

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

At the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), some 1,500 participants, comprising delegates from 155 governments, policy-makers and specialists in education and health, social and economic development from around the world, met to discuss major aspects of EFA. *The World Declaration on Education for All* and the *Framework for Action to Meet Basic Learning Needs*, adopted at Jomtien, foresaw the need for an end of decade assessment of progress as a basis for a comprehensive review of policies concerning basic education.

In 1998, EFA 2000 Assessment activity started in collaboration with regional and field offices from EFA Forum partners (UNDP, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNFPA and World Bank) throughout six regions worldwide. Also in 1998, Member States designated EFA coordinators, EFA Assessment teams and technical sub-groups to implement this endeavour, and UNESCO and UNICEF technical teams conducted a series of workshops in a number of Member States in order to launch EFA Assessment activity. The EFA 2000 Assessment Technical Guidelines propose a number of characteristics and phenomena, as well as a set of 18 core EFA indicators that describe or measure the main components of basic education. They are grouped according to six “target dimensions” of EFA, as listed below. Each country EFA Assessment Report refers directly to these 18 core EFA indicators.

The six “target dimensions” of EFA:

- 1) *Expansion of early childhood care and development*
- 2) *Universal access to completion of primary education*
- 3) *Improvement in learning achievement*
- 4) *Reduction of Adult Literacy rate*
- 5) *Expansion of provision of Basic Education and training in essential skills required by youth and adults*

- 6) *Increased acquisition by individuals and families of the knowledge, skills and values organized for better living.*

The Global EFA 2000 Assessment, now in its final stages, has mobilized 180 countries world wide, 44 of which are within the Asia-Pacific Sub-region, to critically assess their achievements in education and identify more effective and appropriate strategies for laying down the foundations of lifelong learning for all. The Assessment will identify progress and shortcomings in basic education, and will be vital for planning solutions and policies for the twenty-first century. The results will be presented and debated at six regional conferences scheduled to take place from December 1999 through February 2000, and the culmination of the whole exercise is the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, 26 to 28 April 2000.

This report covers the Asia Pacific region and presents a synthesis of the findings, dominant themes, future plans and proposed development strategies described in the country assessment reports. Because the Asia Pacific region is as diverse as it is large, it was decided to divide the countries into four sub-regions: Central Asia, South Asia, East and Southeast Asia, and the Pacific. Thus, four sub-regional synthesis reports were written, each covering the six EFA dimensions in the nine to fourteen countries of each sub-region. Country reports and sub-regional synthesis reports were then consulted in compiling this report.

The emergence of Asia, or more accurately, its re-emergence, on the centre stage of world affairs has been much heralded. If education has correctly been identified as the necessary pre-cursor and pre-condition of all development, then no undertaking can be more important than an scrutiny of the education efforts in this dynamic region.

Country and sub-regional reports are descriptive and analytical and provide both qualitative and quantitative data on the six EFA dimensions. For the first time, prior agreements were arrived at on which EFA quantitative indicators to gather and analyze, and common techniques and procedures were utilized to arrive at these indicators. Terms

such as “retention rates or dropout rates” which hitherto had ambiguous meanings now have common definitions across countries, and standardised computational procedures were used in their compilation. Consequently, data presented in country reports are far more comparable, credible, and disaggregated than they have been in the past.

Country assessment processes involved a retrospective analysis covering the ten years since the World Conference, marking progress and successes as well as obstacles and continuing challenges. Importantly, they also attempted to draw lessons from the past and use them at the basis for plotting out strategies and frameworks for action to accelerate progress towards Education for All in the future.

Reflecting both the retrospective and prospective feature of EFA 2000 Assessment, this regional report is divided into six sections; Section 1 Introduction; Section 2: Contextual Factors; Section 3: Achievements of the Last Decade; Section 4 Regional and Global Trends; Section 5 Aspirations for the Next Decade; Section 6 Conclusions. Additionally, Appendix 1 contains summary tables for all 18 indicators for the region.

SECTION 2: CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

Geography

The Asia Pacific region, extending from Iran in the west to Japan and DPR Korea and the Republic of Korea in the east and stretching from Kazakhstan in the north to New Zealand in the south, is characterised by an extraordinary range of landforms, vegetation, climate and habitation patterns

The Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia sub-region is comprised of the three states of the Trans-Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia), the five Central Asian states (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Mongolia. Except for Mongolia, these countries were part of the former Soviet Union and became independent in 1991. Although an independent nation, strategically placed between the Soviet Union and China, Mongolia had strong economic ties with the Soviet Union and was therefore affected by its dismantlement. Since the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991, all nine countries have embarked on programmes of economic reform and are in a state of transition from a command to a market economy. However, in each country the reform process has its own characteristics and the rate of progress varies considerably from one country to the next.

The Central Asian and Trans-Caucasus sub-region is one of dramatic contrasts. Vast steppes and deserts (Gobi, Karakum, Kyzulkum) cover much of the area and, in the south and east, mountain ranges are capped with eternal snow. The Tien Shan mountain range stretches over a thousand miles from east to west, through Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and the Pamirs which reach over 7,000 metres run 800 km across Tajikistan. The Altai Mountains in the north spread across Russia, China, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The Caucasus mountain range covers much of Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, and all three lie between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea.

The countries of the East and South East Asian sub-region are Japan, DPR Korea, the Republic of Korea, China, Viet Nam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Malaysia and Indonesia. Countries in the sub-region vary greatly in size ranging from the continent's second largest country, which is China with its 9,596,960 square kilometres, to the 633-square-kilometer-city-state of Singapore (not a member state and hence not covered in this report) where its 100% urban population enjoys the highest living standard in Asia. Each country has either one or two official languages although as many as over 300 local dialects may be spoken in various parts of the country.

The landforms of the sub-region are just as varied, ranging from desert and grazing land in the northwest to arable land, woodland, and forest in the east and the south. A bird's eye view of the sub-region reveals high snow-capped mountains as well as vast green rice fields. A large part of the sub-region is irrigated by such rivers as the Yangtze, Yellow, Mekong, and other smaller and less well-known rivers and their rivulets. Depending on location, the people of the sub-region experience either four or three seasons with an enormous amount of rainfall each year. Countries such as the Philippines and Indonesia, along with their Pacific rim neighbours, have braved countless number of monsoons and tropical storms.

Diversity in the sub-region extends to its natural resources. Fertile soils and arable fields make it possible for some inhabitants to survive on subsistence farming whereas others have reaped profits from the same. Oil and minerals, on the other hand, opened doors to heavy industries that have brought Japan to the forefront, ahead of the economic tigers in the west of the sub-region. While urban dwellers increasingly use new technologies and products for convenience and comfort in daily living, a large number of the rural population still cut down trees and burn wood to cook their food and to keep themselves warm when the temperature is low. Neither is beneficial to a rapidly degrading environment.

