

CROP newsletter

Comparative Research Programme On Poverty

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ELEMENTARY EDUCATION AS A PRO-POOR STRATEGY IN INDIA: MYTHS AND REALITY

In 1950 the Indian constitution directed all states to provide "free and compulsory education for all children until they complete the age of fourteen years". Forty-eight years later, less than one third of all adults have completed eight years of schooling. Even in the younger age groups, educational deprivation remains endemic, writes professor Jean Dreze from the Centre for Development Economics at the Delhi School of Economics.

According to the 1991 census, for instance, nearly half of all women in the 15-19 age group are illiterate. A forthcoming Public Report on Basic Education (PROBE) attempts to shed light on the causes of this failure. The report, prepared by a team of researchers based at Centre for Development Economics (Delhi School of Economics) and other institutions, is based on a detailed survey of the schooling system in north India. The PROBE survey was conducted in late 1996 in 188 randomly-selected villages of Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. These four states account for over half of India's out-of-school children. Aside from surveying all the schooling facilities in the sample villages, the PROBE team interviewed 1,221 households.

Myths

The PROBE survey subverts several myths about the causes of educational deprivation in rural India. One myth is that elemen-

tary education in India is free. It may well be free, or nearly free, in the restricted sense that admission fees in government schools are negligible. But education is not free in the wider and more relevant sense that it involves no expenditure for the parents. The PROBE survey indicates that north Indian parents spend more than Rs 300 per year (on fees, books, slates, clothes, etc.) to send a child to a government primary school. This is a major financial burden, especially for poor families with several children of school-going age. Thus, an agricultural laborer in Bihar with two such children would have to work for about 40 days in the year just to send them to primary school.

A second myth is that Indian parents have little interest in education. Contrary to this belief, the PROBE survey suggests that an overwhelming majority of parents, even among deprived sections of the population, attach great importance to the education of their children. For instance, 98 per cent of all parents would like their sons to receive at least 8 years of education, and even for girls the corresponding proportion is as high as 63 per cent. Similarly, 80 per cent of parents favour compulsory education for all children. This is not to deny that pockets of indifference remain, especially when it comes to female education. It would be misleading, however, to regard lack of parental motivation as the main obstacle to the universalisation of elementary education.

A third myth is that economic dependence on child labour is the main reason why poor families are unable to send their children to

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school. Contrary to this assumption, PROBE data on the time utilization of children show that out-of-school children only perform two hours of extra work per day, compared with school-going children. Further, the direction of causation does not necessarily run from child labour to non-attendance. In many cases, it is the other way round: drop-out children take up productive work (of their own choice or through parental pressure) as a "default occupation". Even among children whose income-earning activities are essential for the family, the time spent in these activities is often relatively small. Bearing in mind that school hours are short (at most 6 hours a day for 150-200 days in the year), the proportion of children whose work priorities are incompatible with schooling is likely to be small.

Reality

What, then, prevents so many children from going to school? The main problem seems to be that sending a child to school on a regular basis requires a great deal of parental effort (not only due to the significant costs involved but also in terms of the time and attention required to ensure the child's sustained attendance and progress), and that the poor quality of the schooling system often discourages parents from making that effort. The effort required tends to be all the greater for parents from a deprived background, whose willingness to face the relevant demands depends crucially on what they can expect from the schooling system. This basic problem is often compounded by other factors such as seasonal dependence on child labour, gender bias in educational priorities, and occasional parental irresponsibility. These aggravating factors, however, should not divert attention from the central problem of the disproportion between expected parental effort and the quality of schooling.

First, the schooling infrastructure is inadequate. The typical primary school boasts little more than two classrooms, a leaking roof, and some dilapidated furniture. Second, schools are short of teachers: one third of the sample schools had a single teacher present on the day of the survey. Third, classroom activity is minimal. In half of the sample schools, there was no teaching activity whatsoever when the investigators arrived. Fourth, the stultifying nature of teaching methods and school curricula tends to undermine the motivation of the child. The PROBE survey found a number of cases of children who were still unable to read or write after several years at school.

While the PROBE survey paints a grim pic-

ture of the schooling situation in India, there is a sense in which these findings are good news. If child labour or parental motivation were the main obstacles to universal elementary education, the government might have good reasons to feel somewhat powerless.

