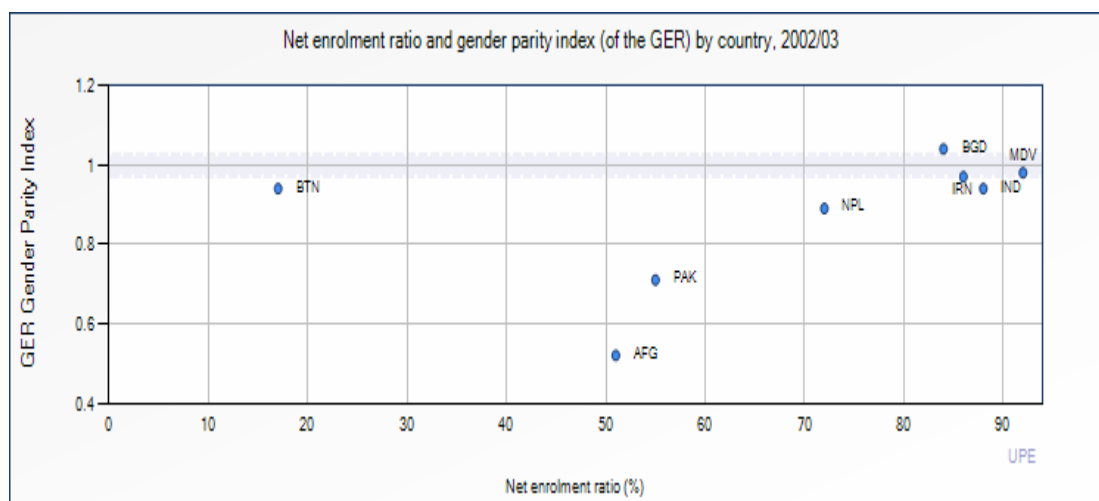
¹⁰ GMR database at <http://gmr.uis.unesco.org>.

2. Across the Asian Region

There is considerable divergence across Asian countries in their absolute and relative success in achieving UPE and gender parity. In South Asia, none of the countries has reached the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of universal primary education,¹¹ and only two have achieved gender parity in primary school. In Central Asia the picture with regard to the UPE target is even more stark, with only one out of nine countries having reached universal primary education, but Central Asia has a much better performance on gender parity with seven out of nine having achieved gender equality in primary school. In East Asia and the Pacific, there is a middling record on both goals, with 13 out of 30 countries having achieved UPE, and 17 out of 30 having achieved gender parity in primary school (see Figures 1–3).

The primary net enrolment to attendance ratio (NE/AR) in these sub-regions is also arresting with the figure for South Asia being the lowest in the world outside sub-Saharan Africa, though there has been an average increase of 0.9 per cent annually in the NE/AR between 1980 and 2001. South Asia also accounted for one-third of the world's 115 million out of school children, with India accounting for 26.8 million, Pakistan for 7.8 million and Bangladesh for 3.8 million in 2001/2.¹² The difficulty in shifting the large numbers of out-of-school children into the schooling system continues to possess a considerable challenge to governments in South Asia. Gains made in net enrolment cannot be regarded as a badge of victory for the UPE achievement of Sri Lanka and the advances made by the Maldives in this area were torn to shreds by the tsunami of 2004 (UNICEF 2005).

Figure 1: Net enrolment ratio and Gender Parity Index in South and West Asia, 2002/3

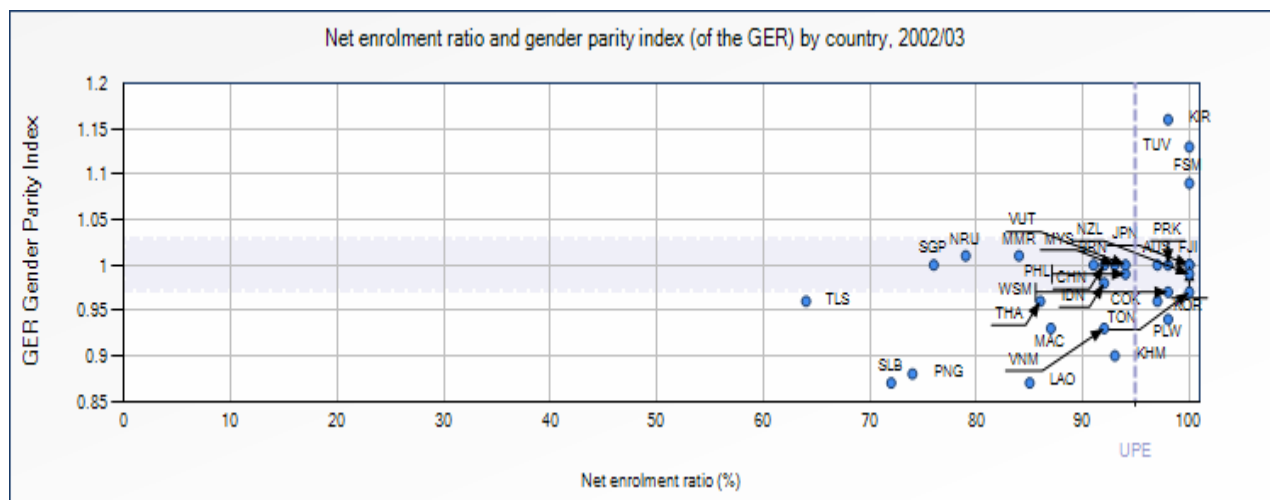


Source: UNESCO UIS website.

¹¹ UNESCO UIS website. UPE is said to be reached when the Net enrolment ratio reaches 95 per cent. Gender parity is achieved when the GPI (Gender Parity Index) of the gross enrolment ratio is between 0.97 and 1.03.

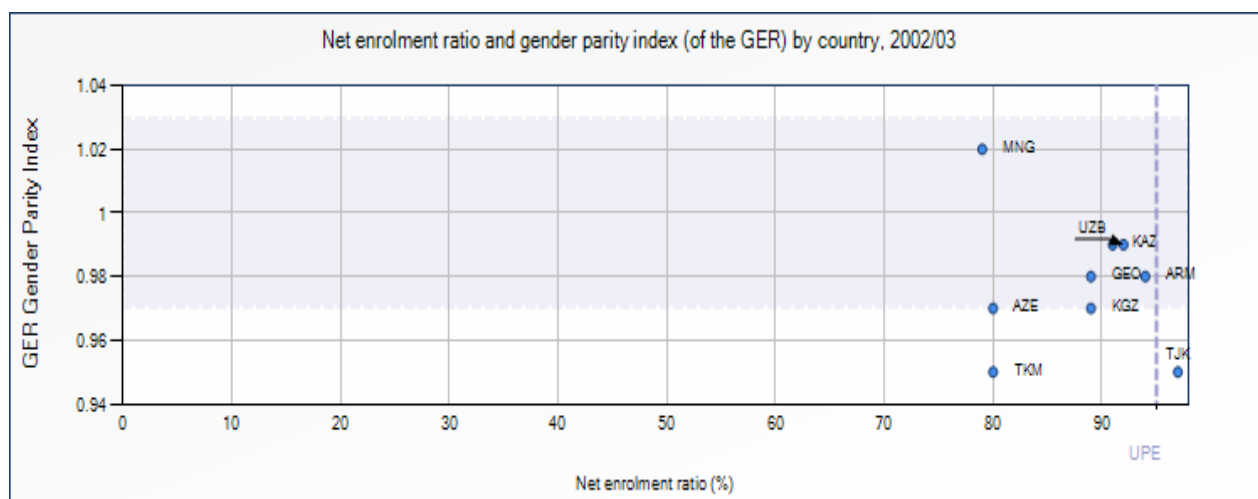
¹² UNESCO UIS, 2001/2.