The Pacific sub-region is comprised of the following 14 states: Australia, Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and the Republic of Vanuatu. These countries vary enormously in their geographical characteristics. Most are small in terms of total land area and are scattered over many unevenly populated islands in the Pacific. Others like Australia and Papua New Guinea occupy large land areas and carry low population loads. Most have tropical climates with pronounced monsoonal influences and, with the exception of Australia and New Zealand, depend upon agriculture, fishing and tourism.

The South and West Asian sub-region is comprised of the following nine states: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka. They, too, are marked by an equal though different kind of diversity. In terms of landform, they range from the Himalayan Kingdoms of Nepal and Bhutan to the mountains, hills and plains of India and Pakistan, to the island nation of the Maldives. The diversity of their landforms is matched by the variations in their climates and, hence, vegetation patterns between and, particularly in the case of India, within countries. Snow capped mountain peaks in the north give way to intensely hot, semi-desert landscapes in the west and south.

Demography

The Asia Pacific region accounts for more than two thirds of the World's population distributed very unevenly over large land masses and island states, and encompassing an extraordinary ethnic diversity. Table 2.1 contains summary data on the populations of the sub-regions in 1990 and 1999 and Figure 2.1 provides a thematic illustration of the distribution of the region's population.

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It is particularly noteworthy that five of the world's E 9 (largest populations) states are in this region – China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan and Bangladesh – and that they include the world's two most populous states, China and India. Consequently, in purely numerical terms the level of educational development in the region is a major determinant of the state of education in the world as a whole: put differently, if the world is ever to approach Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) very high participation levels must be achieved in this region. In this regard, it is also important to observe that although a few of the most economically advanced states such as Japan and Australia have ageing populations most have comparatively young and expanding populations. This is illustrated in Table 2.2 which shows the distribution of dependency ratios across the region.

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Dependency ratios represent the proportion of persons aged 6 to 14 years in the overall population and, hence, offer a useful though crude estimate of potential demand for education services in the short to medium term. They also provide an indication of the relative size of the workforce from whom taxation revenue might be extracted in order to fund the supply of such services. It will be noted that dependency ratios are highest in countries such as India, Pakistan, Nepal and Bangladesh which tend to have lower primary education participation rates.

Socio-Economic Conditions

The decade of the 1990s was marked by social and economic upheavals of great magnitude, the effects of which will be evident for at least a further decade. They include: the breakup of the former Soviet Union in 1991; the extraordinary growth of the East Asian “tiger” economies in the early to middle years of the 1990s followed by the financial crisis that hit the sub-region in mid 1997; the rapid growth of the economies of India and China; the continuation of border and territorial conflict in parts of South Asia;

migration and settlement of economic and political refugees; and the stagnation of the Pacific Island economies.

Additionally, in many of the Pacific Island states and in parts of South Asia lack of natural resources, inadequate infrastructure, political instability, isolation from foreign markets and periodic devastation from natural disasters have hindered economic development. In some of the Central Asian states that were part of the former Soviet Union the economic decline has been so rapid that by the end of the decade their GDPs had fallen to less than 30 % of their 1989 levels. The financial crisis that hit East Asia was so sudden and severe that it is reported that in one day hundreds of millions of dollars (US) were “exported” from Thailand.

These crises have left many countries with severely reduced financial resources and a heavy foreign debt burden. High inflation and negative economic growth have prompted many countries to review their national development priorities and budgets, a first casualty of which is usually spending on health, education and social services. Consequently, in the worst affected countries zero budget growth for education can be expected in the early years of the next decade.

In the longer term, however, prospects for human development are encouraging. This is exemplified by the rapidity of the economic turnaround in Thailand and Malaysia, the continued expansion of the economies of India and China, the potential value of the natural resource base of Papua New Guinea and Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, and the foreign currency earning potential of the tourism industry in some Pacific Island states. Perhaps even more important is the resilience of the region's population in the face of adversity. As far as EFA is concerned, this is well illustrated by the maintenance of high levels of participation in primary education in the Central Asian states throughout the last decade. This was due to concerted efforts by governments, local communities and families to continue to value education.

Historical and Cultural Context

Education shapes culture just as culture fashions education, hence, the pursuit of EFA necessarily takes place in a historical, cultural, political and social context that influences its pace and direction differently in every continent, country, culture and sub-culture. Therefore, an adequate understanding of the progress of EFA in the Asia Pacific must take historical and socio-cultural factors into consideration and reflect upon the extent to which progress has been helped or impeded by these factors.

The diversity of the Asia Pacific region makes it impossible to paint a generalized picture of its cultural backdrop. The ocean-based cultures of the Pacific have little in common with the traditions of the peoples of the steppes and mountain ranges of Central Asia. Although some traditions are less documented than others, most cultures in the Asia Pacific have been developing for centuries and even millennia. With deeply rooted philosophies, religions, and cultures of Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, Taoist, Islamic, and animist origins, it has correctly been said that Asia is a cradle of civilization.

The history of countries of the region also varies dramatically, as centres of global power and geopolitical demarcations shift over time. Some countries have cherished histories of independence over centuries; others have emerged from their colonial roots at the turn of the century or after the second World War. Still others have recently re-established their identities after breaking away from the Soviet Union. It may be said that, for different reasons, many are simultaneously old countries and new nation states.

Moreover, there is an emerging phenomenon in Asia of national communities that transcend political borders. Overseas Chinese groups in Southeast Asia and elsewhere form an active and dynamic community who direct much of the region's trade and commerce.. In a similar vein, expatriate Indian communities in the Pacific and elsewhere form a collective entity. Educational systems for these communities form part of the EFA mosaic. The large increase in overseas workers from South Asia and South East Asia has meant not only a boon to the national economies of the sending countries but

has also created trans-border national communities. The learning needs of children of these overseas workers, and of the workers themselves, constitute specific target groups that the EFA movement should specifically address.

The historical-cultural context influences learning content in formal education, shapes educational systems and structures, affects pedagogy, and informs the explicit and implicit values conveyed by the whole educational process. It influences attempts to reach out to under-served ethnic and minority populations, either to incorporate them in the mainstream of education, or to protect local identities and cultures, or to do both simultaneously. It affects value formation in schools regarding cultural plurality and diversity, and is a determinant in the extent to which cultural diversity is a source of continuing conflict or a wellspring of enrichment of national heritage.

Some of factors impelling or impeding EFA progress have historical-cultural roots. On the negative side, certain interpretations of aspects of a specific belief system have hampered the push for girls' education and hindered efforts to provide education to ethnic and religious minorities. On the positive side, common to the great cultures of Asia and the Pacific are the fundamental value given to education, to respect for elders, sages, and teachers, the central role of the family, and implicit faith in the importance of educating the next generation. In large measure, this accounts for the continuing high levels of primary school participation in East Asia in spite of economic crisis, and in Central Asia in the face of acute budgetary stress experienced by countries in transition from command to market driven economies.

Analysis of progress over the last ten years and formulating strategies for the next ten years must take account of these and other important historical-cultural factors.

