Module 1: Overview and Context of Education Policies

1.1 Education and Development

This reading material is reproduced for training purpose based on *Learning for All: Investing in People’s Knowledge and Skills to Promote Development* (The World Bank, 2011) and *UNESCO Handbook on Education Policy Analysis and Programming* (UNESCO Bangkok 2011).

Details of the reading material can be accessed at:

Education and Development

Education’s Role in Development

There is broad agreement backed by research findings, that education enhances people’s ability to make informed decisions, be better parents, sustain a livelihood, adopt new technologies, cope with shocks, and be responsible citizens and effective stewards of the natural environment. Given that global economic growth remains sluggish despite signs of recovery from the recent economic crisis, the shortage of the “right” skills in the workforce has taken on a new urgency across the world (World Bank 2010b). Global unemployment, estimated at 205 million (or 6.6 percent of the working population) in 2009, is at an all-time high (ILO 2011).

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) recognize a child’s right to an education – a worldwide acknowledgment that depriving a child of the opportunity to basic skills is tantamount to depriving that child of the chance to have a satisfying life.1 Through the actions described in this strategy, the World Bank Group commits to removing barriers to access to quality education so that the right to education may be upheld for all children and youth.

Education improves the quality of people’s lives in ways that transcend benefits to the individual and the family by contributing to economic prosperity and reducing poverty and deprivation. Countries with low levels of education remain in a trap of technological stagnation, low growth, and low demand for education. By measuring education levels based on what students have learned, one influential study estimates that an increase of one standard deviation in student scores on international assessments of literacy and mathematics is associated with a 2 percent increase in annual GDP per capita growth (Hanushek and Woessmann 2008). At the micro level, education yields its greatest benefits in countries undergoing rapid technological and economic change because it can give workers the ability to continue acquiring skills throughout life, as well as the capacity to adapt to new technology.

The development benefits of education extend well beyond work productivity and growth to include better health, reduced fertility, an enhanced ability to adopt new technologies and/or cope with economic shocks, more civic participation, and even more environmentally friendly behavior. A few such benefits include:

1 The UN Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) enforces the right to education of every child and makes this right legally binding for the signatory countries.

“Perhaps the best protections a government can provide are education – which makes it easier to pick up new skills – and a strong rate of job creation, which makes it easy to find new employment.”

Source: Commission on Growth and Development 2008, 5-6
Healthier children. Other things being equal, more educated parents have healthier children, even after controlling for household income. Education increases knowledge of the benefits of vaccination and strategies for avoiding the transmission of infectious diseases. It is estimated that of the 8.3 million fewer deaths of children younger than 5 years between 1970 and 2009, one-half can be attributed to more education among women of reproductive age (Gakidou, et al. 2010).

Better coping with economic shocks. Households with more education cope better with economic shocks than less educated households, since they tend to have more resources and knowledge about how to cope with income fluctuations. Such households are also more able to exploit new economic opportunities (see Frankenberg, Smith, and Thomas 2003 and Corbacho, Garcia-Escribano, and Inchausete 2007).

Adapting to environmental change. Comparing countries with similar income and weather conditions, those countries with better-educated female populations are more capable of coping with extreme weather events than countries with low levels of female education (Blankespoor et. al 2010).

In all societies, governments assume the responsibility for giving their people the opportunity to become educated and thus receive these benefits. Indeed, there are good reasons for governments to play this role in education. Because many of the benefits of education accrue to the individual, individuals and their families are often willing to spend and sacrifice on their own to take advantage of schooling opportunities, even without government help.

There are strong rationales for a government’s promotion of education. First, “educated people contribute more to society than they get back in higher pay.” (Commission on Growth and Development, 2008). Second, credit constraints prevent poorer families from borrowing enough to pay for schooling, even if schooling would lead to higher wages that would more than justify a loan. Both these market failures lead to underinvestment in education, so “public spending on education is justified on the grounds of efficiency and equality of opportunity. It corrects the failure of the market to allocate enough resources to education, and it also widens access to education beyond those who can pay for it upfront.” (ibid) Managed correctly, public intervention to promote education creates opportunities for gains in growth, productivity, employment, and poverty reduction. And for the development community, investing in education is a key item on the agenda as the world continues to recover from crisis (World Bank 2010b).