On the other hand, much can be done to reduce the costs of schooling (e.g. by providing school meals), and to improve its quality (e.g. by raising teacher-pupil ratios). The main challenge seems to be to build the political commitment required for a radical improvement of the schooling system.

1998 HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) 9th annual edition of the Human Development Report focuses on the issue of consumption patterns in today's world and its implications on human development. Despite a dramatic surge in global consumption - with real expenditures doubling over the last 25 years - more than one billion people still lack the opportunity to consume in ways that meet their basic needs.

This year, global consumption of goods and services will reach a record high of \$ 24 trillion, while levels of poverty in developing countries soar, and homelessness and illiteracy in industrialised countries continue to rise, says the 1998 Human Development Report.

The Report documents the devastating human consequences of the growing gap between rich and poor, as well as the disheartening priorities of the world's consumers. According to the report the three richest people in the world own assets that exceed the combined Gross Domestic Products of the world's 48 poorest countries, while 86% of the world's goods and services are consumed by just 20% of the world's people. Yet, those who consume the least - namely the poor - suffer the most from the resulting pollution of the land, air and water that they depend on for survival.

For more information about this year's Human Development Report, look at <http://www.undp.org/undp/hdro/98.htm> or write to: Human Development Report Office, 336 E. 45th Street, Uganda House, New York, NY 10017, USA, tel:+1 212 906-3661, fax:+1 212 906-3677

The email address is

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THE STATE OF WORLD POPULATION 1998: THE NEW GENERATIONS

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has launched its new State of the World Population 1998: The New Generations. The Report states that the momentum of global population growth is slowing. Due to the efforts of the past 30 years, growth rates have fallen and will fall further in the coming decades. World population, will pass 6 billion in mid-1999. Whether it ultimately grows to 8, 10 or 12 billion will depend on policy decisions in the next decade. Over 90% of the growth will take place in today's developing countries.

A complete version of the Report can be downloaded from the UNFPA web-site at: <http://www.unfpa.org/SWP/SWPMAN.HTM>

or you may contact the United Nations Population Fund, Information and External Relations Division, 220 E. 42nd Street, New York, NY 10017, USA, tel:+1 212 297 5020, fax:+1 212 557 6416, email: ryanw@unfpa.org

POVERTY RESEARCH THROUGH A NON-WESTERN LENS

At the 14th World Congress of Sociology, the International Social Science Council and CROP organised a special session on "Poverty Research Through a Non-Western Lens". The session was chaired by professor Else Øyen, and the focus was on Western imperialism in the social sciences. The following papers were presented and discussed: *Discourses on Poverty in a Changing World*, by Abram de Swaan, Amsterdam School for Social Science Research, The Netherlands; *Living Dangerously? Discourses and Dimensions of Poverty in the Third World*, by Habibul H. Khondker, National University of Singapore, Singapore; *Third World Feminism: How Do We Understand the New Poverty?*, by Rhoda Reddock, University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago; *The Impact of Western Sociology on Poverty Research in Poland*, by Wielieslawa Warzywoda-Kruszynska, University of Lodz, Poland and *Poverty Concepts in an International Organisation Engaged in Poverty*, by Sonia M. Cuales, United Nations - ECLAC.

editorial

The World Bank has entered the arena as a major actor of poverty reduction. Its earlier engagement in development through economic growth and structural adjustment programmes is now to reorient itself towards poverty reduction. The World Development Report 2000 will outline the Bank's new strategy, and several poverty researchers have been invited to provide inputs for the Report.

It is important that this process of reorientation be followed closely and changes monitored and assessed by external actors and poverty researchers who work independently of the Bank.

Some of the immediate questions that arise are whether the Bank, given its past history, has the vision, the organisation and the legitimacy to become an efficient mover for poverty reduction.

The World Development Report 1990 outlined poverty reduction as continued economic growth, accompanied by broad-based labour intensive strategies, investments in basic health and education to improve human capital, and some limited transfers to those who are not able to enter the labour market. Whatever a new vision may look like, at least two lines of research can be outlined. One which studies the impact of the Bank strategies on actual poverty reduction, as well as their impact on other social phenomena. Another which studies the impact of the Bank's initiatives on other major actors. Over time the Bank has influenced the vision of governments and multinationals. Its mere presence may exclude other actors with a different vision from a fuller participation. An example is the UN family and its increasing emphasis on a broad understanding of human rights as the implementation of social, cultural, political and economic rights to reduce poverty.