SECTION 3: ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE LAST DECADE

The sub-regional synthesis reports provide summaries of achievements at country level and highlight those that are particularly characteristic of the sub-region. Thus, the synthesis report for the Trans Caucasus and Central Asia sub-region makes special mention of the extent to which participation rates in primary education have been maintained in virtually every country despite the severe budgetary pressures experienced by school systems as a consequence of dramatically declining GNPs. The sub-regional report also draws attention to the rapid decline in enrolments in the pre-primary sector that was formerly held in high regard as the foundation of quality schooling in the former Soviet Union.

Similarly, the East and South Asia sub-regional report comments on the very large gains made in increasing access to and improving participation in primary education in nearly every country, including high population states such as China and Indonesia.

Additionally, the rapid expansion of the pre-primary sector, especially in the cities and more affluent urban areas, is described. Attention is also drawn to reductions in gender and provincial disparities, and special mention is made of continuing high repetition and dropout rates, low survival rates and poor coefficients of internal efficiency. Reductions in adult illiteracy rates are also discussed

In the Pacific sub-region draft report attention is drawn to the different ways in which island states responded to the Jomtien stimulus for EFA. In some countries, mainly those with well established urban communities, more resources were devoted to ECCD and greater emphasis was given to nurturing their distinctive cultural and linguistic heritages. There was a greater recognition of the needs of special education children and their parents, and primary school GERs either migrated towards 100% or else stabilised. Quality of education became a greater concern and this gave rise to improvements in teacher education and professional development, and focussed attention on issues of curriculum relevance. Non formal education (NFE) also attracted the attention of policy

makers, often in response to persistent and urgent problems of youth unemployment or under-employment that are seen to be associated with social unrest.

The South and West Asia synthesis report was not available at the time of writing but analysis of the country reports points to a number of signal successes and areas of continuing concern. Chief among the successes are the expansion of primary schooling and reductions in levels of adult illiteracy. Among the continuing concerns are: high repetition and dropout rates, low survival rates and poor internal efficiency; persistent and serious provincial and gender disparities in almost all enrolment related indicators; and insistent calls for curriculum renewal and reforms of teaching and learning practices. Underpinning many of these concerns is the difficulty faced by governments in trying to fund primary education systems characterised by high levels of demand that are driven by rapid population growth and, in some provincial areas, by increasing rates of urbanisation.

Attempting to synthesize these findings is a daunting task. Ideally, such a synthesis would rest in substantial measure upon a thorough statistical analysis of the quantitative data. Sub-regional and regional weighted means and measures of dispersion such as standard deviations and coefficients of variation would be computed and interpreted. Additionally, powerful statistical techniques like multilevel modeling would be employed to assess the extent to which crucial indicators such as Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) varied within and between countries and sub-regions, and multiple and logistical regression techniques would be used to explore relationships between important variables.

Regretably, this kind of approach could not be taken because at the time of writing there were serious gaps in the data. Perusal of the statistical tables given in Appendix 1 will reveal the extent of the missing data. In no sub-region is there a complete data series given for each indicator for all countries. Moreover, many of the gaps in the data record are for countries with very large populations, and some of the data given in the tables

were not received until the end of December, 1999 leaving insufficient time for analysis. Hence, even computation of weighted means would be methodologically unsound.

Nonetheless, with the exception of the Pacific sub-region, the available data provide sufficient coverage of indicators and countries to allow useful generalisations to be made. In the case of the Pacific, due recognition should be given to the difficulty confronted by small island states administering education systems scattered over widely dispersed islands. The reader is referred to the Pacific sub-regional report for further details. The following account of progress achieved by the four sub-regions usually refers to changes over the decade in the minimum and maximum values for most indicators, based on available data. Absolute values such as total primary school enrolments in the sub-region are rarely provided in this report, because of the paucity of data. For these reasons the “working document” status of the report should be emphasized, and the findings should be seen as being broadly indicative rather than definitive of progress achieved during the period.

Early Childhood Care and Development (ECCD)

At the start of the decade, with the exception of the Trans Caucasus and Central Asia sub-region and a few countries in the other three sub-regions, ECCD was not extensively developed in the Asia Pacific region. By the end of the decade, except in the Trans Caucasus where it showed rapid decline, the ECCD sector experienced strong growth, especially in the East and South East Asia sub-region,. This is illustrated in Table 3.1 which gives minimum and maximum values and the range for ECCD GER in 1990 and the latest year. Additionally, Figure 3.1 contains a thematic map showing the distribution of ECCD GER across the region.

Table 3.1: ECCD: Range of Gross Enrolment Ratios ¹ by Sub-Region

SubRegion	Minimum		Maximum		Range	
	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest
Central Asia	14.1	5.0	44.0	27.3	29.9	22.3
East Asia	8.0	5.8	74.5	90.6	66.5	84.8

Pacific	100.0	10.1	100.0	100.0	0.0	89.9 ²
South Asia	8.3	0.7	8.3	52.0	0.0 ³	51.3 ⁴
Regional	8.0	0.7	100.0	100.0	92.0	99.3

1 Based on Indicator 1 given in Appendix 1

2 The range for 1990/91 is heavily influenced by the uneven spread of data particularly in the Pacific and South and West Asia. For example, in the Pacific region only one of the 14 countries supplied data for the first half of the decade. Niue reported 100.0 in 1991/92 and for each year after that. Six countries provided data for 1998/99 with Tonga reporting 10.1. This resulted in a range of 89.9 for the latest figures in the Pacific.

3 In South Asia the range for 1990/91 was 0, as only one country, Iran, reported their ration (8.3). This resulted in a range for 1990/91 of 0.

4 The latest GER in South Asia ranges from 0.7 in Bhutan to 52.0 in the Maldives. This is reflected in the range of 51.3

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The data also suggest only a modest difference in male-female participation rates with the minima for female rates being typically less than for males – see Figure 3.2.

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In East and South East Asia where the growth of ECCD has been most marked, country data reveal that most pre-schools and creches are located in either urban or economically advantaged regions and that private providers cater for a significant proportion of pre-primary enrolments. The implication is that children from poorer families or remote or disadvantaged areas have a lesser degree of access to pre-primary education. Having regard to the established developmental benefits of participation in ECCD programmes, these excluded children may be those who stand to gain most from the enriched learning environment that pre-primary education can provide.

Inevitably, given the rapid rate of expansion, concerns have been expressed about the quality of some pre-primary programmes . These concerns stem from a perception that many ECCD teachers are inadequately trained, that curricula are narrowly focussed and pre-school centres are often poorly equipped. In other cases, it is suggested that ECCD regulatory and administrative frameworks need to be either developed or strengthened, and that more comprehensive data collection and analysis systems should be implemented.

Access to and Participation in Primary Education

In nearly all countries and all sub-regions Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) have tended to move closer to 100%, reflecting the fact that participation rates have improved and at the same time the incidence of age appropriate enrolment has increased. This is illustrated in Table 3.2 which shows minimum and maximum values for GER in 1990 and for the latest year available. One exception to that pattern is the Philippines which has experienced large growth in enrolment of older children who previously lacked access to primary schooling.

