

## **WORKSHOP ON EDUCATION, EQUITY, AND SECURITY**

Hotel Taj Bengal, Kolkata

January 2-4, 2002

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Workshop on Education, Equity, and Security was organized by the Commission on Human Security, UNICEF/India, the Pratichi Trust, and Harvard University to explore the relationship between human security and education in the twenty first century. The workshop brought together over three dozen academics, educators, government officials, policy planners, and staff of the UN and non-governmental organizations from South Asia and elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

This group spent two days considering how to ensure high-quality primary education as part of human security. The discussion moved from concepts, to field innovations, to policies and programs.<sup>2</sup> The focus was primary education in India in general, and in Bengal (both West Bengal and Bangladesh) and the nearby state of Madhya Pradesh in particular.

The theme of education and human security was timely. As vividly recounted by Tapas Majumdar, in November 2001, India's Parliament passed unanimously a constitutional amendment ensuring all Indian children of the basic right to elementary education (until 14 years and up to the 8<sup>th</sup> level). Recently, the Supreme Court mandated all Indian schools to provide free cooked mid-day meals. More than 50 years after independence, India has enshrined free and compulsory education into the country's constitutional fabric, but the gap between legal entitlements and on-the-ground realities is vast.

### **EQUITY, RIGHTS, AND SECURITY**

The workshop began by seeking clarity about the linkages among education, equity, rights, and security. Alaka Basu cited the enormous benefits of primary education -- knowledge, information, skills, modernization, socialization, and the opening of young minds to "new worlds." Sabina Alkire presented the Commission's working definition of human security -- protecting the "vital core" from "critical and pervasive threats" in a manner consistent with "human fulfillment." Amartya Sen argued that the underpinning of human security must include a focus on the individual, the role of social arrangements, and the strengthening of human development and human rights.

The workshop reached a consensus quickly that primary education advances human security by enhancing political participation, economic opportunity, and human capabilities. Drawing upon the European Enlightenment, Emma Rothschild reminded us

---

<sup>1</sup> The list of workshop participants is attached.

<sup>2</sup> The agenda for the workshop is attached.

that education also generates self-confidence, reduces fear, enables risk-taking, and supports an orientation towards the future. Good education endows people with better coping capabilities to grapple with crises. Amartya Sen described multiple linkages between education and human security: illiteracy is itself a human insecurity; education provides greater employment security; education enables people to exercise their rights; literacy expands the possibility for political participation; education empowers the underdog, especially women; and finally, education can socialize children towards tolerance and engender respect among diverse communities of people. Education, thus, strengthens all dimensions of freedom from fear and freedom from want.

Amartya Sen explicated some of the relationships among human security, human development, and human rights. Human development, he said, focuses on equity during economic growth, whereas human security is concerned with protection against “downside risks.” He noted that some sections of the population may fall behind even when others progress and, in the face of reversal, they can fall very divided indeed.

Sen asserted that human security is a basic human right. In contrast to the first generation of civil and political rights, Arjun Sengupta argued that the inclusion of the second generation rights of economic and social development raises questions about accountability and culpability. Amartya Sen described how the concept of “imperfect obligations” to ensure economic and social rights may be contrasted by the more “perfect obligations” of governments to desist from violations of civil and political rights. In the case of “imperfect obligations” responsibility is diffuse as opposed to specified to one agent.

Rehman Sobhan warned against thinking that more money, more teachers, and more schools would lead automatically to educated children and the realization of schooling’s social benefits. Structural barriers in access and quality threaten to polarize society and exacerbate social injustice. Identifying relative educational deprivations as the central problem, he called for the “democratization” of educational access, retention, learning, and opportunity. He proposed that the test of an educational system was whether or not it opened opportunities for individuals to participate in the modern economy.

A number of participants remarked that educational performance cannot be delinked from development. Jean Dreze speculated that Himachal Pradesh’s superior performance may be due in part to the egalitarianism of earlier land reforms. Others noted that education is only one of many competing demands of people for development; others include clean water, roads, and electricity. Yashodhara Bagchi pointed out that cultural development also shapes human security, such as gender-based insecurities associated with dowry in India.