Another area of research is the relationship between the organisation of the Bank and the opportunities and constraints its structure and professional expertise provide for the undertaking of poverty reduction. Take as an example the many poverty assessments the Bank has commissioned, and in which poverty researchers have been strongly involved. How much of an impact have these assessments had on the actual poverty reducing policies of the Bank and the countries in which the assessments have been carried out? Is there a receiving apparatus in the Bank for the wealth of data obtained in the assessments? Has the Bank developed a strong expertise on poverty theory which goes beyond economic theory? What happens when the data provided in the assessments do not fit in with the current vision of the Bank? What kind of political and organisational obstacles does the Bank have to overcome for a successful implementation on the country level?

THE WORLD BANK AND POVERTY IN AFRICA

In collaboration with the Chr. Michelsen's Institute (CMI) a group of researchers from CROP, have made a study on the poverty reducing strategies of the World Bank.

The purpose of the report was to review experiences of the World Bank in operationalising policies for poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan Africa. The focus was on the institution's analytical work on poverty; the country assistance strategies and the policy dialogue; the lending programme and outputs; and the relations and linkages between these three exercises. Three country cases have been selected from Southern Africa. The report is a study of formulation and implementation of policies. It is not an attempt to analyse or evaluate the impact of Bank policies in terms of reducing poverty, although the appropriateness of these policies is assessed. Below are some excerpts from the summary of the report:

"The 1990s has seen a renewed emphasis on poverty reduction in official development assistance. Most major aid agencies now formally define poverty reduction as an overriding goal or as a priority alongside other priority objectives. Donor activities to pursue poverty reduction are manifested at many levels. Clearly formulated and operational pro-poor policies are however, in most cases lacking. Most information on poverty reduction seems confined to data on activities and output with little or nothing on impact and effectiveness."

"At the level of development theory, the World Bank has maintained a remarkably constant approach to poverty reduction throughout its 50-year history. Its assumptions has always been to view development and poverty reduction as fundamentally an issue of economic growth. Poverty reduction was not originally a goal in itself, but rather an expected, albeit unarticulated consequence of economic growth."

"[The report] makes several critical com-

A third area of research touches on the legitimacy of the Bank to engage in poverty reduction and the moral and political dilemmas this poses. Poverty reduction is a conflict-ridden field which calls for diplomacy, trust and a control of vested interests if any reduction is to succeed. The past history of Bank initiated structural adjustment programmes has created an animosity in many developing countries which does not place the Bank as a preferred partner in sensitive

ments. Most importantly it raises fundamental questions about the Bank-strategy itself. Is a reliance on economic growth with human development...sufficient to bring poverty reduction in Africa? The report points out that the Bank pays scant attention to inequalities and distribution of assets as constraints on growth and poverty reduction. This involves not only material inequalities, but also gender relations and the distribution of political power and the ability of the poor groups to influence public policy. This may affect overall growth and it may affect income growth of poor groups disproportionately. Growth, even when combined with increased social spending, may therefore simply not be enough to make any real dent in the problem of poverty in highly unequal African countries. The report also makes several critical comments on the Bank's approach to cost recovery in the social sectors and the design of the social safety net operations."

"Case studies of the bank's operationalisation of its poverty reduction are provided based on data from three countries: Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe. These three countries are often mentioned in Bank documents as examples of countries where there are close links between poverty studies, country assistance strategies and lending programmes. The links are confirmed in this study and it is evident that the poverty studies has had some impact on bank policies and also on raising awareness of poverty issues in the countries concerned."

The study was commissioned by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A full text of the report can be obtained from the Ministry, Policy Planning and Evaluation Unit, P.O. Box 8114 Dep., N-0032 Oslo, Norway, fax: +47 22 24 95 80, email eval@ud.dep.telemax.no

dealings. On the other hand, it can be argued that efficient poverty reduction needs many actors, and it is particularly important to have on board a heavy actor such as the Bank. Wrapped around these controversial issues are the likewise controversial aspects of economic growth and its implications for both poverty production and poverty reduction. In truth, an analytical area to be sorted out by independent researchers and supported by empirical studies.