Table 3.2: Range of Primary Education Gross Enrolment Ratios¹ by Sub-Region

SubRegion	Minimum		Maximum		Range	
	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest
Central Asia	74.8	94.6	99.5	102.9	24.7	8.3 ²
East Asia	93.3	89.7	112.2	118.8	18.9	29.1
Pacific³	53.5	62.7	53.5	110.5	0	47.8
South Asia	55.0	71.6	112.0	125.2	57.1	53.6
Regional	53.5	62.7	112.2	122.1	58.7	59.4

1 Based on Indicator 5 given in Appendix 1.

2 In Central Asia, data are available for five of the nine countries in 1990/91 and seven of the nine in 1998/99.

3 Only one country, Papua New Guinea, of the 14 in the Pacific region provided data for the early part of the decade. This is reflected in a range of 0. Data were available for six of the 14 countries in 1998/99 giving a range of 47.8.

The gender disaggregation of GER, however, suggests that although disparity in favour of males was reduced in East and South East Asia it remained a characteristic of South and West Asia... This is illustrated in Figure 3.3. Closer inspection of the data indicate that the problem is located mainly in remote areas and rural provinces of just a few countries.

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The data also show substantial variation in GER within countries which tends to be masked in national average figures. Even then, there still remain considerable variation within and between sub-regions and countries. Figure 3.4 presents a thematic map of GER for the region for 1999, and Figure 3.5 shows the distribution of GER within China.

Figures 3.4 and 3.5 here please

Although final EFA spreadsheet data for India were not available at the time of writing, India’s draft report drew attention to the persistent provincial disparity in GER. Given that China and India are the world’s two most populous nations and that each covers an extensive and diverse land area, these kinds of disparity are not surprising but they do constitute a major obstacle to attainment of EFA.

Retention capacity and Quality of Primary Education

In general, repetition rates and survival rates have improved over the decade. At the beginning of the decade country repetition rates ranged from a minimum of 0.5 (Central Asia) to a maximum of 30.1 (East Asia) and by the end of the decade from 0.3 (Central Asia) to 24.9 (East Asia) – see Table 3.3. Although these rates show a modest compression of the range over the decade they must be interpreted with care, because many countries with substantial repetition rates introduced automatic grade promotion policies in order to make school more appealing and less threatening to children. Though commendable, this policy may have increased teaching difficulty and, hence, had a negative effect on quality.

Table 3.3: Range of Country Repetition Rates¹

SubRegion	Minimum		Maximum		Range	
	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest	1990/91	Latest
Central Asia	0.5	0.3	7.1	7.1	6.6	6.8

East Asia	2.0	2.0	30.1	24.9	28.1	22.9
Pacific		1.2		10.7		9.5
South Asia	10.1	22.1	4.5	14.4	5.6	7.7
Regional	0.5	0.3	30.1	24.9	29.6	24.6

¹ Based on Indicator 12 given in Appendix 1.

Survival rates also showed modest improvement.

SECTION 4: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL TRENDS

It is difficult to distill the common or dominant themes that emerge from an overview of the Asia Pacific region, given the number and extraordinary variety of the 44 countries of which it is comprised. Less difficult is identifying the following dominant themes for each of the four sub-regions within Asia-Pacific:

- the persistent gender gap in the large countries of South Asia,
- the needed education management reforms in the changing economies of the Trans Caucasus and Central Asia,
- the need to address the problems of youth in the particular circumstances of the Pacific States, and
- the need for sustaining EFA gains in economic crisis situations in East and Southeast Asia.

Themes common to the entire region take on the character of concerns that to a greater or lesser extent reflect dominant issues in other regions of the world; indeed, they tend to be phenomena global in nature. They range across most areas of education and provide a background against which to review the aspirations of countries in Asia and the Pacific.

With the obvious impact of the communication and information technology revolution on modern society, there is a perceived concern that educational systems must explicitly protect smaller and more localised cultures and learnings from the onslaught of an

homogenising globalisation. The UNESCO report of the Delors Commission on Education in the Twenty First Century, “The Treasure Within,” argues that maintaining a balance between the local and the global is an imperative. This argument has particular resonance in the rich and diverse cultures of the Asia Pacific region.

The practical implications of this for policy making are manifold. They embrace decisions on the language of instruction, the encouragement of locally produced supplementary teaching materials, and devolution of curriculum and responsibility to local levels. Country reports from Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia, and from the Pacific Island states, recount efforts to ensure that curriculum reform places appropriate emphasis not only on national histories and cultures, but also on more localised and community based sources of wisdom, learning, and ways of life that shape an individual’s culture and identity. The challenge, of course, is to honour the roots of national cultures without losing a respect for the diversity that abounds within them.

Technology will impact on educational systems in the future in a profound way, both at the level of managing education systems, and at the level of enhancing learning processes. Management of education is as effective as the accuracy and timeliness of the information systems that allow policy managers to undertake proper analyses and formulate appropriate decisions on an empirical, rational basis.

At the pedagogical level, new technologies should facilitate the changed role of the teacher from being the prime source of knowledge to being a guide to multiple sources of information that will be instantly accessible to the learner. However, decisions on the application of the technology in the classroom should always be based on realistic considerations of curriculum objectives not on the seductive attraction of the technology itself. Moreover, it is useless to provide inappropriate tools, or tools for which the user is not yet ready. For example, provision of computers nationwide in primary classrooms when electrification of schools is not a widespread phenomenon is an unrealistic measure. Similarly, the economics of hardware provision must take into account local realities. The cost of a computer in Australia is equivalent to the salary of a primary

school teacher for three weeks; whereas the cost of the same computer in Bangladesh is equivalent to the salary of a teacher there for seven years. The challenge is to use technology in affordable ways, not to be used by technology. A further difficulty is to assimilate technology in a way that does not automatically absorb the cultural milieu in which it was produced and is still embedded.

The Delors Commission points out another set of education goals between which a balance must be struck: that between promoting individual expression, creativity and assertiveness on the one hand, and promoting teamwork, interactive skills, and social cohesion on the other. The Commission points out that a fourth pillar to education must be, aside from learning to know, to do, and to be, learning to live together. If this fourth pillar has been the weakest in the twentieth century, it must be the strongest in the twenty-first. This sentiment is reflected in arguments for curriculum reform in all sub-regions.

A further trend is the shifting attitudes of many Asian countries towards testing and measurement of learning achievement. Stories abound in the popular media of extremely competitive examination systems in the more developed East Asian countries driving parents and students to extreme measures, even suicides. In South Asia and other countries that have inherited an external or national examination system from their colonisers, there are reports of test scores determining access to schooling, even in the basic primary grades. In both cases, it is asserted that schooling is memorizing facts and learning structured routines for solving standardised problems. It is argued that teaching is geared excessively to preparing for examinations and that intellectual conformity is the desired objective. Fortunately, in recent years a shift away from this stereotype of teaching and learning in Asia is evident. Opportunities for greater self-expression and free inquiry are on the increase and rigid discipline and rote memory are less in evidence.

