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ABSTRACT

Noting that more than 60 million eligible school-aged Asian children are not enrolled in elementary school, this overview of educational provision in the Asian and Pacific region briefly discusses 10 topics. These are (1) the number of children not being educated in the region; (2) universalization of primary education; (3) three dimensions of universal primary education; (4) target populations, such as girls, tribes, and other disadvantaged groups, special language groups, and handicapped children; (5) retention in school; (6) school achievement; (7) curriculum renewal; (8) new approaches to teacher preparation; (9) new structures for planning and management; and (10) forms of education designed to complement the conventional elementary school. (RH)

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Towards Universalization of Primary Education in Asia and the Pacific

REGIONAL OVERVIEW

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UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION IN ASIA AND THE PACIFIC – REGIONAL OVERVIEW

Children without schools – magnitude

Universal primary education was first adopted as a goal for the countries of the Asia region in the 'Karachi Plan' (1960), which proposed 'that every country of this region should provide a system of universal, compulsory and free primary education of seven years or more within a period of not more than 20 years (1960-1980) . . .'. This target has not been attained, due in part to a more rapid expansion of the population than foreseen in 1960. However, some of the shortfall is attributable to a slackening of the expansion of primary education in the early 1970s, which followed changes in the education and development policies of some countries.

Primary education in about 15 countries of the region covers six years, with the age of admission generally at 6. In others, primary education covers five years. In three countries, the primary cycle is three or four years, but essentially a segment of a longer span which covers eight years of first-level education. In countries which have attained a high enrolment ratio, the trend is for the primary span to be lengthened to include the lower secondary years. In the industrialized countries of the region, (Australia, New Zealand, Japan, USSR) the period of compulsory schooling covers the first IX or X grades, with a very high percentage of pupils staying on in school until 16-17 years of age.

Universalization of primary education (UPE) has now been accepted by many governments in the region as a priority objective, and target dates have been fixed for achieving it. The effect of this renewed commitment on the provision of primary education for all children is beginning to show. However, in the years ahead, it will call for sustained and consistent effort. To assess the magnitude of the effort, it may be convenient to look at the existing situation in

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terms of the gross enrolment ratios which different countries have reached (see Table 2)¹ on the following page.

Table 1. Enrolment by level of education in Asia and the Pacific
1970-1982

Region and level of education	Enrolment (in thousands)				Average annual growth%		
	1970	1975	1980	1982	1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1982
Total Asia and the Pacific (31 countries)							
Total all levels	372,866	471,432	518,068	521,980	4.9	1.9	0.4
First level	266,037	328,311	347,954	353,900	4.3	1.2	0.9
Second level	95,329	128,122	151,295	147,543	6.1	3.4	-1.3
Third level	11,500	14,999	18,819	20,537	5.5	4.6	4.5
Developed Asia and the Pacific (4 countries)							
Total all levels	74,753	74,508	74,818	75,199	0.1	0.1	0.3
First level	37,448	33,642	35,526	36,336	-2.1	1.1	1.1
Second level	30,683	33,417	31,244	30,799	1.7	-1.3	-0.7
Third level	6,622	7,449	8,049	8,064	2.4	1.6	0.1
Developing Asia and the Pacific (excl. China) (26 countries)							
Total all levels	166,302	200,115	239,042	258,859	3.8	3.6	4.1
First level	123,309	143,729	166,158	177,845	3.1	2.9	3.5
Second level	38,163	49,337	63,274	69,716	5.3	5.1	5.0
Third level	4,830	7,049	9,610	11,298	7.9	6.4	8.4

Source: Unesco Office of Statistics

In this regard four patterns are discernible. The four industrialized countries (Australia, New Zealand, Japan and USSR), which account for 13.7 per cent of the total regional population, have already fully achieved universal schooling of ten years' duration. Of the developing countries, 13 (Group A) have a gross enrolment ratio for both sexes of 100 per cent or more, which does not necessarily

1. A gross enrolment ratio for a given level of education is derived by dividing the total enrolment for this level of education, regardless of age, by population of the age-group which according to national regulations should be enrolled at this level. In the developing countries such enrolment includes children who may be under age or over age with reference to the level of education.

