Development, **2010**, **53**(4), (518–521)

www.sidint.org/development/

Dialogue

Education and Development: A return to basic principles

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ABSTRACT *As a political strategy, Education-for-All has been a failure. Originally designed to attract education investments over other priorities, the portion of donor resources devoted to education has been stagnant. The strategy has made a fetish out of primary education at the expense of education sector development; generated a donor monopoly over client interests and exaggerated the role of the state in education provision. Stephen P. Heyneman explains why it is crucial now to return to basic principles.*

KEYWORDS *foreign aid; human capital; social cohesion; education for all; World Bank*

Introduction

Education-for-All commenced as a political strategy to help draw public attention to the need for education sector development in low and middle income countries (Heyneman, 2009a), and much good has come from this two-decade effort. Attention has focused on completion and learning achievements rather than simply enrolment. The breadth and accuracy of statistics have improved. New data on academic achievement, new definitions of literacy and expenditures have been designed and implemented in areas of the world where they had not existed previously. There has been a marked improvement in the means to describe problems and to track progress. There have been numerous publications on basic education, and many colourful charts, graphs and figures. The websites of the World Bank, USAID, DFID, JICA and many agencies resemble that of UNICEF or Save the Children with a plethora of photos of young girls attending school in places like Bangladesh, Mali and highland Bolivia. But what have the results been? After 20 years of effort, about 17 percent of the children of primary school age and 42 percent of the children of secondary school age remain out of school (Bloom, 2005). And the question is why.

Foreign aid accounts for less than 7 percent of the capital flows to developing countries (World Bank, 2001). The US remains last among industrial democracies in terms of the portion of its economy devoted to foreign aid (Tarnoff and Nowels, 2004), and over one half of the US bilateral aid is targeted to countries in the middle east where access to primary education is not a major concern.

But the US is hardly an outlier. Of the 21 OECD donor nations, many have reduced their commitments to foreign assistance (Heyneman, 2006). The reasons are similar. The voting population is aging and asks that more attention be devoted to health care and security. Stories of graft and theft of foreign aid, and inefficient programmes have captured public attention. Even the World Bank, an important provider of foreign aid, has published results showing a lack of foreign aid effect due to all these reasons (Dollar and Pritchett, 1998). The donor community, in response, has set new criteria to receive foreign aid under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Recipient countries would have to demonstrate that they are economically and socially responsible before they would be able to obtain external assistance or be paid only on delivery of development results (Birdsall and Savedoff, 2010). This might be considered progress except for the fact that few of the countries where the poor and unschooled reside are included among those considered economically and socially responsible or in countries likely to deliver those results (Heyneman, 2006).

But is there progress?

The education problem, however, is worse. At the time of the Jomtien meeting in 1990, the portion of World Bank lending devoted to education was 6 percent. Though there is year-by-year variation, in terms of new commitments, today education is the second smallest sector, and only 8 percent of Bank lending. Among all donors, the portion devoted to education is only 4 percent. For France it is around 2 percent; for the UK it is around 7 percent and for the US it is only around 6 percent (Heyneman, 2009a: 7). The need and purposes of education assistance have failed even among its most visible proponents. The liturgy supporting basic education, coming originally from the World Bank, squeezed out justifications for secondary schools, universities, and educational research damaging the sector as a whole (Heyneman, 1995, 2003). On the other hand, no matter how problematic the World Bank has been because of its hostility toward higher and vocational education, UNESCO, UNICEF and the major bilateral agencies are also to blame. The international community allowed the education sector statistical function of the UN to deteriorate (Heyneman, 1999; Heyneman and Lykins, 2008), making it impossible to monitor change parallel to international statistical standards. None of the agencies were courageous enough to deviate from the standard justification of Education-for-All. None took a lead in demanding that education policy be more balanced. This absence of professional leadership allowed the development community to easily move on to other priorities – democracy, HIV/AIDS, private sector development. The absence of a balanced education sector development strategy also meant that the private organizations such as the major associations of universities, technical institutes and the for-profit education businesses took only a marginal interest in development assistance because it appeared that development community had only a marginal interest in what they could offer (Heyneman, 2006: 22). How has education fared in the competition for development resources? One observer says that 'the focus on the MDG's and basic education has side-lined educational aid, as it has been seen as a marginal concern in the broad assault against poverty and the promotion of economic growth' (Jones, 2008: 38).

Getting back to basics

The education development community now needs to get 'back to basics', which implies three basic principles and modern emphases.

One principle which deserves reiteration concerns the link in efficiency between different subsectors. Like the health sector, education cannot be sub-divided without creating counterproductive distortions. A collapse in statistics and research, or graduate education, or university libraries, will adversely affect basic education. An inability to reform how secondary school teachers are compensated or university students are financed or vocational education is delivered will adversely affect the level of public resources available for primary education.

A second principle concerns education purpose. Somehow, the purpose of education commonly

discussed within the development community has been confined to cognitive achievement and marginal changes in productivity. Models have concentrated on the link between access and learning and between learning and economic growth (Hanushek and Woessman, 2007). The problem with this is that it does not incorporate the reason public schooling was invented, which was to help preserve social cohesion. Nor is the traditional human capital model sufficiently flexible to incorporate the future requirements for social and political development. These demands largely concern security and the role of the state in guaranteeing 'national resilience' to external shock (Omand, 2010). The development community should justify universal access and quality in public schooling because of the need for community social cohesion and for national security and not solely on the basis of human capital (Heyneman, 2002/3; Heyneman, 2005; Silova *et al.*, 2007).

A third principle has to do with the role of the state. To a very large extent, the development community has been captured by the proposition that the state is necessary to both finance and deliver schooling. Historically education development has often been the result of non-state efforts and energies (Verspoor, 2008; Tooley, 2009; Heyneman, 2009b, c). This oversight about non-state roles and responsibilities has been particularly problematic in developing countries where the state has been associated with graft, corruption, inefficiency and inequality. Early socialist governments in Eastern Africa for instance exacerbated inequality after they nationalized control over primary school supplies (Heyneman, 1975).

Working with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and local governments

Two additional issues might be useful to mention. First is the role of NGOs. Sometimes these are driven by a genuine sense of altruism and sacrifice. But they also can operate without accountability to local political structures and institutional interests. Local officials are sometimes treated as an encumbrance. Far-away donors are treated as though they were the clients. The list of NGOs operating in Kenya constitutes a telephone directory as large as a small city. It is understandable if local officials sometimes regard NGO activities and wonder how their national sovereignty had been lost.

Recognizing the dilemma

The final issue concerns what to do about 'the education and development dilemma'. The development dilemma (mentioned above) concerns the fact that the MDGs and the plans for 'cash on delivery' do not solve the problem of the many children who need education but who do not have the good fortune of being born in a country likely to qualify for assistance. The quality of education in low income countries is only a fraction of the ideal attained in the industrial democracies (Heyneman, 2004a). There is justification on the basis of social justice for considering a minimum standard of education as part of a new international tax (Heyneman, 2004b), but this begs the pertinent issue of how to guarantee that the money will be allocated wisely. Hence, the development dilemma.

One solution may lie in associating the benefits of a fully funded level of education-quality-for-all with the inauguration of a kind of 'charter city' such as those suggested by Paul Romer (Mallaby, 2010). This charter city, ruled for a period of time by an external industrial democracy, would help ensure the efficient allocation of resources; it would avoid the pitfalls of voluntary associations assuming the rights of a political institution; and education could finally be targeted to those genuinely in need of assistance.

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