Interestingly, on the other side of the globe, some educators look with envy at the excellent results the more rigid systems of East Asia have produced, as evidenced by international test scores which show Japan and Singapore, for example, well ahead of the

United States in secondary mathematics and science. In contrast, US students who ranked among the lowest in achievement scores ranked among the highest in self perception of their cognitive skills. Consequently, many western educators are looking to recapture some of the academic discipline and rigour they lost in the name of free expression and creativity.

Paradoxically, even in countries where there is now less emphasis on competitive or qualifying examinations, there is now more interest than ever in measuring learning achievement. The major difference, however, is that what is now being tested is not the efficiency of the individual learner, but the efficiency of the education system. Achievement test results are used to guide policy on which pedagogies to adopt, which curriculum and learning materials to improve, which areas and districts need special attention, and which teachers need to be recognized and rewarded for their effectiveness.

In the Asia Pacific region, policy makers frequently confront an apparent dichotomy of quantity versus quality. When budgets are limited it is said that tough choices have to be made. An example might be the choice of more textbooks and facilities for those already in school (quality), or additional buildings and teachers for children not yet in the system (quantity). The drive towards universal primary education in Asia has led to a trend where budget decisions have tended to favor quantity or expanded access. But several countries in South Asia, for example, have reported that more schools do not necessarily translate into more educated students. Thus, participation and attendance rates tend to be low when school is perceived to be of little relevance or of uncertain quality. Paradoxically, paying attention to quality can enhance quantity. For example, providing trained and motivated teachers, adequate learning materials, and curricular content that meets the needs and aspirations of local communities is the best way to guarantee expanded and sustained school attendance. The difficulty is that the children most in need are often those who are not in school and expanding access for them cannot be denied on the grounds of improving quality of an existing system that already serves the less needy.

In some countries in South Asia where primary education is still far from universal, and in countries in South East Asia like the Philippines where there is near universal primary education, there are still pockets of “the unreached” for geographical, ethnic, or poverty reasons. In these cases, the role of non-formal education is being emphasized. Parallel to this is the remarkable expansion in ECCD participation. Data from the Asian countries in the first half of the decade showed a strong focus on the formal primary system, but in the last five years the expanded vision of EFA propagated by Jomtien to include other aspects of basic education finally started to take hold. Country reports from Indonesia, the Philippines and India illustrate mechanisms by which graduates of non-formal programmes are credited with an equivalency that enables them to cross into the formal system. Additionally, as the non-formal sector becomes more regulated the formal sector is becoming more flexible, adopting mother tongue languages as the medium of instruction in the first few years as in Uzbekistan, or incorporating an eight week pre-school package at the start of the primary cycle as in the Philippines.

In almost all countries, even in those where access remains a major problem, there is a major shift in focus from schooling to learning. Enrolment for all is not education for all. This means two things. First, it means that the principal government means of providing basic education, the formal primary school system, cannot address all learning needs and must be accompanied by alternative, non-formal learning modalities. Second, it means that placing children in a formal system does not guarantee that their learning needs will be met. Recent achievement test results show an alarming percentage of pupils who have been in the school system three years or more but still have not mastered the basic skills of reading and writing.

As this shift occurs, there follows an increased appreciation of the value of testing as a diagnostic tool rather than as a credentialing mechanism. There also follows a re-examination of curricular content, not only for appropriate degrees of difficulty, but also for relevance to actual and emerging learning needs. Finally, and most importantly, a reassessment of pedagogy is occurring with the focus moving from teaching subject matter to teaching individual students at whatever level they happen to be.

In this connection, special mention should be made of the movement directed at those with special needs or disabilities, now called inclusive education. Given worldwide impetus at the Salamanca Conference on Special Needs Education in 1993, this movement to adjust and adapt school systems to accommodate all children regardless of their abilities or disabilities has now been adopted as an education philosophy in several countries in the Asia Pacific. As a consequence, it is schools that now must adjust to students rather than the reverse.

One final trend needs to be noted as common to most countries in the Asia Pacific region, and, indeed, in the rest of the world. When listing impediments to progress in EFA, almost every country report mentioned financial resource constraints. Again, though, there is a change of focus which was not evident a decade ago. Whereas the emphasis used to be on acquiring more money to do basically more of the same, now the emphasis is shifting to how to make better use of the money provided.

SECTION 5: ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT DECADE

Introduction

In most instances, country reports provide only brief accounts of the objectives, priorities, plans and strategies for the next decade, however, it is possible to detect common themes within sub-regions which will influence education development. These themes range across all dimensions of EFA but, perhaps, find their most forceful expression in ECCD. There are also a number of concerns which are common across the Asia Pacific region. Most notably, they are related to improving the quality and relevance of primary education, enhancing NFE, further decentralisation of education management, strengthening EMIS and associated monitoring and evaluation systems, and finding new ways of funding EFA in the next decade. With this mind the following paragraphs offer

a summary of EFA development plans first from the Asia Pacific regional perspective, and then for each sub-region.

Asia Pacific Regional Perspective

It is interesting to observe that some of the themes that are of concern in a number of sub-regions derive their importance from different causes. For example, a strong motivating factor for curriculum reform in the Trans Caucasus and Central Asia is the emergence of newly independent nation states that intend to reassert traditional cultures and traditions and, at the same time, provide their primary school children with a more modern, pupil-centred educational experience. In East and South East Asia concern with improving the quality of primary education has been motivated more by a desire to consolidate the gains in participation rates made over the last ten years by making schooling more attractive and relevant. Similarly, Pacific Island states are looking at NFE as a means of ameliorating the effects of persistent high levels of youth unemployment, whereas in East and South East Asia NFE is seen as an efficient mechanism for providing out-school-children with educational experiences that offer the prospect of their eventual re-engagement with the formal system in late primary or early secondary years.

Quality and Relevance of Primary Education. Whatever the motivation many countries in Asia and the Pacific plan to improve markedly the quality of their primary education systems. In general, the thrust of these proposals is to make schools more attractive to children and their families by such measures as improving the physical condition of schools, increasing the supply of and enhancing the quality and relevance of teaching and learning materials, moving from didactic teaching to participatory, activity, discovery-based and child-centred learning, and introducing school-based systems of formative assessment.

In many countries such reforms are long overdue, however, they are conceptually complex and costly to implement. The complexity arises, in part, from the interconnectedness of education. Curriculum development experience has shown that

merely layering new approaches on old structures is rarely successful and, hence, this implies wholesale curriculum reform. Change of that magnitude also implies a need to revamp pre-service and in-service teacher training, and a requirement to design, publish and distribute new teaching and learning material. Moreover, it is probable that many teachers will resist, actively or passively, such changes and this will require considerable leadership – not just management - skills both at the level of the school and systemically if the reforms are to be implemented smoothly and for them to endure beyond the first flush of enthusiasm. Indeed, even if resources can be found to institute these reforms it may well be the case that the most difficult implementation issue will be the management of change.

These reforms should lead to improvements in learning outcomes but they are not by themselves sufficient. In many countries in Asia and the Pacific there is now an recognised need to institute national systems for the assessment of basic learning competencies. Such systems are needed not only to assess learning outcomes of the primary cycle but also as proxy measures of teacher and school performance, and, ultimately, of the performance of the whole primary system.