Recent Developments: More Schooling, Little Learning

Governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), communities, and private enterprises have built new schools and classrooms and recruited teachers at unprecedented levels. Moreover, because more schools are available in rural areas in these countries, the poorest children – as well as girls who were kept out of school because there were not schools close to home – have also benefited. However, low-income countries as a group are still far from reaching the education Millennium Development Goals (MDGs): universal primary education as measured by enrollment and primary completion rates, and gender equality in primary and secondary education. Three-fourths of the
countries that are furthest from meeting the MDG on primary completion rates are in Sub-Saharan Africa; the corresponding percentage for gender equality is 45 percent.2

As primary enrollment rates have climbed, pressure has mounted to expand the capacity of secondary and tertiary education institutions. Spurred by the rise of new economic starts such as Brazil, Russia, India, and China (the BRICs), developing countries – including low-income countries – are more keenly aware that secondary and tertiary education are critical to developing a skilled, productive, and flexible labor force and creating and applying ideas and technologies that contribute to economic growth (Rodriguez 2008; COREHEG 2010).

Income poverty remains a pervasive barrier to school attendance and learning, particularly for girls and minority groups. Educational progress lags even more among children and youth who face multiple sources of disadvantage: gender, place of residence, disability, or ethno-linguistic background. For too many students, however, more schooling has not resulted in more knowledge and skills. The results of substantial resources spent on education have thus been disappointing in terms of learning outcomes. Youth are leaving school and entering the workforce without the knowledge, skills, or competencies necessary to adapt to a competitive and increasingly globalized economy. As a result, to find employment they may need remedial, second-chance, and job training programs.

Education systems in many countries face the simultaneous challenges of providing basic education to hard-to-reach or disadvantaged groups, expanding post-basic education to meet greater demand for employable skills, providing second-chance learning opportunities to those who are out of school, and ensuring that the education provided at all levels yields better learning outcomes.

The results from regional and international student assessments, such as the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSSS), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and the Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ) tests, illustrate the wide gulf in international test scores of students from different income levels, both between and within countries.

**Why a New Education Strategy?**

Economic, demographic, and technological changes are redefining the development challenge for all countries. Education systems must adapt to those changes so that they can produce the skilled, agile workforces and informed citizens needed in this environment.

A country’s demographic landscape shapes the potential demand for education. Because their fertility rates remain high, low-income countries continue to have very young populations; on average, more than 40 percent of their populations will be under 15 years old in 2020. An estimated 3.1 billion young people worldwide are between the ages of 0 and 24 years, of which 90

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2 In Latin America and the Caribbean, gender inequality tends to result from boys having significantly lower enrollment and/or completion rates than girls.
percent live in the developing world. Moreover, fertility is not declining as rapidly as expected in some poor countries. These countries must provide their young people adequate basic education while upgrading the quality of that education. Success in getting more children through basic education, moreover, creates demand for education at secondary and tertiary levels. In contrast, sharp declines in fertility rates in middle-income countries have reduced the pressure to expand primary education facilities, leaving more resources for quality improvement and the expansion of post-primary education.

Urbanization is another global shift that has consequences for education: the rising urban share of the population of the developing world presents both opportunities for and challenges to the education sector. Educated migrants seek places where many other workers have similar skills because educated workers gain from proximity to others. Education can take advantage of the economies of scale presented by urbanization, with opportunities for less costly expansion of services. The challenge will be not only to expand access, but also to increase learning outcomes and education’s relevance to the urban labor market, while reducing rural-urban gaps (World Bank 2009i).

The emergence of new middle-income countries has intensified the desire of developing nations to become more competitive by building more highly skilled, agile workforces. The technological landscape also shapes potential demand for education. New information technologies have transformed—and continue to transform—how people live and communicate, how enterprises do business, the kind of jobs that are available, and the skills that are in greater or less demand. The ability of education systems to develop “new economy skills” can help countries become more competitive. This implies changing the way educators are trained, increasing the supply of qualified educators, and improving the relevance of education curricula.

