



### **EDUCATING AND TRAINING OUT OF POVERTY? A REVIEW OF THE ISSUES**

**\*\*\*Many debates on China, India, Africa and Latin America to be found in this Special Issue\*\*\***

#### **Introduction**

Are education and skills really the way out of poverty? This is what the contributors to NN37 have tried to answer in 45 short, topical articles, from E. and S. Asia, Africa and Latin America. Here is a summary of their findings, translated into propositions and questions that can be used for further policy debate.

#### **Main challenges, findings and propositions**

Some of the most basic questions still relate to this old conundrum: Does economic growth lead to more and better (basic) education or the other way around? Look at our evidence and decide.

Do four years of education really make a difference to farmers' productivity? No! Only in certain circumstances.

Can basic education of really poor quality really help poor people get out of poverty? Surely not!

What is the role of culture in educating out of poverty? A belief that everyone is educable, or that every penny must be saved for education, are a huge help. But can these beliefs be transferred, e.g. from E. Asia elsewhere? Our contributors argue that countries have to do promote the values of education in their own way.

What can Africa learn from Asia? Or more specifically from China's and India's success in poverty reduction? Surely, they must learn that there several Chinas, several Indias, just as there are many Africas. India and China still contain millions of very poor people, and are in some respects becoming increasingly unequal.

Asian experience shows that education policies take much time before they have their desired impact. In Africa, emergency campaigns of basic education, or secondary education, are shown not to help poor people, if they allow quality to fall to critically low levels. Often such campaigns have merely encouraged parents to leave the public system, for low and high-cost private schools.

The overarching lesson learned in NN37 is that education policies must be part and parcel of an overall development strategy and that this strategy can only be 'born from within'.

Directly connected to this, there are two messages about education and its surrounding environment. First, primary education needs an enabling educational environment of decent quality and accessible post-primary schooling if it is to deliver its many claimed benefits. And second, the education system cannot 'go it alone'. There needs to be a supportive macro-economic surrounding environment if educational outcomes are to be utilised. Acquiring education and skills without the chance to use them is otherwise the danger.

Our analysis of educational reforms of the 1990s that aimed at better educational services for the poor and disadvantaged, by and large, concludes that these failed. Look at the evidence from Mexico, Sri Lanka and Tanzania, and see what you think.

Donor policies on education continue to be influential, especially in aid-dependent countries. A great deal of new work will shortly be available from research consortia studying educational access, quality and outcomes. They are unlikely to suggest that primary education on its own can any longer deliver the many benefits once associated with it. Post-basic education of good quality and a supportive environment may well prove to be necessary to sustaining investment in primary education.

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**Editorial Address**

**Kenneth King**

Centre of African Studies, 21 George Square, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh EH8 9LD, Scotland UK

Emails:

Kenneth.King@ed.ac.uk  
or P.King@ed.ac.uk

**Switzerland Co-ordination Address**

**Frederique Weyer  
and Michel Carton**

IUED/Graduate Institute of Development Studies

P. O. Box 136

1211 GENEVA 21 -

Switzerland

Emails:

Frederique.Weyer@iued.unige.ch;

Michel.Carton@iued.

unige.ch

## Emerging from this Issue of NN – here are some Statements for Debate

Based on the many diverse contributions to NN37 we can extract four Propositions for further discussion.

### *Education strategies need to be nationally determined but ...*

The experience of the role of education in Asian countries is valuable for Africa. It shows that each country has to do education in its own way. Culture and national unity are vitally important. A comprehensive national development strategy is needed to mobilise human and other resources. Outsiders should limit their contribution to assisting countries to implement their own strategy. A holistic sector-wide approach could be a suitable aid modality to do this. One of the risks is that general policies may be designed that are insufficiently geared to regional and other differences. There is evidence in Asia of massive, and even increasing, inequalities between urban and rural areas, richer and poorer states, provinces and regions.

### *Education and inequality*

Hence a key question must be: Is support to basic education an effective and efficient mechanism for donors to try to reduce inequalities? Our answer is yes, but...

The evidence from too many countries is that without a concerted policy to the contrary, current education systems reinforce rather than compensate for existing inequalities: the children of the rich acquire more education than the children of the poor.... Education systems can be part of a vicious cycle, locking out generations of the poor. (UN Millennium Project 2005: 24)

The question is how can countries develop that positive policy and political environment? And in its absence what can NGOs and civil society do to reduce the reinforcement of inequalities?

### *Education needs a 'results orientation' if quality is to be improved*

Quality is the key to better outcomes. But we hardly know what quality means. And probably even less what it costs. Many governments are trying to set up independent authorities to set standards and to control the quality of the education and training provided. But what is the role of regional or international testing and standard setting bodies? Look at the evidence from SACMEQ and PISA etc, and decide.

### *The role of education and training in poverty reduction depends crucially on other enabling factors*

Many now assume that the impact of education is bigger when education and training are combined with, or followed by, other types of support: enterprise development support, meritocratic access to jobs, access to credit, decent prices for crops, infrastructure of roads that work etc. These take us far beyond the world of schools and classrooms, but educators need urgently to consider these wider supporting factors, if their own contributions to skills and knowledge acquisition are to be followed by skills and knowledge utilisation.