Some countries have operated national assessment systems for a number of years, but they are the exceptions rather than the rule. In other countries UNESCO and UNICEF have collaborated with member states in running Measurement of Learning Achievement (MLA) surveys that have also collected data on the conditions of teaching and learning. These surveys have provided useful information but should not be seen as a substitute for national testing systems. The latter employ instruments that are tightly coupled to the national curriculum – indeed they are sometimes conceptualised as components of the curriculum. They also use measurement models similar to those that underpin the international testing systems being developed by the Australian Council for Education Research (ACER) for UNESCO and OECD in the well known PRISM project.

Some countries have also acknowledged that national assessment of learning programmes should encompass process variables as well as measure cognitive outputs. For that

purpose they propose to collect qualitative data in a systematic manner, on a sample rather than a population basis. Both kinds of evidence are required to guide curriculum development.

Enhancing NFE. Non formal education in many countries in Asia and the Pacific received a diminishing share of total government education budgets often in the context of budgets that were themselves declining in magnitude. Paradoxically, this reduction in budget coincided with an increasing demand for NFE programmes and services and it is this demand which has spurred the majority of countries in all four sub-regions to place emphasis on this sector in the next decade. The increasing demand came from diverse client groups: adult illiterates; children who had dropped out of formal schooling; youth seeking to acquire life skills; migrant workers and their families; rural women wanting to develop employment related skills; and men wishing to develop the skills needed to start a small business were some of the client groups. Governments, community organisations and NGOs responded with an array of innovative programmes, many of which enjoyed singular success.

However, the NFE sector remained at the end of the decade perhaps the most cost efficient but least well resourced area of education. Additionally, with some notable exceptions, governments had made little progress with establishing regulatory frameworks and administrative machinery covering NFE, and there had been few attempts to articulate NFE and formal systems so as to provide multiple pathways for all seeking to enhance their education.

Everywhere, the increasing complexity of society will give rise to even greater demands for NFE programmes in the next decade. This will require a major shift in understanding the role and importance of NFE on the part of governments, and will lead to the need to build new partnerships and mobilise additional resources to meet the challenge.

However, this component of the education sector is possibly the least well understood by policy analysts and planners, and received the least attention from governments in the

context of EFA. To some degree, this is because EFA was understood more as UPE and, hence, the policy focus was on primary education for all children and not on education for all members of society. Having regard to the far reaching social and economic changes that will mark the next decade and the effects they will have on individuals, families and communities in Asia and the Pacific, NFE is an area which must receive much greater policy attention and far better resourcing.

Management Issues. Many countries in Asia but not in the Pacific mentioned decentralisation of education management, strengthening of EMISs and associated monitoring and evaluation systems, and finding new ways of funding EFA in the next decade as major elements of their development planning.

Decentralisation. Devolution of authority, flat organisational structures and operational systems that enforce accountability are creeds of modern management in the public and private sectors. These are attractive notions for those setting out to reform public administration, especially in countries operating highly centralised, heavily standardised and command driven forms of education management such as are found in all four sub-regions. Planned reforms in many countries are directed at reducing the degree of control over decision making currently exerted by the central offices of their Ministries of Education in almost all areas of operational management, in planning, and in policy formulation and monitoring. It is often expressed in long delays in decision making, and inordinate difficulties in implementing new programmes and services.

Moreover, given the current budgetary difficulties of many countries in Asia and the Pacific which, at least in the short term, are likely to continue, there is an even greater than usual need to ensure that maximum levels of efficiency are achieved in management of the education sector. This is not easy, especially in the context of deeply entrenched systems of public administration that have a tendency to inflate administrative staffing levels and promote duplication of systems and procedures. It is commendable that there

is now a clear recognition and sense of urgency about the need for reform of education management.

Education Management Information Systems A necessary but not sufficient condition for the success of management reform in each country is the existence of a comprehensive Education Management Information system (EMIS). This is now widely accepted partly because in almost every country in Asia and the Pacific the EFA 2000 Assessment process has demonstrated that, although many governments have very comprehensive education data collection systems, they have less well developed capacities in data validation, analysis and interpretation. To some degree this is because their data systems are distributed across several Ministries and are not coordinated let alone integrated. They often yield different information about the same matter because the separate systems were designed to support different administrative processes. Hence, some were designed to support financial processes, while others are directed at supporting personnel management, and still others are essentially statistical data collection systems.

A more satisfactory arrangement in each country would be an integrated system designed to support day-to-day, routine operational financial and personnel management which at the same time collected the kind of data needed for planning and policy monitoring and evaluation. Given modern computer and communications technology such systems can be designed and implemented in a manner that will allow data needed for decision making to be stored and accessed at the level in the administrative hierarchy or network at which it is needed for decision making. Such systems are flexible and responsive to the requirements of decision makers, planners and policy analysts. In this regard, it is an imperative that the new national EMISs be designed so that they also provide information needed by labour market planners and analysts.

The availability of such systems will help enforce accountability procedures, contribute greatly to the effectiveness of education management, and promote an education policy

monitoring and evaluation mindset that in the longer run will produce an education sector more attuned to national cultural and economic goals. The design, development and implementation of national EMISs, therefore, has been accorded very high priority in the strategic plans for education development of many countries in Asia and the Pacific for the next decade. It is seen as a principal means by which many other goals and objectives will be realised.

New Sources of Funding. Undoubtedly, many of the goals set by countries in the region depend on the acquisition and application of additional funds. It is quite clear that, at least in the early years of the next decade, not all of these can be provided by governments and so other sources will have to be found. This will require new kinds of partnerships to be forged between governments and local communities. It will also require greater coordination between governments and international, bilateral and other agencies so that projects can be designed and implemented that fit into larger programmes which in turn are elements of a national strategy. Obvious examples of the kind of coordination needed are the linking of curriculum renewal with textbook production and distribution and teacher re-training in an integrated package.

In many countries education system managers have little experience of working with local communities in a truly collaborative manner. It is equally true that local communities have little experience of working with senior education planners and project managers from central or provincial levels of government. Moreover, it must be said that international and bilateral agencies often have their own priorities and these may not be consonant with those of other agencies or be consistent with the strategies of national education planners. In these circumstances, forging of new partnerships, accommodation of diverse priorities, and integration of multiple projects within comprehensive and coherent programmes will constitute a major challenge for education development in Asia and the Pacific in the coming decade.

In summary, these planned initiatives in improving education quality, management and funding are characteristic of all four sub-regions. They should be seen not as separate

from but linked to the specifically sub-regional initiatives mentioned in the following paragraphs.

Trans Caucasus and Central Asia Sub-Region

Of all the initiatives planned by countries in the Trans Caucasus and Central Asia the three that are most characteristic and most emphasized are: (i) to rebuild the pre-primary sector; (ii) improve the quality of primary education; (iii) expand and enhance NFE; and (iv) reform education management. All but the first of these are common to the Asia Pacific region and have already been referred to. The first is of particular relevance to this sub-region because of the status of the pre-primary sector when the countries were part of the former Soviet Union.

