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ROLE OF EDUCATION IN HUMAN DEVELOPMENT AND QUALITY OF LIFE

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ABSTRACT

There is a general presumption among many policy makers that secondary and higher education is not necessary for economic growth and development. On the other hand, it is literacy and primary education that is argued to be important. Estimates on internal rate of return also contributed to strengthening of such a presumption. Accordingly, secondary and higher education do not figure on the poverty reduction agenda of many poor countries and of the international aid organizations. The Indian experience also testifies to all this. Secondary and more strikingly higher education has been subject to neglect by the government. Using most recent statistics, it is attempted here to show that the general presumption on the weak or negligible role of secondary and higher education in development is not valid and that post elementary education is important for reduction in poverty, in improving infant mortality and life expectancy, and for economic growth. The experience of the fast developing East Asian countries has shown that it is human resources of a nation, not its capital and material resources that ultimately determine the character and pace of its economic and social development.

KEYWORDS: Education index, HDI, Literacy rate, Gross enrolment ratio.

INTRODUCTION

Human Development Index (HDI) is constructed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This annual index is an integral part of the global Human Development Report (HDR) since 1990. The index captures the multidimensional nature and process of human development, and summaries the level of human development attained by a country. It is composed of sub-indices relating to health, education and income at the national level of

aggregation. International ranking by the value of the HDI is informative on broad source/s of high, medium and low levels of countries' human development. This is helpful to policy makers in formulation of different policies and programmes for higher attainment of their countries' human development. India recognized the policy useful of HDI and adopted its methodology to constructing HDI at the national level in 2001. However, sub-national level HDR started earlier when the first Madhya Pradesh human development report was prepared in 1995.

In recent years, education indicators/variables have been contributory for measurement of indices of global competitiveness, business environment and investment climate of countries. This is evident, for instance, in the hard data-based education indicators in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report, International Institute of Management Development's World Competitiveness Yearbook, World Bank's Competitiveness Indicators, International Telecommunication Union's Digital Access Index and World Economic Forum's Networked Readiness Index, and International Finance Corporation's World Business Environment Survey. The most common education variables in these indices include (a) primary and secondary enrolment ratio, (b) average years of schooling, (c) adult literacy rate, and (d) quality of education. Hence, measurement issues in this article have implications for construction of comparable national and subnational competitiveness, business environment, and investment climate indices for India, as they are related to education indicators and variables.

Since the launch of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in September 2000, human development has been considered as the centerpiece of social and economic progress, and the MDGs have been widely accepted as yardsticks for measuring development. The MDGs constitute a set of numerical targets to be achieved by 2015 from their levels in 1990. The targets, related to key achievements in human development, include halving income-poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education and gender equality, reducing infant and child mortality by two thirds and maternal mortality by three-fourths, reversing the spread of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases, and halving the proportion of people without access to safe water. Since India has committed herself to attain these targets, it would be useful to examine the performance of Indian states on some of the millennium development indicators.

Redressing regional imbalances has been one of the primary objectives of the Indian planning process. The concern for regional disparities in development, in general, and in the standard of living, in particular, has been expressed in the Government's policies and programmes since Independence. The Eleventh Five-Year Plan (2007-12) has chosen 'faster and more inclusive growth' as its central theme. It has recognized the need to make growth 'more inclusive' in terms of the benefits of growth accruing to those sections of the population which have been bypassed by the high rates of growth achieved in recent years. It has also been perceived that regional disparities— inter-state, inter-district and rural–urban—have been increasing steadily and the gains of rapid growth have not reached all parts of the country in an equitable manner. The process of rising regional disparities has accelerated after the implementation of large-scale economic reforms involving structural adjustment and liberalization programmes since 1991. Naturally, the goal of redressing regional disparities has assumed special importance during the post-reforms period (Planning Commission, 2008b). For growth to be 'more inclusive', the benefits of growth should be shared by different sections of the population and by all the regions of the country. At the present juncture of the economy's progress, it would be useful to investigate how far economic growth has been inclusive, to what extent the benefits of growth have trickled down to different sections of the population, and how these benefits have been shared by different regions of the country.

Human Development Index

The HDI prepared by UNDP since 1990 has been through a process of continuous modification. It is a composite index of achievements in basic human capabilities in three areas – a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. Life expectancy, educational attainment and income are the three variables which have been chosen to represent these three dimensions. The HDI value for each country indicates how far it has to go to attain certain defined long term goals such as an average life span of 85 years, access to education to all and reasonably high per capita income for enjoying a decent standard of living. The index is used for inter-country comparison of human development and has been proved useful in boosting up the efforts of the governments of the countries deficient in human development.

