

Helpdesk Report: Comparisons of outcomes of formal primary schooling and non-formal education in Asia

Date: 26 May 2010

Query: What evidence is there, for Asia in particular, comparing the learning achievements, employment opportunities and incomes of children who complete formal primary schooling (G1 – G5) with those who attend non formal education (NFE) centres (for example 2 or 3 year condensed courses combined with life skills)?

Enquirer: DFID Nepal

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1. Overview

Substantial evidence is lacking of the comparable effectiveness of nonformal education versus formal primary schooling in terms of the learning achievements, employment opportunities and incomes of children who undertake either route.

The available literature on the returns to education deals substantively with formal education (see Mark Bray, 1998, detailed in 'Evidence' section). In regard to formal education, the findings of a key regular periodic report on the aggregate rates of return (ROR) to primary education, however, have themselves been called into question by a reanalysis of its treatment of Asia (see Paul Bennell, 1998).

In order to make a clear and valid assessment of the relative benefits of nonformal and formal primary education on a large scale in terms of outcomes and returns, more extensive research is required. Whilst this might include commissioning a large scale and extensive literature review, such a review would be constrained by the apparent paucity of existing research directly focused on this area, and would thus need to adopt a methodology which constructed a matrix of piecemeal experiences from discrete and unconnected nonformal programmes to compare against the more formalised extant research on the returns to formal education.

Greater benefit might be gained from planning into development support provided to the education sector in one or across several countries, over a period of years, a systematic strand of comparative evaluation over time, including analysis of inputs, processes and outputs, and longitudinal studies, using the principles and methods of rigorous programme evaluation. This would require substantial commitment and organisation, but would offer the

possibility to obtain information and create knowledge which lies beyond the scope of efforts to date.

In the case of Nepal specifically, there would be scope for pursuing and evaluating the reported perception of development agencies that short nine-month nonformal education courses achieved educational gains equivalent to the initial three years of primary education (see comments by Anna Robinson-Pant).

2. Evidence – Selected information sources, references and summaries

This section includes references to journal articles. We have tried to supply web links where possible, although some of these require subscription. The DFID Journals facility may already subscribe to these, or some offer a free sample article service.

'Rhetoric vs reality: the state of elementary education in India', India summary report, Asia-South Pacific Education Watch, Asia South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE), 2008.

www.aspbae.org/index.php?option=com_phocadownload&view=category&id=6:edwatch-booklets&Itemid=54

Reviewing the national EFA effort in India under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), improvements in educational attainment have failed to be realised despite substantial investment in improving the formal schooling system and initiatives by State governments under the SSA umbrella.

'Remedying education: evidence from two randomized experiments in India', The Quarterly Journal of Economics, 122:3, pp 1235-1264, by Abhijit V. Bannerjee et al, August 2007.

www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1162/qjec.122.3.1235

A programme to hire young women to provide extra reading support to learners who were lagging behind in urban schools in India improved reading attainment, but the effect was slight and faded.

'Rates of return to education in Asia: a review of the evidence', Education Economics 6:2, pp 107-120, by Paul Bennell, Aug 1998.

www.tandf.co.uk/journals/titles/09645292.asp

Reviewing the periodic rates of return (ROR) reports of George Psacharopoulos [for example 'Returns to Investment in Education: a global update', World Bank Policy Working Paper 1067, 1993] and other data suggests that the aggregated data are not applicable to Asia as suggested and should not be used as the basis for planning allocations to different levels of education either across the region or in the case of specific countries. Many ROR studies are flawed due to inadequate data and through not considering other factors than financial which influence educational outcomes.

'Financing education in developing Asia: themes, tensions, and policies', International Journal of Educational Research 29:7, pp 627-642, by Mark Bray, November 1998.

www.sciencedirect.com/science/journal/08830355

Even as the demand on public resources to support education grows, governments face compelling alternative demands to address issues of pollution, disease, and infrastructure development. The resulting search for new sources of revenues and new efficiencies in education will force difficult trade-offs over the next decade.

'Can redistributing teachers across schools raise educational attainment? Evidence from Operation Blackboard in India', Journal of Development Economics 78:2, pp 384-405, by Aimee Chin, December 2005.

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/B6VBV-4GR8N99-1/2/48cf9e4c15432918dcb6515f57ddf47e>

Evaluation of policy of providing a second teacher to each single-teacher primary school under Operation Blackboard in India. Despite problems with implementation, and although class size did not decrease, primary school completion rates increased, especially among girls and the poor

'Equity Gains in Bangladesh Primary Education', BRAC Research Monograph Series No. 20, by Mushtaque R. Chowdhury et al, September 2001.

www.bracresearch.org/monographs/equity_gains_in_ped.pdf

BRAC's Nonformal Primary Education Programme has brought children, and particularly girls from poorer parents, into primary education in great numbers across Bangladesh [1.2m children, cited in the (2001) paper], with benefits in gender and social equity. The NFE provision is thus of benefit. However, the impact on poverty is not established.