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Table 2. Selected indicators of the expansion of primary education in Asia and the Pacific 1970-1982 (29 countries)¹

	Gross enrolment ratios (in %)				Disparity between sexes (in %)		Enrolment: Average annual growth rate (in %)		
	1970		1982		1970	1982	1970- 1975	1975- 1980	1980- 1982
	MF	MF	M	F	MF	MF			
Developed countries									
Australia	115	109	110	109	0	1	-1.1	1.0	-0.8
Japan	99	100	100	100	0	0	1.5	2.7	0.3
New Zealand	110	102	103	101	2	2	-0.5	-0.5	-1.2
USSR	104	107	...	...	...	...	-3.7	0.3	1.8
Group A (100% and more)									
China	102	116	127	104	...	23	7.5	-0.6	-0.9
Democratic People's Rep. of Korea ²	...	113	115	112	...	3	...	...	...
Fiji	106	109	110	109	4	1	1.6	-1.2	0.6
Indonesia	77	116	122	109	12	13	3.6	7.5	2.8
Lao People's Democratic Rep.	64	100	107	93	31	14	5.3	8.6	4.2
Mongolia	116	106	105	108	9	-3	2.7	2.1	2.1
Philippines	108	107	106	107	2	-1	1.7	2.3	0.7
Republic of Korea	103	104	106	103	1	3	-0.5	0.2	-1.7
Singapore	106	104	106	102	8	4	-2.0	-2.3	-2.2
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam ³	119	113	120	106	11	14	...	1.3	3.5
Sri Lanka	99	104	106	101	10	5	-3.0	7.7	1.5
Tonga	117	108	110	105	6	5	1.5	-0.7	-2.1
Turkey	108	103	111	95	29	16	1.7	0.7	3.5
Group B (85-99%)									
Burma	87	86	88	84	9	4	1.8	3.3	2.9
India	73	85	100	70	34	30	2.9	2.0	4.4
Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	74	97	112	81	41	31	8.2	3.1	3.5
Malaysia	87	92	93	91	7	2	2.4	1.3	1.5
Nepal	26	94	141	43	35	98	11.9	14.1	19.2
Samoa	98	99	97	101	-2	-4	2.1	0.2	-0.9
Thailand	91	95	98	93	8	5	3.0	3.3	0.8

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Table 2. Selected indicators of the expansion of primary education in Asia and the Pacific 1970-1982 (29 countries) (cont'd)

	Gross enrolment ratios (in %)				Disparity between sexes (in %)		Enrolment: Average annual growth rate (in %)		
	1970		1982		1970	1982	1970-1975	1975-1980	1980-1982
	MF	MF	M	F	MF	MF			

Group C (below 70%)

Afghanistan	25	36	57	14	34	43	5.4	7.3	6.4
Bangladesh	52	64	78	49	34	29	9.6	-0.3	3.2
Bhutan	6	15	19	10	9	9	10.3	11.1	10.9
Pakistan	40	58	81	33	35	48	5.6	6.1	4.6
Papua New Guinea	52	66	73	58	25	15	4.5	4.7	4.3

Source: Unesco Office of Statistics.

1. Within each group, countries are ranked according to the value of the gross enrolment ratio for both sexes (MF) in 1982.
2. Data refer to 1976.
3. Data for 1970 refer to 1975.

mean UPE. In these countries the expansion of enrolment in the future will follow demographic trends and efforts to extend schooling to children in remote areas. The 13 countries in Group A account for 48.5 per cent of the total regional population.

Group B comprises seven countries (30.2 per cent of the total regional population) which have reached 85-99 per cent gross enrolment ratios. This is the empirical threshold beyond which further expansion is possible in a relatively short-term, essentially by reducing very substantially the drop-out and grade repetition rates and increasing the enrolment of special population groups notably girls, and children in remote geographical areas. Countries in Group C (five countries) have less than 70 per cent gross enrolment ratios, ranging to a low of 15 per cent. They account for 7.5 per cent of the total population of the region. The recent average annual growth rates of enrolment in this group have been around 5-10 per cent, but would have to be raised and sustained at around 7-12 per cent to ensure universal primary education in the 1990s.

Taking the region as a whole, the current shortfall of primary education places means more than 60 million children of primary age-group are not enrolled.

Universalization of primary education

Primary education in the Asia and the Pacific region is seen to have a particular long-term value in bringing about social and economic transformation. Expression of this faith is enshrined in the constitutions of many Member States and is elaborated in national development plans, which give a high priority to the achievement of the goal of universal primary education.

The problems associated with the universalization of primary education, as well as the importance of overcoming those problems, have received much attention in regional meetings and conferences. The Karachi Plan, formulated in 1959-1960 by representatives of Asian countries, put stress on the provision of free and compulsory education for a minimum of seven years' duration. Subsequent conferences of ministers of education of the region continued to support this goal, especially through the document which became known as the Asian Model of Educational Development.¹ The declaration adopted by the Ministers of Education at MINEDASO IV (Colombo, 1978) re-affirmed the 'commitment to the principle of universal schooling of children'.