Figure 2: Net enrolment ratio and gender parity index in East Asia and the Pacific



Source: UNESCO UIS website.

Figure 3: Net enrolment ratio and gender parity index in Central Asia, 2002/3



Source: UNESCO UIS website

The considerable advances in net enrolment are clearly not adequate in themselves to ensure that Asian countries reach the goal of UPE. Net enrolment rates are currently at around 80 per cent in South Asia and need to be boosted upwards. On the other hand, the UNICEF report card indicates that there are concerns about the regularity of attendance among enrolled children as the low NE/AR ratios have been reported in the region (UNICEF 2005). Additionally there are concerns regarding the completion on primary schooling, with the average figures at less than 60 per cent.¹³ Figures A3.1–A3.3 in Annex 3 show that South Asia has been a low achiever with regard to survival rates to the last year of primary school, while in Central Asia survival rates are above 80 per cent in all countries and close to 100 per cent in many countries. The comparison of individual countries in each sub-region further underline the sharp contrast in success indicators in the primary sector as well as the transition from primary to lower secondary schooling.

¹³ Asian Development Bank, Country Strategy and Programme updates, www.adb.org.

In Vietnam, the current net primary enrolment rates were 92 per cent in 2002 and though there was a decline in the ratio of girls to boys from 99.2 per cent in 1992 to 98.1 per cent in 2000 there was an increase in the ratio of girls to boys from 86.1 per cent to 93 per cent in the lower secondary sector in the same period (UNICEF 2005). The government of Vietnam has a country strategy in place for 2006–8 which is to ensure that the current school coverage is consolidated through a quality improvement intervention and with the target of achieving universal lower secondary education by 2010 (UNICEF 2005).

In Kyrgyzstan there was a fall in net primary enrolment rates from 92 per cent to 82 per cent between 1990 and 2000.¹⁴ The national government of Kyrgyzstan has been unable to satisfactorily increase its public expenditure on education which fell from 6 per cent of GDP in 1991 to 4.5 per cent in 2002, and a recent report on childhood poverty indicates that children are now being drawn into the drudgery of piece rate menial work to support their primary education (Yarkova et al. 2005).

In China, there was an increase in the net primary enrolment rate from 97.4 per cent in 1991 to 98.6 per cent in 2002 and a ratio of girls to boys in primary education rising from 86 to 90 per cent over the same period. The Government of China is currently committed to reversing the trend of falling public expenditure on education, which was 2.85 per cent of GDP in 1991 and 2.49 per cent in 1996.¹⁵

The extent of success in meeting the Millennium Development and EFA goals across Asia indicates that the case studies of individual countries informed by the nature and orientation of both government programmes and non-governmental initiatives are valuable in understanding the processes that facilitate the sustainable achievement of educational milestones.

3. Locating Success

The dynamic interplay between government and non-government, non-profit programmes for advancing towards achieving UPE and gender parity underscore the complementarity between these two providers. The commitment of respective government to education, its level and quality of educational infrastructure in terms of school buildings and other physical facilities such as usable toilets, the duration and quality of teacher training have been repeatedly identified as important features in ensuring the effectiveness of the government as a primary provider of education.¹⁶ The responsiveness of non-governmental non-profit organisations to shoulder the task of bringing in deprived and underprivileged children into primary education is heartening. The present non-governmental initiatives indicate a preference for working with the existing government educational institutions at provincial/state and district/county levels.

¹⁴ UNESCO, Global Monitoring Report, 2003–4.

¹⁵ DFID country website, ADB Country Strategy update, 2005.

¹⁶ De and Dreze (1999) *Public Report into Basic Education in India*. UN Millennium Project: Report of the UN Millennium Task Force on Education and Gender Equality, 2005.

Countries such as Vietnam with a strong sectoral programme in education have been able to pursue UPE in a relatively autonomous manner. However, in other instances such as Indonesia, the state education system is supported by religious community schools (madrasah) and private madrasahs. Indonesia is currently working on an educational sector programme to decentralise educational provision so as to improve outreach to the poorest sectors of society.¹⁷ Though educational intervention is government led there are indications of a need to devolve power and decentralise finance to ensure that there is an increased ability to access the most difficult groups of primary school children.

In cases where there is a relatively conservative education sector programme and/or the government has low capacity to ensure an acceptable delivery of education the initial steps towards UPE have been the result of non-governmental non-profit organisations, some of which are charities set up by professionals (Pratham) and others drawing on corporate profits in the business world (ICICI and Wipro). The growing presence of corporate players in the Indian educational sector signalling their interest in supporting government initiatives to extend the enrolment net is a promising trend in a scenario where there is considerable unevenness in the ability of individual state governments to deliver on education in India.

In the case of Nepal, the lead was taken by the Cheli-Beti programme and then emulated and expanded by the national government. This approach is inspired by non-governmental initiative but is able to nest within the larger governmental programmatic approach as it does not set itself out as an alternative to the state education system but is located in the community and the larger development plan of the district.

In the case of China, where financial devolution has advanced to a considerable extent there is significant pressure on state and county governments to provide the finances and physical infrastructure that are needed to ensure that educational provision can be delivered in local schools. The withdrawal of the national state from the direct financing and delivery of education has necessitated the injection of external funds, in this case, by international agencies, to support the attainment of the Millennium Development and EFA goals.

The melange of emerging engagements between national governments, domestic non-governmental non-profit organisations, local communities and international aid agencies indicates that there is the possibility of starting out in the primary education sub-sector with differing state and non-governmental initiatives in terms of approach and sectoral understanding and still identify a feasible process by which to work towards achieving the goals of universal primary education. It is interesting that the success in moving towards Goal 2 and 3 on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) has not been associated with a single institution, whether state or non-state, but with a large variety of educational providers not always within the remit of formal education.

The achievement in advancing basic education towards the goal of UPE does require that the competencies of the various stakeholders and the effectiveness of the educational interventions be

¹⁷ ADB Country Program Update.

taken into account. There is the difficult issue of whether the fall in the number of out of school children should be regarded as an indication of an increased take up by the public education system or whether the rising proportion of children that are accessing private education is what is being witnessed. The extent to which the phenomenon of exit is occurring is an indication of the failure of the state education system to provide a sufficient coverage and quality of education. Recent studies indicate that in South Asia the private school is a valuable additional provider (Tooley 2004).