Else Øyen, Chair of CROP

CO-PUBLISHING WITH ZED BOOKS

In July CROP signed an agreement with the London based publisher Zed Books. CROP and Zed will co-publish a series of books entitled "CROP INTERNATIONAL STUDIES IN POVERTY RESEARCH". The first book to appear in the series is The International Glossary on Poverty, edited by David Gordon and Paul Spicker. It will be available in January 1999.

Zed Books was founded in 1977, and publishes some forty books annually on international and Third World issues. Zed's intention is the publication and effective distribution, North and South, of books that matter.

CROP has chosen to co-operate with Zed Books, because CROP and Zed has a common goal in publishing academic books that play a constructive role in educating people about the urgent need to make the world a more just, peaceful and responsible place for all humanity. For more information about Zed, a list of new titles and a complete stocklist, visit their web-site at: <http://www.zedbooks.demon.co.uk/>

RECENT POVERTY RESEARCH

A selection of useful materials on recent poverty research is available from The Electronic Development and Environment Information System (ELDIS). You will find a link to a selection of documents available in full text at the CROP web-site.

BEST PRACTICES IN POVERTY RESEARCH

CROP has been commissioned by UNESCO and the MOST programme to develop a framework for a project on best practices in poverty reduction.

To involve interested members of the CROP network and bring in different experiences as part of the project you are invited to enter a CROP/MOST competition and write a *theoretical* paper on poverty reduction and best practices. What does "best practice" in relation to a certain kind of poverty reduction mean, and how can the context in which the best practice works be described and analysed.

Authors of the best papers will be invited to the first CROP workshop on the project, all expenses paid. The workshop will take place in late 1999 and likely venue is the new International Centre for Human Sciences, Byblos, Lebanon.

The most outstanding paper will receive a prize of USD 1.000. Two more papers will receive a prize of USD 500 each.

Deadline for papers: **March 15, 1999**. Maximum length: 20 pages. Language: English.

You may contact the CROP Secretariat for further information.

LIST OF CROP EVENTS

1998 - 1999

September 98:

18-22: "The Role of the State in Poverty Alleviation II", CROP/SALDRU/University of Cape Town workshop in Cape Town, South Africa.

March 99:

18-20: "Poverty and Social Justice in Latin America", CROP/Universidad Ibero-americana/Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey workshop, Mexico City, Mexico.

May 99:

19-21: "Law and Poverty III: Law as a Tool for Combating Poverty", CROP/IISL workshop, Oñati, Spain

WORKSHOPS UNDER PREPARATION

October 99:

"The Role of the State in Poverty Alleviation III"
"Best Practices in Poverty Reduction", a joint CROP/UNESCO/MOST workshop, likely venue, Byblos, Lebanon

CROP IN BRIEF

CROP is a world-wide network of researchers and experts on poverty. The aim of CROP is to establish an arena for interdisciplinary and comparative research on poverty in developed and developing countries. CROP organises regional workshops, symposia and international conferences, promotes joint research projects and publications, links poverty researchers and disseminates information about poverty research, on a non-profit basis. CROP has developed a database on poverty researchers, and documentation of ongoing research. CROP is chaired by professor Else Øyen, University of Bergen, Norway.

If you wish to have your name listed in CROPnet, you are welcome to write the CROP Secretariat and request a copy of the CROP Questionnaire. For further information please contact the CROP Secretariat

WEBPAGE FOR CROP

Those who have an Internet connection and a WWW browser programme installed, find the CROP web page at <http://www.crop.org> The pages hold general information about CROP, news about past and ongoing activities, as well as the latest CROP newsletter.

Please note: We can no longer answer the increased demand for copies of single papers presented at CROP conferences and workshops. However, if you have the patience, most of the papers become available through the publications that follow the conferences and will be duly announced. We still supply the authors addresses, phone & fax numbers.

AT THE CROP SECRETARIAT

you will meet:

Else Øyen, Chair of CROP

Hans Egil Offerdal, CROP Co-ordinator

Einar Braathen, CROP Programme Officer

Inge Erling Tesdal, CROP Assistant

THE QUOTE

"The poor people and the poor nations - poor in different ways, not only for lack of food, but also deprived of freedom and other human rights - will judge those who steal these goods, accumulating for themselves an imperialist monopoly of economic and political domination at the expense of others."

Pope John Paul II