References


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3 The same goal is being pursued by OECD countries: “Early education helps to broaden opportunity and stimulate subsequent learning, while secondary and tertiary education improves workforce skills and enhances absorptive capacity…Policies to improve higher education performance and output are a priority for Austria, the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, the Slovak Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, and Turkey” (OECD 2009, 36 and 37).

4 Autor, Levy, and Murname (2003) conclude that within industries in the United States, computerization is associated with reduced labor input of routine manual and cognitive tasks and increased labor input of non-routine cognitive tasks.


Understanding the Context of Education Policy

The education sector does not function in isolation but regularly interacts with other sectors in the country as well as regionally and internationally. Reforms in the education sector not only can be triggered by new needs which emerged in society and the economy, but also can affect other sectors. Sometimes, such impact on other sectors can be hidden and takes effect only after a certain time. Education policy reform often responds to identified needs, and is also influenced by global and regional education development agendas. This section describes some of the most far-reaching global priorities in education which can influence national education policies.

1. Global Priorities: MDGs and EFA

Education for All (EFA) is an international commitment to provide quality basic education for all children, youth and adults. It was first launched in 1990, then reconfirmed in April 2000 together with six goals to be reached by 2015. In September 2000, another set of eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) with specific targets for the year 2015 was announced. Since then, MDGs and EFA goals have become global development agendas driving national policies and development in many countries, and mobilization of external resources for education.

The EFA Goals are linked with the MDGs but expand the scope of the education-related MDGs to a lifelong learning perspective (from ECCE to adult learning) and provide a strong emphasis on equity and quality of education (see Figure 1). For example, EFA’s ECCE goal (Goal 1) covers both the health and education aspects of a child’s development while MDG Goal 4, on reducing child mortality, also covers health. Most important of all, education is key to achieving all MDGs and the EFA goals can thus be considered preconditions for the MDGs.

Figure 1. Linkage between MDGs and EFA Goals

The MDGs and EFA goals provide important international development frameworks against which progress at global, regional and national levels is measured and compared. Most countries have included these goals in their development policies and monitoring systems. However, there is risk that
EFA is interpreted within the context of MDGs. For instance, when the MDGs and EFA Goal 2 emphasize primary education, other areas such as adult literacy and life skills, post-basic education and TVET tend to be neglected by the donors and the Government itself. Another example is the issue of quality of education which is an EFA goal and concerns all countries regardless of their level of development, while MDGs do not explicitly mention this aspect. This may cause imbalanced development within the education sector.

2. International Conventions Related to Education

In addition to the global initiatives such as MDGs and EFA, there is a wide range of international agreements that also help shape country-level thinking on education policy and reforms. They include:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Article 26 (1948)\(^5\)
- The Convention against Discrimination in Education (CDE) (1960)\(^6\)
- International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965)\(^7\)
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979)\(^8\)
- Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC) (1989)\(^9\)

There are also international and regional conventions and agreements of a standard-setting nature directly related to education and adopted under the auspices of UNESCO solely or jointly with other international organizations. UNESCO has a mandate and responsibility to promote those conventions and monitor their implementation. They include:

- Agreement on the Importation of Educational, Scientific and Cultural Materials, with Annexes A to E and Protocol annexed (1976)\(^10\)
- Convention on Technical and Vocational Education (1979)\(^11\)
- Regional Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Asia and Pacific (1983)\(^12\)

When analysing national education policies and their implementation, it is useful to verify the extent to which these international and regional conventions and agreements are respected and implemented, and what remedies can be introduced in case of deficiencies.

3. The National Policy Context

Education is a key sector of national development. To be effective, education policies must be designed in conjunction with other sectors’ development policies in the country. For example, early childhood care and education (ECCE) involves education, health and community development. Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) closely links education to the economy and job market.