'The patterns of returns to education and its implications', RECOUP Policy Brief number 4, by Christopher Colclough et al, April 2009.

<http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/pb4.pdf>

The wage returns to primary education have seen a proportionate reduction compared to returns for other levels of education, which indicates potentially important policy implications for labour market policy and education policy in the context of poverty reduction. However, the rationale for investment in primary education remains strong, since primary education is a necessary foundation to unlock the returns to higher levels of education; primary education retains its intrinsic value from a rights perspective; wage-earning is a typically small component of the economy in many developing countries; and basic education has other, non-economic benefits, such as reduced fertility and mortality and social, democratic and environmental benefits

'Future policy choices for the education sector in Asia', Asia 2015 conference, by Shailaja Fennell, 2006.

www.eldis.org/vfile/upload/1/document/0708/DOC21182.pdf

Nonformal education provision by NGOs and by corporate bodies is valuable in terms of increasing access and enrolment in education, and includes examples of good practice and success in accelerated learning programmes. (for example, in Nepal, the Cheli-Beti programme used nonformal methods to encourage rural girls' participation, and subsequently the Basic Primary Education Programme included provision for girls who had been excluded from education or whose primary education record was truncated to undertake nonformal options.) However, efforts at scaling up successful NFE programmes to national scale have faced difficulties. Partnerships between government and non-government agencies are a significant way forward. The emphasis is most effective when placed on providing programmes for disadvantaged and socially excluded groups, such as girls and tribal groups. NFE is constrained by being considered a feeder mechanism for the formal schooling system: a more effective route would be to support alternative modes of educational access. The perception that NFE is 'second best' has also to be countered, in conjunction with such a shift in policy and perception, in order to reap the potential benefits of nonformal approaches. There is a need for a concerted mapping of non-government sector providers, and a move from a 'drop in the ocean' approach of short term, small scale NFE projects, to bring greater impact from successful NFE programmes. Donor and government support for NGO provision of NFE should be central to planning financial support to education.

'Marginal returns: re-thinking mobility and educational benefit in contexts of chronic poverty', Compare: a journal of comparative and international education 40:2, pp 213 – 222, by Bryan Maddox, March 2010.

www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a919464102&db=all

Measures of the returns on education are not easily observable in situations of chronic poverty in South Asia. Concepts of educational benefit need to be rethought, to capture the marginal returns on education in this context. Standard measures of educational attainment (such as primary school completion, years of schooling, literacy rates) are ill-suited to capture

and understand such benefits. Similarly, data on income from formal employment is likely to be unsuitable.

'Formal vs non-formal vernacular education: the education reform in Papua New Guinea', Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development 18:3, pp 206 222, by Jeff Siegel, June 1997.

www.tandf.co.uk/journals/0143-4632

A community-based nonformal education movement in Papua New Guinea led to teaching initial literacy in local preschools and adult education programmes in hundreds of the country's languages. Government subsequently initiated a change from an English medium curriculum to vernacular for Years 1-3 of formal education. However, this generated concern that the change brought in the formal system was negatively affecting the successful nonformal vernacular education movement. Community support and the involvement of NGOs were seen to be key in educational language planning, along with consideration of the interface between the nonformal and formal education sectors.

'Non-formal education approaches for child labourers: an issue paper'. Understanding Children's Work Project Working Paper Series (ILO, World Bank, UNICEF), by F.C. Rosati and S.Lyon, November 2006.

www.ucw-project.org/pdf/publications/standard_NFE_and_CL_17nov2006.pdf

It is difficult to assess the impact of NFE on labour market outcomes. For education systems to attract children from marginalised social groups, there needs to be immediate benefit in terms of transition from school to work. The lessons which can be learned from current NFE programmes are limited, since most are small scale projects which are insufficiently documented and evaluated. Research and methodologically sound impact evaluation studies are vitally needed in order to generate substantial data from which to draw generalisable conclusions. Evaluation criteria could include programme sustainability, replicability, curriculum relevance, learning outcomes and school survival. (This paper discusses policy options, with examples, for bringing child labourers into education, broadly divided into 'remedial' education and 'bridging education', and includes an annex identifying a selection of international policy experience in reaching child labourers with education opportunities, including in India, Bangladesh, Philippines and Indonesia.)

4. Additional information

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