## **EXPERIENCES IN INDIA AND BANGLADESH**

Recent surveys show improvement in primary school enrollment and a rise in female school attendance in both India and Bangladesh. At the same time, troubling

patterns are evident. More than 50 years after independence, India has an estimated 50 million children out of school, about a third of the world's total. Female attendance is still low in some areas, and for all students, stagnation in lower grades persists. This deplorable situation is well documented in the PROBE report (1999) that found serious weaknesses in public schooling, disturbing trends toward privatization and commercialization, and consequent fragmentation of educational systems. Similarly in Bangladesh, enrollments have increased but low achievement levels threaten to erode parental support for school attendance.

The workshop's review of innovative field experiences was, however, encouraging. R. Gopalakrishnan described the Education Guarantee Scheme (EGS) of Madhya Pradesh, which is based on partnership among the state government, local governments, and local communities. Under this Scheme, any community beyond one mile of a formal school could demand state support for a community-based school. The state was obligated to provide a new school within 90 days; the community had to contribute space and supervise the local teacher. In 1997 and 1998, more than 26,000 schools were established under this program. These new schools provide coverage to some 1.2 million children. Strong political leadership backed by decentralization to local Panchayats formed the core of these achievements.

Another success story is Kerala State, where social mobilization in historical and contemporary times has helped to achieve near universal literacy, as described by Shiva Kumar. Building on its earlier success in extending state-aided education to formerly disadvantaged sections of the population, during the 1990s, Kerala sought to raise the quality of education. Changes in pedagogy, the introduction of qualitative evaluation methods, revision of textbooks, and strengthening of parental engagement combined to infuse the educational system with new vitality. Some of these reforms are now threatened by the newly elected state government. Himachal Pradesh also has demonstrated remarkable progress, due in part to governmental commitment and parental involvement.

Mustaque Chowdhury and Mansur Ahmed described Bangladesh's experience. BRAC, a non-governmental organization, has developed "non-formal" schools for drop-out children. These schools, which now service about 1.1 million children, have narrowed the urban-rural gap and the gender-gap in access to education. The BRAC run schools have also proven to be economical providing education for only \$19 per student per year. Despite these gains, student achievement has remained disappointing.

Sugata Bose described the deterioration trend of educational performance in West Bengal. A team of researchers (Kumar Rana, Abdur Rafique, and Amrita Sengupta) from the recently established Pritichi Trust, endowed with Nobel Prize funds awarded to Amartya Sen, reported on their village surveys in West Bengal. The Pratichi study confirmed the problems cited by Bose--teacher performance (absenteeism, social distance from students, unionism, and "economism"), weak parental participation, and rapid growth of private tutors. The recent establishment of less formal system called Sishu Siksha Kendras (SSK) seemed constructive, but the consequent dual system threatens to

polarize academic achievement among the rich and poor. Private tutors help children whose family's can afford the extra cost and reduce pressures to reform the public sector. The consequent disparities between class, caste, and gender are significant and perhaps growing.

## **PROGRAMS, POLICIES AND FINANCE**

Throughout the workshop, exchanges inevitably revolved around how to generate solutions to these daunting challenges. Three clusters of strategies were discussed: (1) efficiency, quality, and effectiveness; (2) innovations of parallel systems; and (3) political will and resource mobilization.

### **Efficiency, Quality, and Effectiveness**

The Pratichi presentation sparked commentaries by Pranab Bardhan and Kaushik Basu on institutional mechanisms to enhance efficiency and effectiveness among teachers. Both argued that incentive structures need realignment. In West Bengal, once under-paid teachers have witnessed significant compensation adjustments, to monthly levels ranging from Rs. 5,000 to 10,000. Powerful unions protect the interests of teachers (especially emoluments and transfers). Teachers, however, lack support systems -- refresher training, curricular revitalization, and teacher-parent committees. Educational experts like John Kurrien and Anita Rampal supported the notion that more attention must be devoted to teacher motivation, capabilities, and performance. Amartya Sen suggested that teachers' organizations, which actively and somewhat successfully pressed for the rights of teachers, need to accept more responsibility for teachers' performance. Kalpana Bardhan concluded that rather than adversarial or confrontational approaches among teachers, parents, and governing bodies, the strategy should be cooperative and harmonious. She suggested "three Cs" -- complementarity through cooperation, and competition.