The exiting of the middle classes from the public education system and the apparent unravelling of the middle class consensus may trigger a reduction in the state commitment (Easterly 2000). The type of intervention depends on the manner in which the lack of education is regarded – if it is a supply-side problem then it requires the building of more schools and improvements in existing schools, while the demand-side is dependent on recognition of the value of education and of the specific targeted interventions that would reduce the cost of education for poor households. Consequently, if the competencies of the government are in the building of schools, while targeted interventions are more effectively directed by community-based organisations, the shift of the middle classes to private education could result in a less effective demand for adequate schooling. If, on the other hand, the state institutions are poor providers of physical infrastructure, then the exiting of the middle class might be the trigger for the entry of private/community based building initiatives.

There is considerable evidence that the progress in education has been achieved through investment in the whole education sector, closely tied to broader development programmes which tackle the underlying social and economic causes of low education achievement. Many governments have also taken strong measures to improve accountability at all levels and to strengthen administration systems particularly financial management.¹⁸ For the most effective pursuit of educational goals enunciated in the Millennium Development and EFA goals the nature of the partnership between the government, the corporate sector, and local communities needs to be mapped out to identify the competencies of individual stakeholders and how they fit into the existing level of educational achievement. It is likely that at the present rate of progress even countries such as Vietnam which are on track to achieve universal enrolment still face huge challenges in providing even a minimum level of quality to provide children with basic literacy and numeracy skills. It is therefore vital to use the multi-partner engagements that are emerging in Asia to ensure that considerations of financial adequacy and quality imperatives are brought to bear on the current programmes to achieve the goal of UPE as the first step toward EFA.

It is noteworthy that international donor agencies have worked with both government and non-governmental providers and have been effective in ensuring that the difficult to access populations have not been excluded from the primary education sub-sector. The experience of DFID funded work in the Chinese province of Gansu indicates that international donor support to government

¹⁸ From Commitment to Action: Education. At the time of writing this paper, 47 countries had prepared poverty reduction strategies (PRSs), and 20 African countries are above the globally accepted 'good performance' threshold (CPIA scores above of 3.5) for transparency and good governance.

educational sector programmes targeting particularly disadvantaged groups can provide the extra resources needed to ensure success in difficult local environments.

4. Diverse Performances and Different Approaches

The educational intervention programmes that are designed by the governments in Asia and beyond increasingly make use of specific instruments that increase the parental demand for education such as the abolition of school fees, and provision of free midday meals that reduce the financial cost borne by poor households. The EFA Fast-Track Initiative (FTI) estimates that, in the next three years, up to 60 countries will have in place credible plans for achieving UPE by 2015. Financial support for the existing educational sector plans of participating governments under EFA-FTI would draw in some 67 million children who are currently out of school into the school system, providing education to 65 per cent of the current global total.¹⁹

The noticeable success of non-governmental non-profit organizations in expanding primary enrolment through the design and implementation of district and provincial level educational programmes indicates that national education plans should not be exclusively designed around country level programmes. Programmes that are directed at reforming the education sector need not be located at the country level but could be conceived at provincial or districts levels to allow targeting of local populations that are educationally deprived. The Cheli-Beti and the DPEP programmes were conceived and implemented as community level interventions with a directed emphasis on improving girls' education. The current trend towards decentralising educational planning and provision to the district level provides an opportunity to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of financial decentralisation as a principle for ensuring an expanding enrolment base moving towards the goal of UPE. The experience of China, where financial decentralisation occurred alongside a fall in national level spending on education, is an early warning that financial decentralisation alone should not be regarded as a policy that will automatically expand and improve educational provision. The matter of adequacy of funds at district and provincial levels needs to be considered carefully with relation to the larger national financial outlays across all categories of national expenditure.

Country level educational reform programmes drawn up by national governments emphasise the aims and objectives of the programme and provide the rationale for the outlay of funds for the implementation. The current trend towards embedding of educational sector programmes within the larger set of economic and social goals allows a ready analysis of the importance awarded to education in the larger national picture. The commitment to educational goals can be gauged from the national expenditure outlays for education. Figures A1.1–A1.4 in Annex 1 show the impact of differing commitment to the educational sectors by comparing the total financial disbursement to education in the overall government expenditure against the percentage of GDP spent by the country on education. It is interesting to note the regional and county level variations with some countries across Asia disbursing close to 20 per cent of their government expenditure to education. In Central Asia Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have disbursement around 20 per cent of

¹⁹ From Commitment to Action, p. 3.

government expenditure on education while in East Asia, Thailand headed the tally with almost 30 per cent of the government budget being spent on education followed by Malaysia at 20 per cent. In South Asia, no country approaches the 20 per cent mark and Bangladesh and Nepal are at the top at around 15 per cent of their government expenditure being devoted to education. There is a much higher financial outlay for education in East Asia where it is currently around 16 per cent, in Central Asia at 15 per cent and in South Asia at 13 per cent. These financial indicators on commitment to education also point to the differential priority awarded to education by countries across Asia with countries such as Malaysia spending more than 5 per cent of their GDP on education and a government outlay of 22 per cent on education, while Pakistan have shown little commitment to educational expenditure despite an improved economic performance the last few years.

The Global Monitoring Report 2003/4 points out that there are five large Asian countries (Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Vietnam) that could effectively absorb an immediate doubling or more of aid in the educational sector. These five countries also have over 60 per cent of the global population subsisting below the poverty line. The current concerns with absorptive capacity of recipient countries could stand in the way of channelling larger aid flows to individual countries. Recent policy debates on the impact of the limitations of absorptive capacity on international aid flows have highlighted the benefit of using participatory community approaches that are already established in the sector at sub-national levels (De Renzio 2005). The Chancellor's report, *From Commitment to Action* indicated that £3 billion would be needed from 2006–7 to meet the existing educational programmes for achieving UPE and gender parity. A much larger sum of £9–10 billion annually is required to achieve the primary education and gender goals. It is imperative that the current educational programmes of these five Asian countries are fully supported by international donor agencies and their commitment to the primary education and gender goals be evaluated in terms of advancement of 'good practice'.

Strategies for channelling international aid flows in line with this social-network-based approach, in order to benefit from existing 'good practice', could be enhanced by drawing on the innovative district level initiatives of non-governmental, non-profit organisations. The education sector plans put forth by Asian countries should be maximally supported with further thinking into the way forward in creating partnerships between national initiatives and programmes and the international agencies to ensure that Asian countries can move forward effectively with regard to fulfilling their respective commitments towards the MDGs.²⁰

The shifting emphasis from the national educational plans to district and provincial based planning and programmes for the provision of education facilitates a move to a greater provision of disaggregated data on achievements in the educational sector. The collection and collation of data from the district level upwards allows for an easier identification of lagging states or districts, and an uploading of features such as a high concentration of particularly underprovided for groups,

²⁰ Statement by Mr P. Chidambaram, Finance Minister of India at the 71st meeting of the Joint Ministerial Committee of the Board of Governors of the World Bank and IMF on the Transfer of Real Resources to Developing Countries, 17 April, 2005.