A study on similar lines is necessary to examine interstate differences, as in a federal set up like in India education and health services primarily come under the purview of the state

governments. Some efforts have been made earlier in the direction but the studies are not comprehensive as these do not correlate the indices with the other parameters of the economies. A.K. Shiva Kumar3 constructed HDI for 17 Indian states and ranked the states along with the countries for which the HDI for 1987 was computed by UNDP in Human Development Report 1990. Recently Shiva Kumar4 computed gender-related development index (GDI) on the lines proposed in UNDP's Human Development Report 1995 for 16 Indian states for which data were available and ranked them along with 130 countries of the world. Kumar found that there were only 13 countries in the world that had low GDI value than Uttar Pradesh and Bihar. Twice as many people live in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in such abysmal conditions of human deprivation than in the remaining 13 countries that had lower GDI values. He concluded, "such low levels of human development and gender inequalities for such a large Indian populations are indeed a sad reflection of the poor state of social progress in the country"5. Kumar's findings may provide interesting academic readings but fail to provide policy guidelines as no effort has been made to correlate various indices with the other parameters of the state economics.

Educational Attainment

Empirical studies suggest positive effects of schooling on GDP growth. It has been found that increasing the labour force's average education by one year raises GDP by 9%, but this holds only for the first three years of extra education. After that, the returns to each additional year diminish to around 4% of GDP9. The returns appear to be highest for basic school in (primary and later secondary), for which further expansion will mainly involve enrolling more children from poor families10. Considering the significance of education most of the developing countries have committed themselves to the goal of universal education in the shortest possible time. Educational attainment was originally measured only through the adult literacy defined as "the percentage of persons aged 15 and over who can, with understanding, both read and write a short simple statement on everyday life"11. HDR-1991 broadened this measure to incorporate mean years of schooling. As reliable data on mean years of schooling were not available the variables for educational attainment now included adult literacy, with a two third weight, and gross combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment with a cone-third weight. In India upto now, the literacy rate data are available for population aged 7 years and above, therefore, the UNDP methodology has been slightly modified to include literacy rate in place of adult literacy.

Combined Enrolment Ratios

UNDP in its Human Development Reports gives one-third weightage to combined primary, secondary and tertiary enrolment ratios for computation of educational attainment indices. The gross enrolment ratio has been defined as "the number of students enrolled in a level of education, whether or not they belong in the relevant age group for that level, as the percentage of the population in the relevant age group for that level". The relevant age group in different levels of education has been specified in the Reports. Age-specific literacy rates data in India as per the 1991 census are not yet available. Whatever data are available from the Ministry of Human Resource Development do not seem to be reliable particularly at primary level of education as enrolment ratio for Tamil Nadu at this level is shown as 148.4 per cent and in case of 6 out of 15 states gross enrolment ratio exceeds 100 per cent which is possible but does not seem to be realistic.

Estimates based on production functions on a cross-section of 49 countries in Asian region (Tilak, 2003) indicated a strong effect of higher education on development. Higher education—measured in terms of the gross enrolment ratios or in terms of higher education attainment, i.e., proportion of population with higher education (HEA)—is found to have a positive effect on the level of economic development. The HEA is also positively related to several human development indicators, in addition to economic development: it is significantly related to the human development index and also to the gender development index. The higher the level of higher education in a society, whether in stock or flow form, the higher can be the level of human development, through its influence on two main components of human development index, viz., the life expectancy, and GDP per capita. It is not only life expectancy that is significantly related to HEA, but also infant mortality, another measure of health, is significantly related to HEA.

CONCLUSION

The contribution of basic education to development is widely recognized. But very rarely the linkages between post-elementary education and development have been analyzed. The analysis of secondary data clearly leads us to conclude that post-elementary education plays a significant role in development. The implications of the empirical results are clear and straight forward: given the importance of post elementary education, along with literacy and elementary education, it is necessary that attention is paid to the development of sound and comprehensive education policies. Public policy has to clearly recognize not only the basic

foundation that primary education provides for development, but also the critical importance of secondary and higher education in development, in poverty reduction, human development and economic growth. Coherent long-term policies for the development of education, including secondary and higher education, for development of the economy are critically needed.

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