The Pratichi and BRAC surveys both underscored worries about educational quality, curricular content, and child learning. In West Bengal, for example, only 7 percent of grade 3 and 4 students who did not obtain private tutoring could write their names. A survey by Education Watch in Bangladesh showed that less than 2 percent of children completing five years of primary education achieved satisfactory levels of core competencies defined by the government.

While not denying the need for sweeping improvements in quality, a number of participants pointed out the benefits of schooling in and of itself. Citing studies showing that even a few years of schooling for girls proved beneficial for health outcomes, Sugata Bose stressed the contribution of school attendance to building girls' self confidence and exposing them to the modern world.

Questions about the content of education provoked lively discussion. Emma Rothschild reminded us that issues related to textbook content, and even the use of new information technologies, deserve attention. Poonam Muttreja pointed out the

importance of youth education in reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention. Especially contentious is the issue of “multiculturalism” and faith-based education. Amiya Bagchi noted that child socialization is the right of parents, but public education should open rather than narrow young minds. Amartya Sen echoed this concern by applauding the work of some schools and systems, public and faith-based. The issue is not affiliation but rather the quality and socialization of the educational experience.

Strong consensus was achieved of the positive benefits of the Supreme Court decision to provide free, cooked mid-day meals – to enhance child nutrition, school attendance, and cognitive learning. As more than 60 million tons of food stocks sit idle, workshop participants deemed that India can well afford to invest food surpluses into learning by hungry children.

### **Innovations of Parallel Systems**

Innovative parallel systems are being established, such as West Bengal’s SSK, Madhya Pradesh’s EGS, and BRAC’s “non-formal” schools. All three parallel systems seem to enjoy wider coverage, better performance, lower cost, and less social distance between teachers and students than the formal systems. For example, SSK teachers are mostly female, appointed and supervised by the community, and paid about Rs. 1,000 monthly, many-fold less than formal teachers. While not perfect, these parallel systems have helped close the coverage gap.

Both the formal and the informal systems have some distance to go to achieve operational efficiency. Innovations introduced by the less formal systems can be tapped to reform the formal system. These include pre-service training, monthly teacher workshops, regular back-up and inspection, and new curricula. Community participation, common feature of the non-formal schools, has also been instrumental for improving learning. Formal schools can consider the benefits derived from having communities contribute space, strengthening teacher-parent committees, and accountability to local councils. At the same time, local control can introduce provincial biases. For example, where religious or ethnic tensions are strong, locally dominated groups may insist on using the school system to spread their beliefs. National standards can help guard against this danger.

The formal and non-formal systems pose different problems for long-term sustainability. The formal systems can only be invigorated with budget increases and innovative programs. Non-formal systems will have to address the wide disparity in pay between their teachers and those in the formal systems.

### **Quality and Content of Education**

Providing children with an opportunity to enroll in school and complete their primary education is essential. But creating a learning environment in which they can realize their potential is also important. How children are taught, what they are taught and the conditions under which they are taught are critical. Central to these issues is how quality

and achievement in schools is defined. There is a need to develop a common understanding of what constitutes learning achievements, how to monitor and ensure quality assurance, issues of accountability and the roles of teachers, educational authorities, parents, the private sector and the state sector were discussed were also debated. Across these debates the issue of decentralization and governance were emphasized. Moreover, curricula reform as a process that tries to redefine what learning is was debated within the specific contexts of national, local and international trends. A key question discussed was the extent to which curricula content could contribute the appropriate mix of skills and knowledge to promote the personal and professional development of children in a context of increasing globalisation.

Alaka'Basu stressed that despite the issues on the quality and content of education, the educational experience itself may result in significant social benefits. Furthermore education has a significant integrative role given the knowledge and information based economy and the role of mass media and communication systems in modern society. John Kurrien raised the concern based on research findings in India that children can go through a school system without acquiring basic skills of literacy and numeracy. He argued that this has a direct impact on their ability to participate in all spheres of economic, political and social life posing vulnerabilities and insecurities at a very personal level.

Poonam Muttreja highlighted the importance of introducing into curricula reform the linkages between reproductive health issues affecting in particular adolescence, education and human insecurity. This aspect she argued was under researched but had a significant influence on the life chances of youth. Sugata Bose focused attention on the learning environment among many other issues. The physical infrastructure of schools and other conditions was crucial in the continuum between access and outcomes. Also important are the learning materials themselves and the need to revise 'text' books. Who writes them, who vets them and who chooses them determines to a large extent the content of education.