Virtually every country in this sub-region emphasized their commitment to increasing access to and participation in ECCD by the end of the decade. By way of illustration, in Kazakhstan, the commitment is that every child will enjoy at least one year of pre-primary education; in Mongolia, the goal is to increase pre-primary participation by 40% relative to 1999 levels; and in other countries equally ambitious goals have been set.

The next decade will pose interesting challenges for ECCD leaders in these countries because the decade of the 1990s that saw such a dramatic decline in pre-primary education in this sub-region was also the decade that witnessed its rapid growth in other parts of Asia and the Pacific. That growth was accompanied by a gradually changing conceptualisation of separate kindergarten, pre-school and family-based and institutional daycare programmes as integrated components of ECCD. If the Trans Caucasus and Central Asian states intend to redesign as well as rebuild their pre-primary sectors they will need to be mindful of these changed conceptualisations and the implications they carry for programme design, service delivery, curriculum and teaching and learning material development and teacher training and retraining . The costs involved will be substantial but so, too, are the likely benefits which transcend economics and relate to the foundation stages of human development.

East and South East Asia Sub-Region

The four dominant themes of EFA planning for the next decade in this sub-region are: (i) to continue the expansion and diversification of ECCD; (ii) improve the quality of primary education and, hence, increase its retention capacity; (iii) reduce levels of adult illiteracy; and (iv) enhance and expand NFE. Two of these themes - (ii) and (iv) – are shared with other sub-regions and have already been discussed from a regional perspective. The other two themes are of importance to one or two of the other sub-regions but take on a different character there.

As the sub-regional synthesis report emphasized the 1990s saw a remarkable growth in ECCD that is forecast to continue with even greater force in the next decade. In this regard, it is interesting that UNICEF is increasingly emphasizing ECCD as a principal thrust of its work and that through its Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys in different countries in the sub-region UNICEF has collected a vast amount of empirical data that are directly relevant to planning for the expansion of existing ECCD programmes and services. It is also interesting that the end of the decade saw a growing interest in University Education, Health and Social Welfare Faculties the region in offering professional training in ECCD and mounting research programmes characterised by a holistic view of infant and early childhood care and development. It is clear that there is a conjunction of influences at work in ECCD and they are reflected in the plans now being developed by many countries in this sub-region.

These plans are characterised by diversity of ECCD offerings, flexibility of participation by children and their families in various kinds of programmes, and proposed collaboration of public and private providers to meet emerging demand. Usually it is planned to offer a range of programmes extending from home-based day care to pre-school to kindergarten, and to give appropriate emphasis within those offerings to a mix of health, education and social welfare curriculum perspectives. Moreover, the planned

programmes will be located in settings that include private homes, sections of primary schools, community learning centres, health clinics, and employers' premises.

Similarly, the planned ECCD programmes and services will offer different levels of participation so that they might truly meet the needs of families and communities. Some children may need to be enrolled on a full time basis, five days a week whilst for others three half days a week may be all that is required.

Possibly because of the difficulty of funding the extent of the forecast expansion of ECCD programmes and services, many governments are encouraging private providers and local community organisations to collaborate in meeting demand. This is a welcome development but it must be implemented in the context of an appropriate regulatory and licensing framework that protects children. Currently, most countries lack comprehensive data collection and analysis systems relating to ECCD. Such systems are essential for effective development planning and for monitoring the effectiveness of programme and service delivery. Without such systems it is difficult to carry out the kinds of cost benefit and cost effectiveness analyses that have the potential to influence policy and decision makers. This, too, has been acknowledged and design and implementation of such systems is a priority in the sub-region.

Throughout the sub-region quite remarkable gains were made in reducing levels of adult illiteracy at national and sub-national levels, especially in respect of basic literacy. Equally impressive were the gains in reducing gender disparities. However, these achievements have stimulated demand for increasing literacy skills from basic to functional levels. Governments plan to meet this new challenge in a variety of ways but principally using non formal channels such as community learning centres.

Pacific Sub-Region

Country reports and the draft sub-regional report for the Pacific refer to the need for increasing primary participation rates, improving the quality of education, building

effective information systems, and enhancing management skills. In an insightful analysis, the draft sub-regional report also draws attention to a number of factors that are either specific to the Pacific or are of particular importance in the island states. These factors heavily influence education planning and include: fast growth of the school age population; uneven distribution of populations across small islands that dramatically increase the costs and logistical difficulties of providing education services; poor quality and high cost communications services; and inadequate government funding.

In the longer term, information technology and distance education may offer partial solutions to some of the problems of small and scattered national populations, but at the present time the costs are prohibitive, especially when many schools lack electricity, clean water supply, adequate sanitation and classroom furniture.

Nevertheless, it is greatly encouraging that there is an unfettered demand for education at all levels and that even severely impoverished and remote communities continue to support the attempts of governments and donors to provide education services.

South and West Asia

Because a number of final reports from some of the large population countries, and the South and West Asia sub-regional synthesis report, were not available at the time of writing, much of the information on which this synthesis is based is derived from draft country reports. However, the crucial issues which demand the attention of governments and all involved in human development in the sub-region are self evident. Chief among these is the continuance of high levels of adult illiteracy and the persistence of significant sub-national, urban/rural and gender disparities in participation in primary education.

In substantial measure, the persistence of these problems after decades of relentless attention by governments and international and bilateral agencies and NGOs is due to the inexorable effects of rapid population growth. In the absence of wide ranging structural reform, if growth of the school age population exceeds the rate of expansion of pupil

places in the primary sector, and the rate of growth of expenditure in real terms fails to keep pace with school age population growth, then participation rates will continue to favour advantaged sections of the population.

Similarly, there is evidence from some large population countries that, even though the rate of adult illiteracy has reduced, the absolute number of illiterates has actually increased over the decade. This is due to many factors but chief among them is that over the decade the rate of growth of the female adult population exceeded the rate of reduction in the ranks of female illiterates. Another major factor is that in many countries in the sub-region there is a high lapse rate of neo-literates into conditions of illiteracy. Still another factor is that the ranks of the adult illiterates are continually enlarged by the number of children who complete the primary cycle without attaining sustainable levels of literacy.

As previously remarked, dependency ratios in some of the large population countries are high by comparison with those of countries in East and South East Asia. This severely limits the capacity of governments to allocate an increasing proportion of public spending to education, except by cost shifting from other sectors such as defence.

Also, there is a well established empirical association between levels of adult female illiteracy and the rate of expansion of the school age population which provides a structural impediment to increasing participation rates and reducing disparities. For example, Schultz, (1988) reported that the fertility rate for women with seven or more years of education (that is, those who could be considered to be functionally literate) in South Asia was 3.8 but that for women with no education it was 5.8. Similarly; Subbarao and Raney, (1995) estimated that doubling family planning efforts in South Asia would reduce fertility rate by 18% whereas doubling female secondary enrolments would reduce it by 27%. Summers (1992), conducted a cost-effectiveness study linking female education and fertility in Pakistan and found that educating 1,000 women at a total cost of \$40,000 would have averted 660 births, and saved over \$250,000 in sustenance costs. This is a cost benefit ratio in excess of 6:1.

