

Post-Basic Education and Training: Education and Poverty - Beyond the Basics

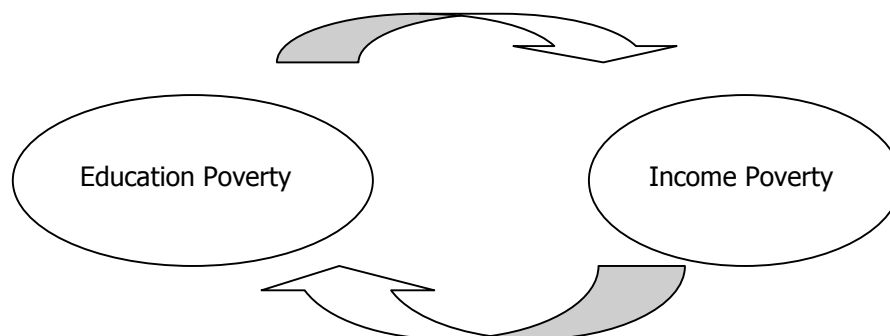
Post-Elementary Education, Poverty and Development in India¹

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Education and Poverty

Education poverty and income poverty are closely related. Poverty of education is a principal factor responsible for income poverty; and income poverty does not allow people to overcome poverty of education. Income poverty forces children to be out of school and thus they are denied the opportunity of participating in schooling. The relationship between income poverty and education poverty is mutually reinforcing. This mutually reinforcing relationship is true both at the macro level and also at the household level - including at the individual, the family, the community, the regional and the wider nation-society levels. At the macro level, nations with illiterate or less educated masses cannot progress or increase their output substantially, and as a result they remain at a low standard of living and suffer from a high incidence of poverty. At the micro level, illiterate or less educated individuals or households are less productive, join lower paying occupations; thus they earn less, and remain at very low standards of living, mostly below the poverty line.

Figure 1: **Inter-Relationship between Education Poverty and Income**



Source: Tilak (2002)

Policy Vacuum: Neglect of Secondary and Higher Education

Ever since 1985 when the World Bank set poverty reduction as an important agenda of itself, and highlighted the role of primary education therein, the attention of many policy makes, planners and development thinkers has shifted very systematically in favour of primary education. Substantial policy research and consultancy research have established strong linkages between primary education and poverty reduction, reduction in infant mortality, reduction in fertility, improvement in life expectancy and so on. Research also covered literacy and non-formal education. Very rarely have the linkages between post-primary education and development been analysed in a similar fashion. All this led many developing countries and international organisations to concentrate on primary education and deliberately to ignore secondary and higher education. Developments, including the World Bank policy papers, the structural adjustment policies that were to be adopted by most of the developing countries, and the Jomtien (and later the Dakar) conference on Education For All (EFA), and the formulation of the Millennium Development Goals, have all contributed to strengthening

¹ In India, elementary education consists of five years primary and three years upper-primary education.

these trends. Resource scarcity added further to the problem. India has, to a degree, also experienced and continued to experience the same trends.

Poverty and Development in India

Poverty eradication has been a key objective of India's development strategy since independence in 1947. As a result, there has been a significant improvement: the percentage of the population below the poverty line (officially defined in terms of a level of income that ensures a minimum level of calories) has declined from 55 per cent in 1970-71 to 26 per cent by 1999-2000, the latest year for which such data are available.

Population (million)	1049.5
Life Expectancy (years)	63.7
Adult Literacy (%)	61.3
Combined Gross Enrolment Ratio (Primary, Secondary and Higher) (%)	55
GDP per capita (PPP \$)	2670
Human Poverty Index	31.4
% Population below Poverty Line	
Below US\$ 1	34.7
Below US\$ 2	79.9
Below the National Poverty Line	28.6
Human Development Index	0.595
Human Development Index Rank	127
Gender Development Index	0.572
Gender Development Index Rank	103
Source: <i>Human Development Report 2004</i> .	

	%	No. of People (mln)
1970-71	55.10	301.80
1983	44.48	322.89
1987-88	39.30	310.10
1993-94	35.97	320.36
1999-2000	26.10	260.25

But still 260 million people are estimated to be living below the poverty line – 193 million in rural areas and 67 million in urban areas, some of whom may be living under 'chronic poverty' in 1999-2000.

India has several programmes that clearly aim at poverty eradication, including the programme of Minimum Needs. But most programmes including the minimum needs programme, or the village development programmes launched in recent years, include only lower primary and, at best, upper primary education, and clearly exclude secondary and higher education.

The Question and the Results

Doesn't post-elementary (above upper primary level) education have any role in development in India? This question has been examined in the longer country paper (see end-note) using some of the recently available statistics and simple regression coefficients. It has been found that:

- Secondary and higher education enhances earnings of individuals and contributes to economic development.
- Secondary and higher education makes a significant contribution to reduction in absolute as well as relative poverty.
- It also influences negatively infant mortality.
- Life expectancy is also positively related to secondary and higher education.

Table 3: Regression Coefficients of State Income (NSDP) per capita	
	β
Illiterate	-190.99 ***
Just Literate	-245.81
Lower Primary	594.85 ***
Middle/Upper Primary	190.75
Secondary	730.99 ***
Higher Secondary	2879.07 ***
General Graduate	4870.12 ***
Other levels of education are not included here *** significant at 1% level NSDP: Net state domestic product Source: Mathur and Mangain (2004)	

A few other related aspects of development are also analysed in detail here and it has been found that secondary and higher education is clearly and statistically significantly related to many development indicators.