Other issues debated included the role of religion, culture and class in schools as well as relative inequality. Within the region as well as more generally in the south the consequences of dysfunctional educational systems require urgent attention. Emerging lessons from the Indian and Bangladesh experience demonstrate that when access to and the quality of education are linked the returns education and human well-being increase.

### **Political Will and Resource Mobilization**

Recognizing that increasing resources alone is not the solution and that the level of resources is not a measure of quality, all agreed that lack of funding is a problem. The Majumdar Committee laid out the macro-level financing picture in India, recommending that investments in education be increased from the current 3.8 to 6.0 percent of GDP. The Committee also noted that this increase is both affordable and would not impose

harsh budgetary sacrifices. With nearly all of the State governments running up huge debt burdens (and most of the educational budgets going to teacher salaries), an expansion of public budgets for education will be essential.

Regarding resources at the micro-level, Siddiqur Osmani noted that hidden or opportunity cost of children's education may be larger than anticipated. The PROBE and Pratiche studies, however, found high levels of family demand for schooling of both boys and girls, and Martha Chen countered that the opportunity benefits of education may compensate for cost constraints at the family level.

In moving the agenda forward, the strategic choice appears to be incrementalism versus radical reform. While systems overhaul may be required, sustained constructive steps can add up to major improvements. In this regard, Amartya Sen warned against making "the best an enemy of the good." He also recognized the importance of political will, citing education "as a political and moral commitment." Political leadership clearly made a big difference in Madhya Pradesh, and earlier in Kerala. Indeed, R. Gopalakrishnan's proposal to monitor educational data by parliamentary constituencies in Madhya Pradesh could strengthen political accountability in the democratization of education.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Universal, high quality primary education deserves more than episodic treatment. As a beginning, a workshop summary, prepared for the Commission on Human Security, will be submitted to the governments of West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. UNICEF will develop a concise summary for advocacy work in India and for global advocacy to leverage education into next year's G8 meeting in Canada.

Over this coming year, work will be pursued to advance the goal of universalizing quality education – in India in general and in Bengal (West and Bangladesh) and Madhya Pradesh in particular. The sponsoring organizations will try to capitalize on the partnerships formed at the workshop to think through how this group can best contribute. The work is likely to involve information and research, documentation of operational innovations, independent assessments, and advocacy especially of financing.

The research agenda is very practical as well as, in some cases, highly sophisticated, as described by Sudhir Anand in the measurement of educational inequalities. At the operational level, experiences in different states can be mined for application elsewhere. For example, BRAC's rapid appraisal methodologies to assess student achievement, described at the workshop, warrants adaptation for India.

At the international level, the rich and carefully researched experiences of India and Bangladesh potentially offer lessons for other countries on both the positive and negative sides. Interpreting the pools of data will require researchers to generalize from the specific variables relevant on the subcontinent to parallel variables that need to be considered in other parts of the world, particularly in sub Saharan Africa.

Efforts to elaborate the links between education and human security need to continue. For example, there is little research so far that documents the suspected links between weak education and disruptions in society. It appears to many, for example, that a dysfunctional educational system can raise the expectations of graduates without giving them the tools to participate in the modern economy. None of us knows the extent that this mismatch between expectations and opportunities contributes to social problems and social exclusion.

## **List of participants**

### **Workshop on Education, Equity and Security Taj Bengal, Kolkata January 2-4, 2002**

Ms. Sabina Alkire  
Commission on Human Security

Prof. Sudhir Anand  
St. Catherine's College

Dr. Amiya Bagchi

Dr. Jashodhara Bagchi

Dr. Kalpana Bardhan  
University of California, Berkeley

Prof. Pranab Bardhan  
University of California, Berkeley

Dr. Alaka Basu  
Cornell University

Prof. Kaushik Basu  
Cornell University

Prof. Sugata Bose  
Harvard University

Ms. Maria Calivis  
UNICEF India

Dr. Lincoln Chen  
Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University