The societal benefits extend well beyond reducing population growth. Over the last decade, UNICEF, in collaboration with national governments, has conducted many Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) in East and South Asia. These surveys collect data on a range of health and education indicators. These, and similar studies (World Bank, 1997), have demonstrated remarkable improvements in health and nutrition indicators that are highly correlated with increased levels of female education. For example, The World Bank study (1997) revealed that an increase of just one to three years in mother's schooling is linked to a 20% decline in the risk of childhood deaths. Similarly, Bhargava and Osmani, (1996) found that women who have completed primary school have 20% less under-nourished children than illiterate mothers. Even more startling findings come from the Subbaro and Raney (1995) simulation study. They found that doubling the female secondary enrolment rate (from 18 to 38%) would have reduced infant mortality rate by 64%. By contrast, they found that doubling the number of doctors would have reduced the infant mortality rate by only 5% and doubling of per capita income by only 6%.

These studies concerning the linkages between literacy, population health and participation rates in primary education are mentioned in the present context because they illustrate the interconnectedness of education, health and social factors and the need to take them into account in education planning. In short, it would seem to be the case that in the South and West Asia sub-region there will be enduring improvements in primary participation and retention rates and reductions in provincial, urban/rural and gender disparities only if the rate of increase of the school age population declines (which, in turn, may rest mainly upon reduction of female adult illiteracy levels), and primary schooling receives a larger share of government spending, and there are structural reforms of primary education that give rise to significant increases in cost efficiency. These are difficult objectives for any state or sub-region to pursue but they may be necessary if human development in the sub-region is to achieve its full potential.

SECTION 6 CONCLUSIONS

In terms of looking back at the last decade and looking forward to the next there are two overarching messages that have influenced what has been achieved, and, in substantial measure, will determine what will be achieved. They are, first the understanding that EFA does mean “education for all”, and second, that funding has been, and will continue to be, to varying degrees, insufficient for all that is desired and planned.

Education for all means just that: education for infants, children, teenagers, young adults, older adults, and the elderly, female and male, wherever they reside and whatever their ethnic origin. Definitively, it does not mean, even in a predominant sense, education for male, primary school children residing in urban areas. Whilst the remarkable achievements of increasing access to and participation in primary education, and the often dramatic reduction in levels of adult illiteracy, over the last decade, have been experienced by both males and females and in urban and rural areas there is evidence that, particularly in South and West Asia, males and urban dwellers have continued to receive more favoured treatment than females and those residing in rural areas. Clearly, attainment of EFA objectives in the next decade across the whole region will depend upon elimination, not just reduction, of these disparities.

Education for all should also mean quality education not just attainment of minimum levels of basic competencies. It should also mean that what is learned is relevant to the immediate, likely and future realities of the learner. And, the learning process should engage the deep curiosity of the learner. Regrettably, the evidence of the last decade is

that these ideals were rarely achieved. More positively, this is recognised throughout the region and there is a commitment to building better quality education in the next decade.

Whilst EFA has been instrumental in reducing levels of adult illiteracy it is crucial that the efforts of the last decade be continued and strengthened in the next. Community-based adult literacy programmes must be expanded and enhanced. They should cover different kinds – basic, functional and social – as well as levels of literacy, and they should assist neo-literates to maintain their newly acquired cognitive skills. Improvements in the retention capacity and quality of the primary sector will lead to a greater proportion of primary graduates having sustainable levels of literacy and thus, will reduce the rate of growth of the adult illiterate population. These two measures are needed to sustain and improve upon the rate of reduction of adult illiteracy. Again, these issues are well understood by governments in the region and can be expected to influence their planning and lead to effective policy.

The ECCD sector which demonstrated, in most parts of the region, extraordinary progress will undoubtedly continue to grow in the next decade. However, in most countries there is an urgent need to design and implement regulatory administrative frameworks that will provide the necessary level of protection for young children and their families. There is also a need for greater attention to be paid to developing effective partnerships between all levels of government, private providers and local communities to ensure that the demand for ECCD services be met in a socially equitable manner. Additionally, the planned diversification of ECCD programmes and services requires an expansion of basic and applied research to guide curriculum development. This is, indeed, a complex area involving the intersection of knowledge drawn from diverse disciplines. It is an area in which UNICEF has shown considerable leadership in the closing years of the last decade. It may be the case that a research network covering all aspects of ECCD in the region should be built so that culturally relevant and socially equitable ECCD programmes and services can be established.

The non-formal education sector is probably the most cost-effective, yet least well resourced and most poorly understood, area of education. Paradoxically, this sector is set to show rapid growth in the next decade. It can offer new opportunities for the most diverse of all education client groups. These client groups range from socially disaffected, unemployed youth in Pacific Island states, to villagers wishing to learn new forms of agricultural production, to rural women planning to establish micro-economic enterprises, to industrial workers made redundant and seeking retraining in emerging industries, to the elderly wishing to further develop their knowledge and skills. It is perhaps the case that non-formal education must be the most locally-based of all education enterprises. This implies the need to forge new partnerships between communities, governments, employers, educationists, NGOs and cultural organisations, and define new ways of mobilising the necessary resources. A further challenge resides in the need to build better articulation between the formal and non-formal sectors so as to provide multiple learning pathways and opportunities for life-long learning. These issues are being confronted by governments in the region and will lead to the development of innovative and socially productive forms of NFE.

The second message arising out of EFA 2000 Assessment in the region is concerned with funding. Education is characterised by the need to make tough choices between competing options of nearly equal attractiveness. There will never be sufficient funds to do all that education planners would wish. The challenge, therefore, is to find new ways of meeting objectives. It may imply the need for thorough-going structural reform; put in another way it may mean doing things differently and doing different things. Sometimes this involves thinking the unthinkable, questioning long-accepted practices. All governments have a constitutional responsibility for providing education services to their citizens. But are there multiple ways of meeting those constitutional responsibilities? Similarly, does the primary cycle have to span five or six years of schooling? Are there ways of rearranging curriculum and modifying delivery practices so that an equivalent amount of knowledge and cognitive development can be acquired and achieved over fewer years?

Funding constraints also impose greater demands on the administration of public education systems and the governance of educational institutions. In terms of public administration many governments are planning to further decentralise management of their education systems and to build new, comprehensive EMISs with strong monitoring and evaluation components. These are welcome developments that deserve encouragement and support.

These are challenges which may not yet have been directly confronted by governments in the region. However, in the face of rising demand for education from all sectors of society and in a context of often severe financial constraint these challenges may need to be confronted and public policy dialogue initiated so as to find acceptable and enduring solutions.

Finally, ten years ago Jomtien declared to the world that education is necessary as an essential building block to development and peace. More recently, governments and international agencies have seen education, not just as a need, but as a fundamental human right. The past decade has demonstrated that EFA is possible. The decade ahead, with all its complexities and uncertainties, makes attainment of EFA more important than ever, and because of this, it is time to tell the world that EFA is not only necessary and possible but also urgent.