such as scheduled tribes in the case of India. The greater focus on individual states/provinces and projects located within allows for a more ready consideration of the possibilities of replicated local success such as the World Bank backed Punjab Education Sector Reform Program (PESRP) Punjab in Pakistan. An evaluation of the key characteristics of the project that ensured success in relation to the aims and objectives of the educational sector plans at district, province and national levels facilitates a consistency check that could work as an additional indicator of capacity. In the case of to the PESRP, there were three key features that have been identified as significantly contributing to its success. The first was that the educational reforms were located within the large framework of public finance reforms thereby improving fiscal sustainability and ensuring increased inflows of public spending. The second characteristic was that the reforms were designed to work along side and thereby to strengthen devolution and enhance the fiduciary environment. Lastly, the reforms in the education sector were designed to benefit from the improved financial and governance regime by being focussed on the setting up of public private partnerships to improve access, quality and governance in educational provision.²¹

The current engagements between the government education departments at national, provincial and district levels with international donors and domestic non-governmental providers are relatively new and there has been little attempt to go beyond the timeline of individual projects in evaluating the implications of the emerging multi-provider configurations in the educational sector. Even less is known about the magnitude and pattern of private financial flows in the provision of education. There is a concern that there is a considerable knowledge gap: it to some extent obscures the way forward for scaling up education with regard to the constraints imposed by financial and quality requirements (Pritchett 2004). Any scaling up exercises in the primary education sub-sector would need as a pre-requisite more information regarding the level and type of spending.

5. Spending and Scale

The commitment of national governments to achieving the Millennium Development and EFA goals by 2015 is clear from individual country education plans and the feasibility of achieving these goals has become an important aspect of the evaluation procedures carried out by international development agencies.²² Figures A1.1–A1.4 in Annex 1 indicate differences in commitment in terms of share of government expenditure allocated to education as set out in section 4.2. Figure A1.2 in Annex 1 shows that Malaysia is currently spending as much as 8.1 per cent of its GDP and 20.3 per cent of the total government expenditure on education and its educational achievement in terms of the gender parity index (GPI) is 1.0 at primary level (see Figure 2) and 1.11 per cent at secondary level though enrolment levels were marginally lower (GER at primary level at 97 per cent and GER at secondary level at 70 per cent) compared with the regional averages (111 per cent and 71 per cent, respectively) in 2002–3. In China, on the other hand, government is spending 2.1 per cent of the GDP on education with only 13 per cent of its entire expenditure being disbursed to the educational sector and a GER of 115 and GPI of 0.99 in 2002–3. Pakistan spends

²¹ Update on PERSP, Pakistan on the World Bank website, www.worldbank.org.pk/.../0,,contentMDK:20613672~pagePK:1497618~piPK:217854.

²² Educational Sector plans are evaluated in terms of meeting the MDG goals by ADB, World Bank, DFID and other agencies.

only 1.8 of its GDP on education and commits only 7.8 per cent of its public expenditure to education signaling a considerable resource deficit in terms of the national commitment to UPE and with a GPI of 0.73 in 2002–3. At the other end, in Cambodia where an identical 1.8 per cent of its GDP is spent on education the government has spent nearly twice that proportion from the national budget, with 14.6 of the entire government expenditure devoted to education and a Gender Parity Index of 0.95.²³

The relationship between enrolment rates and public spending on primary education that has emerged from recent research indicates that high enrolment ratios are not only associated with a high priority accorded to public expenditure but also to the incidence of modest unit costs. Countries which have reached UPE have tended to allocate on average 3 per cent of their GDP to the educational sector and the process of achieving UPE appears to result in at least a transitional increase in the per unit cost of the provision of education. The increase in unit cost of provision is related to the accessing of more difficult local populations and the existing social and gender structures (Colclough and Al-Samarrai 2000). The recent success of gender focussed interventions in both non-government non-profit initiatives and pilot government initiatives at the district level in South Asia might suggest an accelerated route to the achievement of gender parity through homing in on existing gender-based social networks. In China, the national education plan indicates that the paucity of funds in backward provinces such as Gansu require special attention and have become the focus on the attentions of international agencies.²⁴

In the context of the shrinking educational budgets of the Central Asian Republics, the dismaying situation in Kyrgyzstan of a falling enrolment rate notwithstanding a high level of government commitment to education and currently meeting the gender parity levels of the Millennium Goals demands immediate attention. There are early indications of an unravelling of gender parity at the secondary levels on account of falling livelihoods for young adults in the parts of the region that could reduce the incentives for a successful transition from schooling at the basic to lower secondary levels.²⁵ An enhanced commitment to support public spending through international agencies needs to be provided through the facility targeted financial instruments similar to the FTI.

The plummeting of enrolment levels in parts of Asia in the face of national economic crises and international natural disasters could impose additional private costs on poor households and hamper the successful transition from the primary to the secondary sub-sector. Figures A2.1–A2.3 in Annex 2 provide a picture of the public expenditure per primary child as a percentage of GDP/*per capita* across the sub-regions of Asia. It is noteworthy that countries that have increased their expenditure have seen improvements, not only in enrolments but also in the Gender Parity Index. Both Malaysia and Cambodia increased their public expenditure per primary child from 10.7 to 13 per cent and from 2.7 to 6.6 per cent, respectively between 1998/9 and 2002/3. In South Asia, both Bangladesh and Nepal have steadily increased the public expenditure per primary child as a percentage of GDP/*per capita* from 4.2 per cent to 6.8 per cent and from 7.5 per cent to 8.00

²³ GMR UIS UNESCO database.

²⁴ DFID country website, www.dfid.gov.uk/countries/asia/China/programmes.asp.

²⁵ CHIP *ibid*.

per cent over the same period. India stands tall in South Asia with 12.4 per cent and the regional leader is Thailand at 16.4 per cent. It appears that the commitment of the government to expanding the educational net at the primary level is a key to ensuring the success of educational programmes. However, the untenable economic scenario of collapsing budgets does devastate national educational programmes and in Mongolia despite an expenditure level of 34 per cent of GDP *per capita* the net enrolment was 79 per cent in 2002/3, a fall of 10 per cent from the net enrolment ratio of 89.4 per cent in 1998/99.

The relative absence of figures on private spending at the national level is compounded by the low level of recording of the extent of private cost being borne by the poorer sections of the population who access the public education system but directly and/or indirectly bear the costs through charges such as tuition fees, uniform and textbook costs. The private sector in primary education comprises a number of distinct providers with very differential resources. In addition to the established private schools that caters for the well off middle classes who have opted out of the public system of education there are the private organisations that operate religious establishments such as church schools, madrasahs, Buddhist schools and Hindu schools. There is also the phenomenon of the under-resourced private school that operates in areas where the public school system cannot reach or has ceased to operate for all purposes.²⁶ This heterogeneous group of providers in the private sector share only one common characteristic, that they are regarded as an alternative to the government school (Pritchett 2004) and the absence of a disaggregated picture of funding, costing and delivery mechanisms poses a serious gap in the current state of knowledge of how such provision fits into a scaling up of primary education in Asia.