Prof. Martha Chen  
Harvard University

Dr. Mushtaque Chowdhury  
BRAC

Dr. Asim Dasgupta  
Honourable Minister of Finance  
Government of West Bengal

Ms. Antara Dev Sen  
Pratichi Trust

Dr. Nabaneeta Dev Sen  
Jadavpur University

Prof. Jean Dreze  
Delhi School of Economics

Mr. Kul Gautam  
UNICEF

Manzoor Ahmed  
Special Adviser, UNICEF/Bangladesh

Mr. R. Gopalakrishnan  
Secretary to Chief Minister  
Government of Madhya Pradesh

A. K. Shiva Kumar  
Special Adviser, UNICEF/India

Mr. Pratik Kanjilal  
Pratichi Trust

Dr. John Kurrien  
Centre for Learning Resources, Pune

Dr. Tapas Majumdar  
Economist, NIPFP

Ms. Poonam Muttreja  
MacArthur Foundation/India

Prof. Siddiqur Osmani  
University of Ulster

Dr. Anita Rampal  
Lal Bahadur Shastri National Academy of Administration

Mr. Kumar Rana  
Pratichi (India) Trust

Mr. Abdur Rafique  
Pratichi (India) Trust

Ms. Sumana Raychaudhuri  
Commission on Human Security

Mr. Ashok Nigam  
UNICEF/Regional Office for South Asia

Ms. Emma Rothschild  
King's College, University of Cambridge.

Dr. Ellen Seidensticker  
Global Equity Initiative, Harvard University

Prof. Amartya Sen  
Trinity College, Cambridge University

Ms. Amrita Sengupta  
Pratichi (India) Trust

Prof. Arjun Sengupta  
Jawaharlal Nehru University

Ms. Jayashree Sengupta  
Hindustan Times, New Delhi

Prof. Rehman Sobhan  
Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka

Ms. Vivienne Taylor  
Commission on Human Security

## Agenda

### **Workshop on Education, Equality and Human Security Taj Bengal, Kolkata January 2-4, 2002**

#### **January 2**

**1930**

**Dinner hosted by Harvard University**  
Venue- The Terrace at Taj Bengal

#### **January 3**

0900 – 0945

**Introduction to the Workshop**

Welcome Amartya Sen  
Maria Calivis  
Lincoln Chen

0945 – 1115  
Session 1

**Education and human security**

Chair Kul Gautam

Presentation Amartya Sen

Discussants Sabina Alkire  
Amiya Bagchi  
Rehman Sobhan

1115 – 1130

**Tea break at the Chambers Lounge**

1130 – 1300  
Session 2

**Education, equality and rights**

Chair Emma Rothschild

Presentation Jean Dreze

Discussants Pranab Bardhan  
Arjun Sengupta  
Siddiqur Osmani

1300 – 1430	<b>Lunch at the Taj Club Restaurant</b>
1430 – 1800	<b>Basic Education: Innovations and Issues</b>
1430 – 1530 Session 3	Madhya Pradesh and Kerala
	Chair Maria Calivis
	Presentation Gopalakrishnan
	Discussants Shiva Kumar Anita Rampal
1530 – 1630 Session 4	Bangladesh
	Chair Martha Chen
	Presentation Mushtaque Chowdhry
	Discussants Manzoor Ahmed Ashok Nigam
1630 – 1645	<b>Tea break</b>
1645 – 1800 Session 5	<b>Quality and content of education</b>
	Chair Vivienne Taylor
	Remarks Alaka Basu John Kurrien Poonam Muttreja Sugata Bose
1930	<b>Dinner hosted by UNICEF – Poolside Gardens</b>
<b>January 4</b>	
0900 – 1030 Session 6	<b>Issues in education: West Bengal</b>
	Chair Sugata Bose
	Presentation Kumar Rana

Discussants Kaushik Basu  
Kalpana Bardhan  
Sumana Raychaudhuri

1030 – 1045

**Tea break**

1045 – 1300  
Session 7

**Education, equality and security:  
Policy, financing and research**

Chair Rehman Sobhan

Remarks Tapas Majumdar  
Sudhir Anand  
Ellen Seidensticker

1300 – 1430

**Lunch**  
(Speaker: Asim Dasgupta)

1430 – 1530  
Session 8

**Concluding session**

Chairs Amartya Sen  
Lincoln Chen