

Education and Pro-poor Growth

Presentation at International Workshop on
“Strategies to achieve pro-poor growth: the case of
the education sector”

Dec.10,11 2009, Berlin

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About AID India

- Non-government organization based in Tamilnadu, southern state of India
- Mission is to improve quality of education for children
- Comprises people from diverse backgrounds – professionals and village volunteers working together
- Reach – 7000 schools, 1 million children

The education scenario in India

- Huge progress in access in the last 50 years
 - Primary schools in over 95% habitations
 - Over 90% enrollment in primary schools
 - In states like Tamilnadu, it is even 98%
- Programs like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan have helped in this regard
 - Strong focus on bringing out of school children into school
- BUT, most of these children drop out by Class-5 and even more by Class-8
 - More than 50% drop-out, according to government's own statistics

Why do children drop out ?

Quality of education

- Children drop-out because they do not learn anything useful in school!
- Popular perception that they are pulled out of school for child-labor
- Research studies contradict this perception
 - Boredom and lack of learning are the actual reasons cited for children dropping out.
- Parents, even poor parents understand the importance of education for their children
- But if their children do not learn anything in school, what do they do?

The learning quality problem

- Children not learning grammar or algebra or science well? NO!
- Children do not even learn to read (in their mother tongue) or do basic arithmetic problems
- ASER (Annual Status of Education Report), a large-scale national survey conducted every year
- ASER finds that
 - More than 50% children in class-5 are unable to read a simple paragraph in their local language
 - More than 40% children in class-5 cannot do a simple problem in subtraction

The learning quality problem

- Difficult to retain children in school –if they don't gain anything due to education
- Without basic education, increasingly difficult to participate in productive activity
- Form of discrimination against poor children – they are the ones who drop out

Policy questions

- Case of Tamilnadu – a state in south India
 - Progressive government and good investment in education
 - Very high enrollment levels – more than 98%
 - Better infrastructure than rest of India
- Ranks amongst the bottom-most states in learning quality, as measured by the ASER survey!
 - 10-15% lower than national average in reading and arithmetic achievements
- Clearly, pumping more money alone cannot be the best policy

Policy impact on the poor

- Parents, even poor parents, care about what their children learn
- If public schools are poor, they shift their children to private schools
 - In urban areas, even poor parents increasingly send children to private schools
- In the process, end up paying twice for education
 - Through taxes that help fund the public education system
 - As fees for privately-run schools

What would be pro-poor policies?

- Education has to meet the demands of poor parents for better quality
- Focus on measuring learning outcomes
 - Regular, reliable and transparent
 - Simple and participator
- Focus on children who do not acquire basic skills
 - Remedial education as part of the school system

Pro-poor policies: Contd...

- Poor parents participate in this transformation
- Accountability of schools and teachers
 - Parents should be able to question teachers
 - Village-level committees to be strengthened.
- Right to Education Act, recently enacted, has some steps in this direction
- But still some way to go before these become reality...

Conclusions

- Quality of education is the pressing problem in education in India
- Need focus on measuring learning outcomes
- Systems to ensure that children attain these outcomes
- Accountability – if these are not achieved.