The scaling up of primary provision towards achieving UPE will require a greater attention to the types of current provision with a view to re-examining these in relation to the emerging partnerships between the government and non-governmental sector. The potential for 'joined up' provision between government and private providers could further accelerate the achievement of the MDGs, while any organisational or motivational contradictions or slippages between the providers might result in a slippage in achievement.

6. From Enrolment to Retention and Quality

The strong focus on enrolment has produced commendable results but the weaker performance with regard to the transition to the lower secondary stage as well as emerging concerns of variable, if not poor quality of schooling, resulting in low levels of retention and an exiting of the schooling system in extreme cases, does emphasise the need for a more multi-pronged set of indicators to ensure the goal of UPE (World Bank 2004). The Global Monitoring Report 2004–5 directly addressed the issue of the quality imperative for UPE, pointing out that universal net enrolment was necessary to ensure UPE but that it was not a sufficient indicator itself.²⁷ Statistics on pupil progression and retention are important indicators of the extent to which the school system is able to ensure learning among children. The 'gross intake to last year of primary school' figure varies

²⁶ PROBE report *ibid*.

²⁷ Global Monitoring Report 2004–5. The Quality Imperative, p. 96.

from 77 per cent in South Asia, to 98 per cent in Central Asia and in East Asia.²⁸ Figures A3.1–A3.3 in Annex 3 show the variations across individual countries with regard to the ‘survival rate to the last grade of primary school’ and the picture in both East and South Asia is of considerable differences at the with the sub-regions. The South Asian successes of Bangladesh, India and Nepal do not appear to have facilitated high levels of retention with all three countries hovering around the 60 per cent mark. On the other hand, countries in Central Asia are able to retain over 80 per cent of their primary intake. In East Asia, China leads with a near 100 per cent survival rate, while Malaysia, Indonesia and Vietnam have 80 per cent. These large variations indicate that retention of children in the primary sub-sector is still a huge challenge.

The relationship between educational provision and the role of teachers has been highlighted in the GMR 2004–5 as a matter of utmost importance. The problems of high levels of teacher absenteeism, limited number of adequately trained teachers and poor quality and limited duration of teacher training currently beset the government education systems through out the region.²⁹ The relative scarcity of female teachers has already been flagged as serious hindrance to the achievement of gender parity in schools (UNICEF 2005). Scaling up from the existing schooling system has been beset with pitfalls, as it has focussed on enrolment to the detriment of key aspects such as retention, quality, and gender equality.³⁰

The district level adopted by successful non-governmental non-profit initiatives in the provision of education adopted across South Asia could provide the key to more innovative and sustainable scaling up programmes. The community centred focus of programmes such as BEP in Bangladesh and Cheli-Beti in Nepal encourages the use of dynamic social networks that have become the catalyst for project success. Recent evaluations of these approaches have pointed to the key role played by participatory approaches in community based, gender focussed and cross sector initiatives (Commonwealth Secretariat 2005). The success of BEP is located in its use of a community approach that draws on non-formal educational provision with a low or no fee regime and locally recruited women teachers. Direct interventions that motivate learning for girls draw on the enabling environment provided by an established gender-based social network such as Mahila Samkhya in India (Ramachandran 2004). These initiatives support existing national and provincial education plans, bolstering weak areas through programmes such as ‘accelerated learning’ while ‘mid-day meals’ and ‘food for education’ emphasise the strong inter-relations between deficits in health and education in primary schooling.³¹ These positive reinforcements of schooling through targeted nutritional interventions provide a direct and cost effective way of supporting an educational programme with the added benefit that the linking of an educational programme back into the underlying framework of economic and social plans for the district could enhance the local network effect in a way that is in line with good practice.³²

²⁸ UNESCO UIS database.

²⁹ GMR Report 2004/5. PROBE report *ibid*.

³⁰ GMR 2003/4 and GMR 2004/5.

³¹ Snakes and Ladders, *ibid*.

³² World Food Programme 2004. Schooling feeding programmes – why they should be scaled up now.

The greater success of innovative programmes to reaching more difficult to access populations of children across South Asia are also being attempted in educational programmes such as CHIP in Gansu, China and Kyrgyzstan.³³ The superior performance has been attributed to the community based participatory approach that facilitates the uploading of local knowledge and networks. The Cheli-Beti programme provides insights into the successful transformation of a community-based model to a national wide programme through the aegis of BPEP. On the other hand, the history of piggybacking on innovative initiatives in the educational sector is replete with tales of failure. Replication of community level projects is notoriously difficult due to the embedding of the original model in the particularities of specific location, with its attendant history and geography.³⁴

National educational plans emphasise the use of specific targeted educational interventions to further retention such as the provision of scholarships for girls which has worked very effectively in Cambodia in recent years.³⁵ The scaling up of programmes within the government school system rely to a great extent on the ability of educational institutions at the concerned levels to be responsive, rather than authoritative, in their approach and style of management. The record of scaling up of programmes within the government educational system has been poor through much of Asia in part due to bureaucratic delays and inefficiencies in implementation but largely on account of tardy and uneven collection of statistical indicators and inadequate evaluation of programmes (Pritchett 2004).³⁶

7. Scaling with and by the State

The Asia Pacific Report Card for 2005 focussed on the efforts of Asian governments to meet the goal of UPE.³⁷ It is noteworthy that the governments of Pakistan and India are regarded as failing in their duty to provide strong support for educational goals with government commitment to education getting only 3/10. The Thai government came in at the top with considerable praise for working towards the MDGs in education and the valuations seem to be in line with the expenditure outlay for education in the total government expenditure. The limitations discussed in section 6.2 regarding the effectiveness and durability of any scaling up exercise which is based on a singular motivation of achieving UPE through a maximal expansion of enrolment are considerable. Programmes such as SSA introduced in India in 2001 were roundly criticised for moving ahead with a nationwide expansion of the DPEP without taking into account the evaluations conducted of the DPEP Phase I and Phase II.

Non-governmental non-profit approaches that have focussed on non-formal education systems do not directly engage with the state educational provision. Consequently, the improvements in enrolment are the only obvious indicator of the contribution of the non-governmental provider. The quality of the educational provision is more difficult to ascertain and the only, if any, point of contact

³³ CHIP website.

³⁴ Non-governmental providers such as BRAC and Pratham were very cautious in the initial years about any real possibilities of transplanting success from one geographical site to another.

³⁵ Global Monitoring Report 2003/4.

³⁶ Global Campaign for Education Report 2005.

³⁷ Global Campaign for Education 2005. Asia Pacific Report Card.

between the two systems is through the use of the state curriculum in both systems of schooling.³⁸ Non-governmental programmes that work with the government have had mixed experiences of the effectiveness and/or sustainability of such engagement and often regard such linkages as a necessary but unpleasant requirement of their work.³⁹ The state controlled curriculum has been the subject of much heated debate in the last few decades with fierce and extreme exchanges on issues such as the teaching and curriculum of history, and the privileging of English as the language of instruction.⁴⁰ The expansion of non-formal education based schooling is seriously hindered by the low value accorded to such educational qualifications by tertiary educational establishments and limits its effectiveness to that of a transitional mechanism.