Table 4: Coefficient of Correlation between Education and Poverty	
<i>Coefficient of Correlation between Poverty Ratio (1999-00) and</i>	
% of Population (1995-96) having	<i>r</i>
Illiteracy	0.21242
Literacy	0.48595
Lower Primary	0.05105
Middle/Upper Primary	-0.35790
Secondary and above	-0.55952

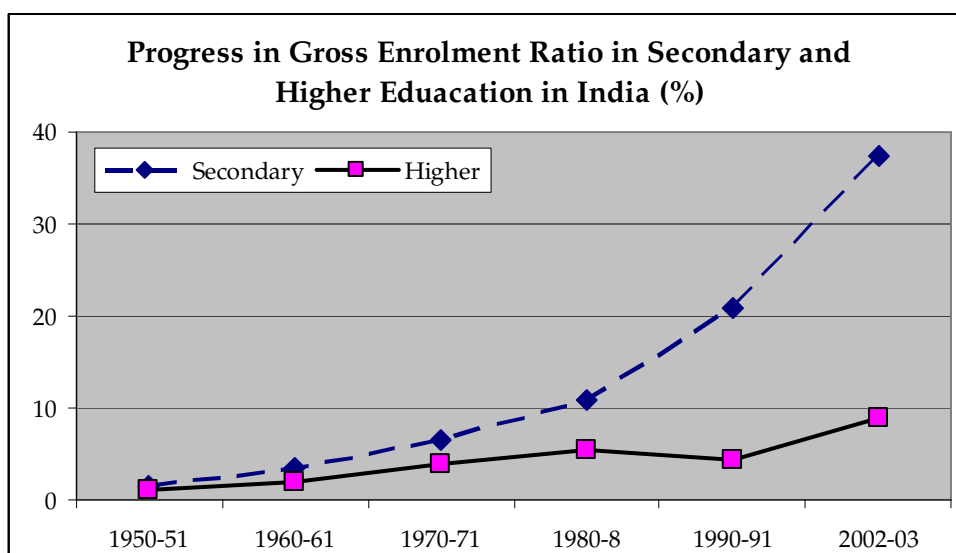
The results clearly indicate that just literacy and primary education do not matter for poverty reduction. The threshold level seems to be upper primary education.

Conclusions and Policy Implications

The implications of these results are clear and straight forward: given the importance of post-basic education along with literacy and full primary education, it is necessary that attention is paid to development of sound, comprehensive and holistic education policies.

It may be underscored again that it might not be sufficient if the focus has been exclusively on full primary education for the social and economic development of the society on the one hand, and for the development of a strong and balanced edifice of the education system on the other. While primary education gives the basic three R's, rarely does it provide skills necessary for employment – self employment or otherwise that can ensure some wages and economic living. Moreover, it has been found that most of the literacy and primary education programmes do not impart sustainable literacy, so many children relapse into illiteracy. Secondly, primary and even upper primary education rarely serves as a terminal level of education. Thirdly, even if primary education imparts some valuable attributes, in terms of attitudes and skills, and if primary education is able to take people from below the poverty line to above the poverty line, it is possible that this could be *just above* the poverty line, but not much above; and more importantly, the danger of their falling below poverty line at any time could be high. On the other hand, it is secondary and higher education that consolidates the gains received from primary and upper primary education; it is secondary and higher education that provides skills that could be useful in the labour market; it is secondary and higher education that can keep the people above poverty line without such a danger of falling back into the poverty trap - educational poverty or income poverty; and in fact, it is secondary and higher education that can take people to much above poverty line, by increasing the social, occupational and economic levels of the households. All in all, it is secondary and higher education that forms 'human capability' and 'human freedom' - those elements which Amartya Sen (1999) champions, that freedom that helps in attaining other 'freedoms'.

But like many other developing countries, India concentrated on primary and upper primary education in which more than three quarters of the eligible children are now enrolled, but in the case of secondary and higher education, the enrolment ratios are very low.



Coherent long term policies for the development of education, including secondary and higher education for the development of the economy are needed. Public policy has to recognise the critical importance of secondary and higher education in development, in poverty reduction, human development and economic growth. Significant enrolment in education at all levels is a necessary, but not a sufficient condition for development, as the enabling environment is also important. This wider economic, social and political environment is what enables education to considerably influence development.

Sustainable socioeconomic development of the societies requires sustainable education systems. It is necessary to build an educational edifice which focuses on human capital as well as on human development; on economic growth as well as equity and reduction in poverty; on modern techniques of development as well as on traditional methods; and on national and local priorities as well as on global concerns. Only strong and vibrant education systems, based on sound assumptions and approaches, can play the constitutive and instrumental roles in development. In other words, a strong and sustainable education system is necessary to serve (a) itself as development, as 'freedom,' as a 'capability,' as a human right, and as human development, as a key dimension of sustainable development – as an end, and (b) as a means of sustainable development from economic, social, cultural, and political points of view. Secondary and higher education is an essential tool for achieving a sustainable future. In the current context, construction of knowledge societies is also found to be increasingly relevant. It is clear that knowledge societies cannot be constructed without building strong and dynamic high quality higher education institutions. After all, creation and expansion of frontiers of knowledge and dissemination of knowledge are the main functions of universities and other institutions of higher education.

Further information sources

This Policy Brief draws on a fuller country study on Post-Elementary Education, Poverty and Development in India. Working Paper no. 6. It is part of a 6-country study coordinated by the Centre of African Studies at the University of Edinburgh and funded by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID). The Policy Brief does not, of course, represent the views of DFID. The full paper by Jandhyala Tilak is available in electronic format from www.cas.ed.ac.uk/research/projects.html. Also relevant and available on the same site is the paper by Kenneth King and Robert Palmer on 'Education, Training and their Enabling Environments'. More information on the full project, as well as country studies for Ghana, Tanzania, Rwanda, South Africa and Kenya can also be accessed from this address.