Three dimensions of universal primary education (UPE)

The countries of the region are making efforts to see that the goal of universal primary education is reached as early as possible. While their plans² indicate a continuing emphasis on providing facilities and promoting enrolments, there is an increasing concern for the improvement of the quality of primary schooling. In this context, the universalization of primary education may be seen to have three dimensions:

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1. Unesco. *An Asian model of educational development – perspective for 1965-1980*. Paris (1966).
 2. At the request of Unesco, 12 countries prepared studies of their national programme for universal primary education; these studies have been published by Unesco (Bangkok, 1984).

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1. *Universal access.* This involves providing facilities and incentives for enrolment in primary education on a scale and in forms adequate and suitable to ensure that all children of primary school age have access to and are able to benefit from such facilities.
2. *Retention and completion.* Educational facilities cannot be effective unless children stay long enough to acquire the basic learning skills.
3. *Learning achievement level.* This refers to the standards of pupil performance and achievement through which the objectives of primary education are realized. Improvements in various aspects of curriculum development, teaching/learning materials, and pre-service and in-service teacher education are needed to help children attain the required levels of achievement. Viewed in a larger context, the issue is to ensure that equal opportunity for access is matched by equal opportunity for educational success.

Universal access: targets

Most of the countries in the region have adopted policies with target dates for achieving UPE in a phased manner.¹ Programmes and projects covering new structures and processes for implementing these policies have also been initiated. The target dates mentioned in the national plans of the countries concerned suggest that by 1995 almost all countries of the region would have achieved universal access to primary education.

The majority of out-of-school children are girls, so the full enrolment of girls will, in fact, largely complete the task of universalizing primary education in many countries of the region. In one country, for instance, it is estimated that girls constitute three-fourths of the non-enrolled children in the compulsory education age-group.

While girls constitute the majority of children outside the reach of primary education in the region, there are several disadvantaged groups (boys and girls) who have yet to be brought fully within its ambit. They include, among others, the rural poor, minority groups, nomadic tribes, people of mountainous and other inaccessible areas, and urban slum-dwellers.

1. *Op. cit.* National studies.

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The provision of educational services for population groups with special characteristics calls for programmes tailored to their specific needs. This applies in particular to groups with languages other than the national language. Initial instruction in the mother tongue and bilingual teaching are considered essential.

The considerable number of handicapped children in the region constitutes another group with special needs. At present there are only about 120,000 places available in special education institutions in 20 countries. However, a majority of children with handicaps could be educated within ordinary schools, but this 'mainstreaming' would require the reorientation of teachers in dealing with children with handicaps.

Retention in school

In many countries of the region, a major factor undermining universal primary education is that a large proportion of the children who enrol in school drop out before completing the entire primary cycle, in fact, usually within the first two years. The incidence of drop-out is indicative of the low efficiency of the education system and represents a waste of human and financial resources invested in the system. More importantly, drop-out means that children's aspirations are frustrated by the inability of the school to respond effectively to their learning needs.

Table 3 shows the drop-out rates and the inverse 'survival rates' (i.e. the percentage of children entering school in a given year and who complete the entire primary cycle) for 17 developing countries in the region. It can be seen that the drop-out rates vary from a low of 3 per cent to a high of 80 per cent. Available data imply that at the end of the 1970s, more than 25 million children dropped out of school each year before reaching grade IV. Generally, countries which have achieved a high enrolment ratio have also reduced drop-out rates to a minimum.

The causes of drop-out are known: they are social, cultural, economic and also educational. Indeed, because the educational causes work in combination with social and economic causes, they are often under-estimated by educators. Studies have shown that drop-out affects the enrolment of children from poor families more than others. Since the incidence of drop-out is higher in the first two grades, most drop-outs retain no basic skills provided by the school.

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Unless direct measures are taken aimed specifically at the problem of drop-out, the percentage of drop-outs in an educational system tends to maintain itself around the same level over a long period of time. In a number of developing countries determined educational measures aimed at preventing large-scale drop-out have been effective within a quite short period and have dramatically raised the retention rates (for example, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mongolia and Thailand).