The engagement of successful non-governmental non-profit initiatives with the government education system is nonetheless a cause for hope. The recognition by the national and sub-national educational institutions of the superior ability of the non-governmental providers in ensuring access in difficult local environments signals a readiness to tackle the harder terrain of accessing the deprived and socially excluded groups in society. The early indications that non-governmental non-profit providers direct and shape their contributions in relation to the major deficits in the government education system, while emphasising their own competencies in community, teaching and delivery provide a favourable environment for scaling up programmes that drawn of success within innovative approaches. As in the case of the BEP schools in Bangladesh that chose to mainstream into the formal schooling system in 2004 after achieving successful scaling up in the non-formal sector, the engagement of numerous non-governmental initiatives to promote access and to retain children in the primary education sub-sector could be the crucial ground work for any scaling up programme that could facilitate enhancement of the government education system through strengthening of state educational institutions and emphasising the need to examine core competencies to ensure learning through the provision of quality teaching.

Improvements in the quality of schooling can be built into the emerging partnerships by drawing on the different core competencies of various providers to work towards programmes that emphasis for example the importance of innovative textbooks and teaching tools to create and support an environment of in-service training.⁴¹ The key role of teachers and teaching in relation to bringing together the objectives of access and retention provides an innovative solution to the intransigence of teacher union lobbies that have been highlighted in public school systems.⁴² The initiatives led by non-profit, non-governmental providers from professional and corporate sectors have been characterised by an emphasis on successful delivery and accelerated learning methods. The shift

³⁸ This does not occur in all cases as there are often numerous parallel curricular systems, with streaming mechanisms, e.g. the National Open School System provides a lower level of curriculum for children who have been unsuccessful in the mainstream government system in India.

³⁹ There is little history of formal partnerships in the provision of education in Asia, though the co-existence of educational institutions in state and non-state sectors is a well established institutional arrangement (see Section 5.4).

⁴⁰ The debate over the over history had across Asia in the last decade.

⁴¹ Azim Premji Foundation 2005. Report on National Conference on Teachers.

⁴² PROBE report, *ibid.*

in focus from bringing children into schools to a more systematic consideration of the schooling system in relation to its ability to retain and motivate students to complete the primary years of schooling is the result of these emerging partnerships. Such partnerships have been particularly effective in designing educational programmes for disadvantaged and social excluded groups such as girls from ethnic minority, low caste and tribal communities (Ramachandran 2004).

8. Moving Forward with Success

Working with the current networks that have been identified and enhanced by non-governmental non-profit organisations in the education sector provides an attractive exit from the singularly focussed drive for increased enrolment as the way forward to achieving the goal of UPE. The entry into a more multifaceted approach to educational provision promotes the identification of good practice in a wide variety of disparate settings within the sector for purposes of consolidation, with future possibilities for replication and scaling up. There is a danger that the array of current practices in the sector could become the baseline for selection of the 'best' approaches rather than the use of process or progress indicators that distinguish between the middling and the good.

Scoping methods and pilot studies that have been recognised practices in the national educational sector tend to be less commonplace in the non-governmental sector on account of the more individualistic and proactive beginnings of educational providers.⁴³ The particularistic features of local success make for very difficult replication across districts in the same state and tend to be dead in the water when attempted at a national level. There is a need for a more comprehensive mapping of the full range of non-governmental non-profit providers in Asia today to obtain a greater understanding of their particular strengths and weaknesses. Such an exercise would be a necessary precursor to identifying examples of 'good practice' in the local and sub-national spheres.

Institutional learning has not been the forte of national educational institutions and the tendency is to regard local success as a curiosity and without the power to ensure social transformation of significance. This 'drop in the ocean' attitude to success in the non-governmental sector has prevented any serious or sustained engagement beyond the duration of a particular project. The recent emergence of partnerships where the non-governmental sector sees its objective as jointly working with the government education system indicates that there might be a new opportunity to fashion longer lasting linkages that could improve network effects in educational provision. The methods that the non-governmental sector have devised to make such engagement possible could provide clues to whether these emerging engagements will have the resilience to make further inroads into the large areas of economic deprivation and social exclusion that exist in the Asian region.

The current explorations into the need to improve quality show that the identification of the weakest areas of provision and a direct, even accelerated approach to addressing difficult areas in

⁴³ The educational sector shares with other sectors that have a large NGO presence the problems of lack of accountability among a large number of providers.

education provision might provide the key to new instruments and approaches. It appears to be the case that for a sustainable scaling up programme to develop there is value in focussing on the local scenario using criteria of depth, comprehension and quality to ensure that these can be effectively embedded in district and provincial initiatives such that they are amenable to uploading to the national level. The success of a scaling up approach that has been deeply informed by the trajectory of 'good practice' in the region is dependent on the commitment of national governments, the continued engagement of the non-governmental non-profit sector and greater and more directed support from international donor agencies.

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Annex 1: Public Expenditure on Education