\(^5\)http://www.udhr.org/udhr/default.htm
\(^6\)http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/DISCR_E.PDF
\(^7\)http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/O/72b2390667c6f922c1257180004b369a/$FILE/G0641237.pdf
\(^8\)http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm
\(^9\)http://www.unicef.org/crc/
\(^10\)http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001145/114589e.pdf#page=138
\(^11\)http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0008/000846/084696e.pdf#page=235
\(^12\)http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0005/000593/059308mo.pdf#page=14
Education policies must in the first place take into account and reflect a country’s geographic, demographic, economic, social, cultural and political contexts.

Geography and demography

For instance, geographical features such as mountains, seas, lakes, rivers, roads, climate and changing demographic characteristics in terms of population structure, distribution and growth can inform decisions not only about the numbers and location of schools, training and deployment of teachers, production and dissemination of learning materials, etc., but also the investment priority and trade-offs within the education system. Knowing the ethnic, religious and linguistic composition of the population can help education policies to give due consideration to different languages, beliefs, customs, and practices of different groups. Key geographic and demographic data for each country are readily available from various national and international sources like for example national statistical offices, the United Nations Population Division\(^{13}\), the WHO Western Pacific Regional Office\(^{14}\) and many other documents and websites.

Figure 2. Concept of National Development

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14 [www.wpro.who.int/information_sources/databases/demographic_tables](www.wpro.who.int/information_sources/databases/demographic_tables)

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Economy

The structure and characteristics of the national economy play an important role in influencing education policies. Changing production and employment patterns in terms of the share among agriculture-industry-service sectors are key factors in human resource development and education policies. Income disparities and the percentage of the population living below the poverty line can affect access to education and learning outcomes. The economic climate can also determine the budget and financial resources available to the education sector. Education policy analysis must therefore closely keep abreast of the many interactions between education and the economy.
Beware that a high share of public education expenditure as a percentage of GDP or total government expenditure does not necessarily lead to a better quality education. Efficiency and effectiveness of spending and transparency and accountability are key elements determining the value for money spent on education.

**Social and cultural contexts**

The effectiveness of education being itself a major social service is often affected by the social structure such as income classes, castes, ethnic/linguistic/religious groups, socially-deprived, marginalized and vulnerable population. Some of these social groups may maintain different attitudes and values towards the utility of education, its priorities and the way in which it is delivered. Traditional culture may also exert its influence on schooling in terms of access and participation which are often tied to the contents and methods of education including the language used in teaching-learning. Education policy analysis must therefore look into the many interactions between education and social/cultural issues.

**Political context**

Policy is about politics. Policy-making in education must fit into overall national development policies and political context. An essential task when analysing national education policies is to first understand the political and administrative mechanisms, where and how decisions are made, who are the major players, what are their strengths and weaknesses, and what are the possible future changes in politics. These will provide the basis for assessing how education policies and policy-making are influenced by the political context, and can proactively influence it in return. The administrative arrangements for education, including the degree of decentralization of policy-making can also have a profound effect on education. Some national ministries are very centralized and create and implement all policies. Other countries may have decentralized many policy-making and planning responsibilities to sub-national levels.

Additional useful information can be found among:

- **National Education Policies and Programmes and International Cooperation: What role for UNESCO**?[^15]
- IMF documentation and in particular the IMF Article IV reports produced on a regular basis and giving an overview of the macro-economic situation of a country.
- World Bank country reports.

4. **National Development Priorities**

Each country has its own national development priorities enshrined in the Constitution, policies, strategies and plans. Education is often included as a critical component of national development and poverty reduction priorities.

In order to analyse a country’s priorities, one can ask the following questions:

- Which are the key official documents and frameworks that define the country’s policy directions and development priorities?
- What are these major national development priorities, policies and strategies? How do they respond to current and future needs of the country? What are the gaps and issues?
- How are these policies and strategies developed? What is the degree of participation of different stakeholders in defining these policies and strategies?
- What is the place given to human resource development and education in all these national development policies and strategies?
- What are the national strategies for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and EFA goals?
- Is there a strategic framework which governs budgetary prioritization (e.g. MTEF)? Does this prioritization match the nominal prioritization in the policy or plan?

Relevant information can be found in national policy and strategy documents, development plans, donors’ support programme documents, and through interviews and consultative meetings with key stakeholders.