Figure A1.1: Public spending on education in Central Asia 2002/3

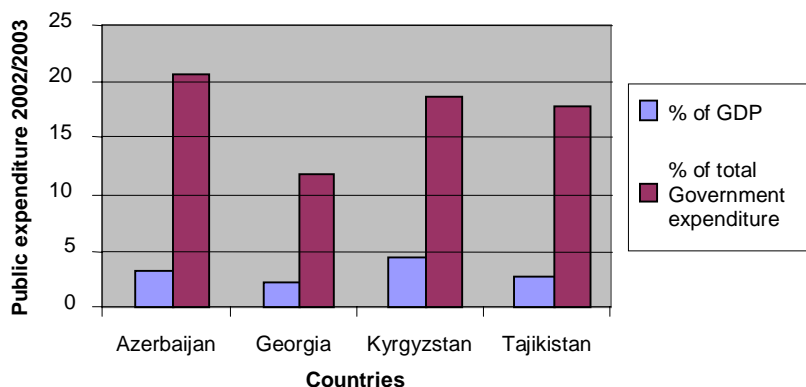


Figure A1.2: Public spending on education in East Asia and Pacific 2002/3

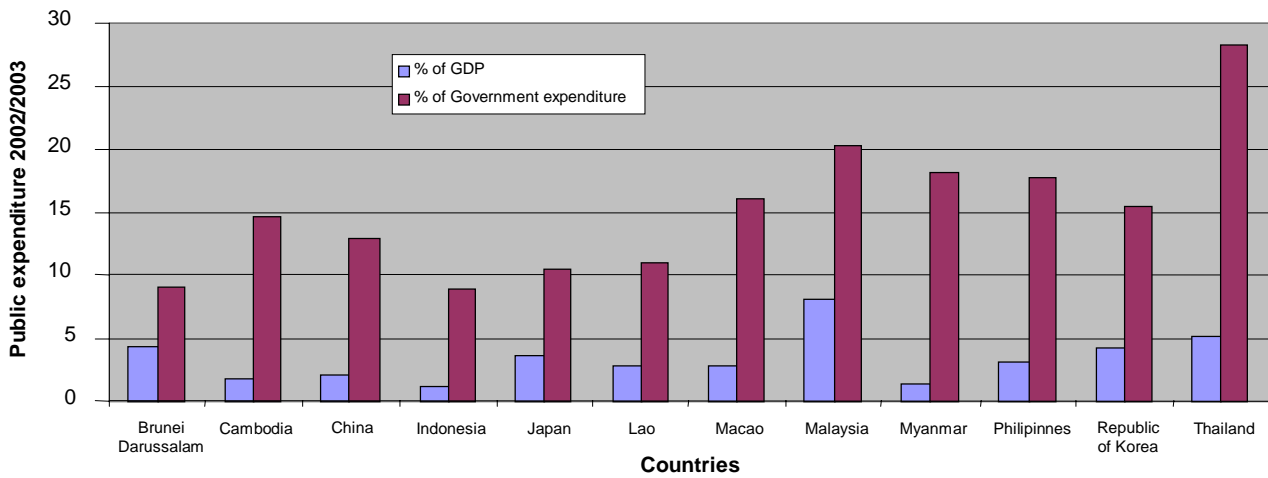


Figure A1.3: Public spending on education in South and West Asia 2002/2003

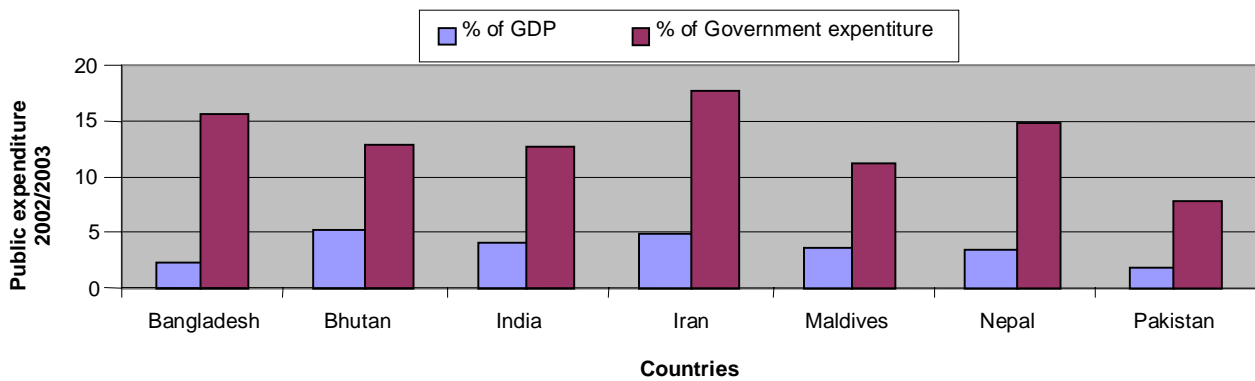
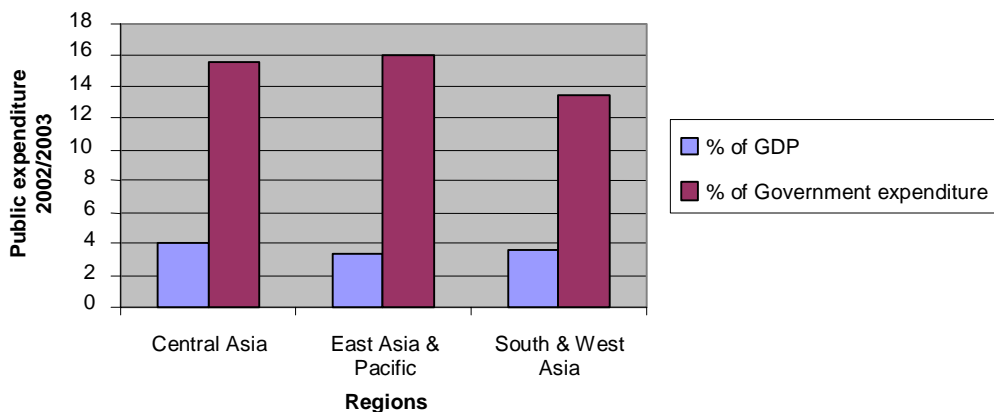


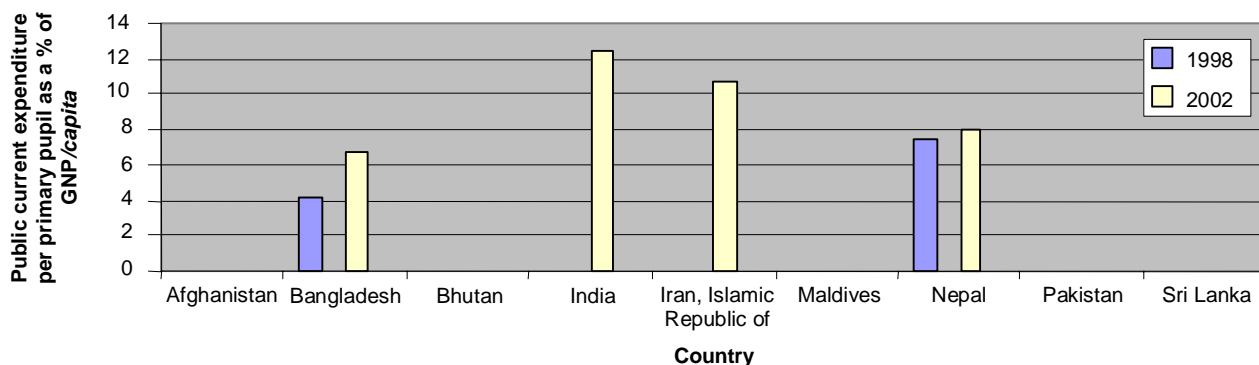
Figure A1.4: Public spending on education in Asia 2002/3



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

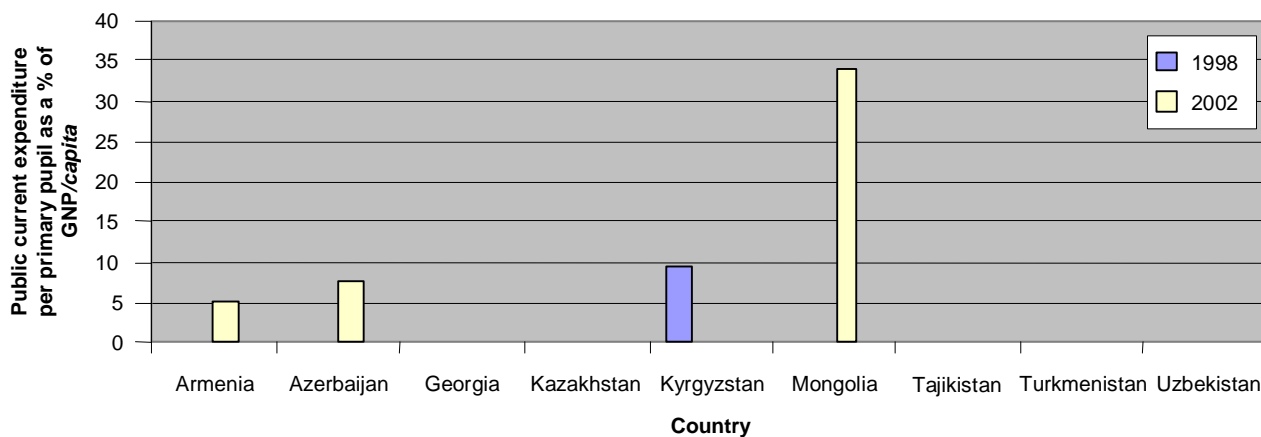
Annex 2: Expenditure on Primary Pupils

Figure A2.1: Public current expenditure per primary pupil as a % of GNP/capita in South and West Asia



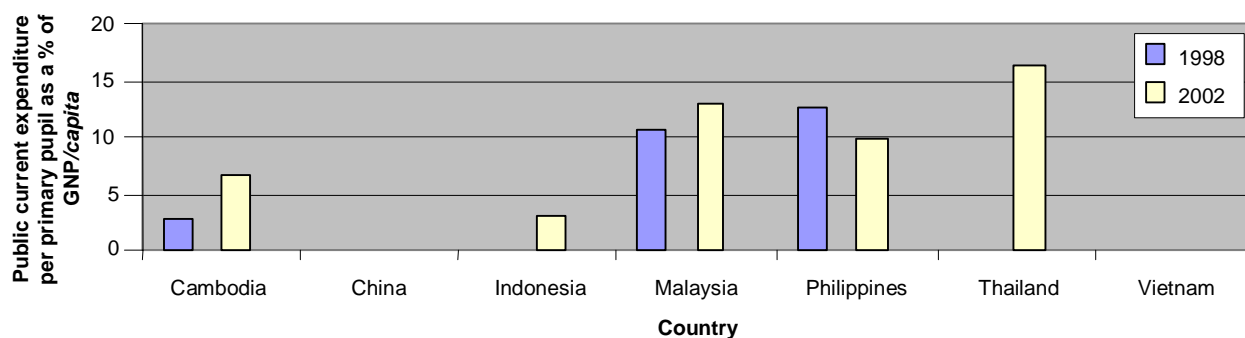
Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.

Figure A2.2: Public current expenditure per primary pupil as a % of GNP/capita in Central Asia



Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.

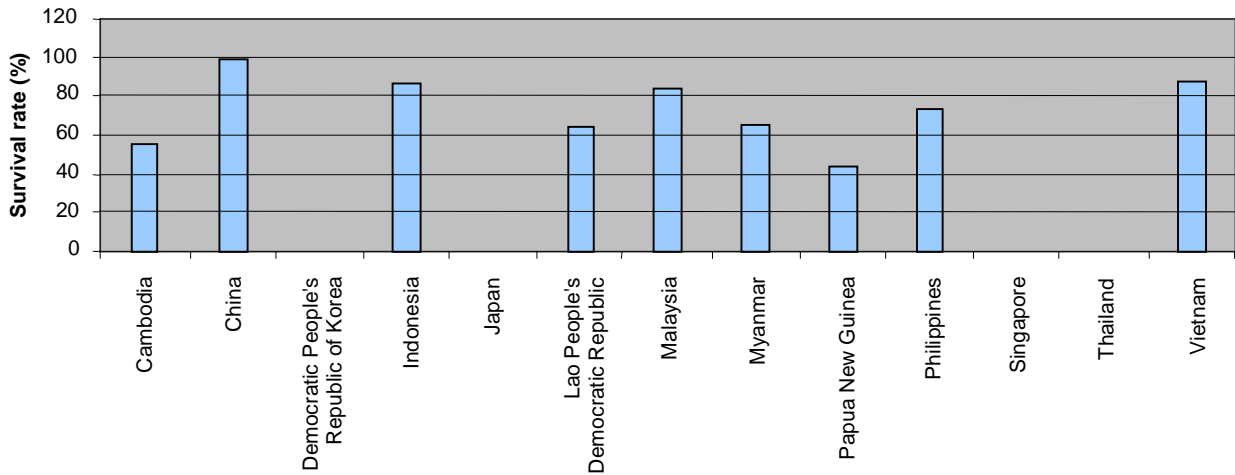
Figure A2.3: Public current expenditure per primary pupil as a % of GNP/capita in East Asia



Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.

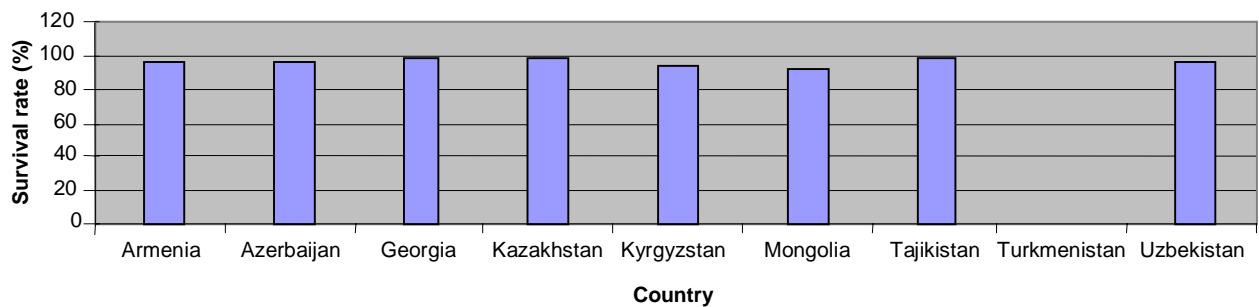
Annex 3: Survival Rates to Last Grade of Primary Education

Figure A3.1: Survival rate to last grade of primary education (%) in East Asia (2001/2)



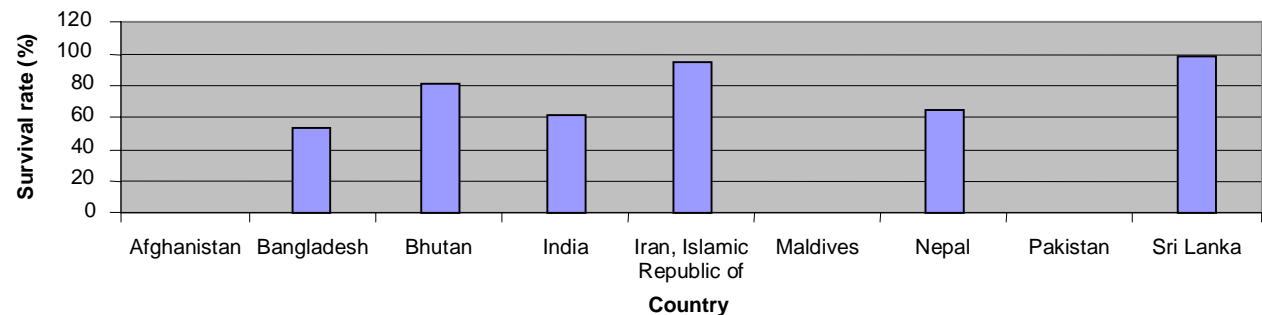
Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.

Figure A3.2: Survival rate to last grade of primary education (%) in Central Asia (2001/2)



Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.

Figure A3.3: Survival rate to last grade of primary education (%) in South Asia (2001/2)



Source: GMR UIS UNESCO.