Table 3. Survival and drop-out in primary education
(17 developing countries)

Country	Cohort beginning in:	Number of grades	% Survival to last grade	% Drop-out before last grade
Afghanistan	1980	8	54	46
Bangladesh	1980	5	20	80
Bhutan	1976	6	20	80
Burma	1972	5	32	68
Fiji	1980	6	90	10
India	1969	5	41	59
Indonesia	1980	6	68	32
Iran, Islamic Republic of	1969	6	70	30
Malaysia	1980	6	97	3
Mongolia	1977	3	92	8
Philippines	1979	6	72	28
Republic of Korea	1980	6	97	3
Singapore	1980	6	90	10
Socialist Republic of Viet Nam	1977	5	46	54
Sri Lanka	1980	6	91	9
Thailand	1976	7	43	57
Tonga	1978	6	92	8

Source: Unesco Office of Statistics.

Another form of wastage at the primary level is grade repetition — due to poor examination scores or low attendance or other reasons. In many countries of the region, the average repetition rate is around 10-12 per cent at the primary level.

Several studies show that repetition, especially in the earlier grades, does not improve achievement levels of the children, and has

no discernible effect on school 'standards'. In the developing countries, most repeaters tend to become drop-outs. One study in Thailand found that two-thirds of all drop-outs had been repeaters. Unlike drop-out, wastage by repetition is a purely school-made phenomenon.

A strategy for universalizing primary education needs to include specific measures for promoting the retention of children in school and, in particular, the progressive reduction and eventual elimination of grade repetition and drop-out.

School achievement

All the effort and expense of providing school facilities, materials and teachers means little if, at the end of the primary school cycle, children have not acquired appropriate abilities and attitudes to prepare them for life. Children and their parents will not support a school by attending and co-operating unless they are convinced that there will be a positive learning outcome.

Educators in many countries of the region are looking with concern at the level of achievement of primary school children. Assessment studies have been made of the outcomes of the primary school system in Indonesia, Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka, Australia, Thailand and in some states of India. In almost all cases, the level of achievement of children has been found less than satisfactory.

These studies have underlined the need for comprehensive educational measures so that the majority of children can reach a specified standard. Almost all countries that have conducted national assessments of pupil performance have introduced major programme reforms in an attempt to increase enrolment ratios and reduce drop-out, as well as improve school achievement.

Efforts to improve primary education seem to emphasize the following factors:

- i) the effective preparation of young children for primary schooling;
- ii) the implementation of more effective strategies and methods of instruction, to enable all children to attain an agreed level of competence in the basic skills of numeracy, literacy and communication, in the 'life-skills' (co-operating with others,

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habits of systematic and hard work) and in one or more manual skills;

- iii) the provision of teachers with competencies, attitudes and perceptions necessary to enhance their pupils' achievement and with the skills required to enlist out-of-school resources;
- iv) the effective involvement of parents and the community in the education of their children.

Renewal of primary education

This renewal of primary education calls for a global and comprehensive approach covering curriculum development, teacher training and improvements in teaching methods and materials as well as in planning and management.

In several countries of the region, as stated above, there has been a re-examination of the curriculum in relation to UPE when it was felt that the existing curriculum did not meet the diversified needs of learners, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. Irrelevant curricula and unsuitable teaching methods are seen as an important reason for non-enrolment and early withdrawal from school. Curriculum renewal in these countries is moving towards:

- i) decentralized adaptation of the core curriculum to meet the specific needs of local communities;
- ii) infusion into the curriculum of issues which are of great concern to local communities, such as health, hygiene, nutrition, population education and environmental education;
- iii) emphasis on socially useful productive work aimed at linking education and the world of work and at promoting the dignity of manual work;
- iv) use of the local environment as a learning resource, particularly for generating concern for its protection and preservation;
- v) strengthening of the science and mathematics content of the curriculum to prepare children more adequately for living in a society impacted by modern science and technology;
- vi) an orientation with respect to moral values.

New approaches to teacher preparation

In the context of the effort that is being made to universalize primary education, countries of the region are showing great concern with the re-definition of teachers' roles and with the improvement of their competences particularly the latter because of its implication for the quality of education and pupil achievement. The new roles of teachers visualize their involvement in identifying the problems of groups out-of-school, in community education and affairs, in intensive work with potential drop-outs, and in raising children's achievement level. Then, with the development of 'complementary forms' of education (discussed in a later section of this chapter), the preparation of teaching personnel for these innovative programmes calls for special attention.

With increased emphasis on in-service teacher training, a variety of approaches are being used in the region, including correspondence courses and radio and television packages (comprising radio or television broadcasts, pre- and post-broadcast discussion and support material in print). In some countries, teachers' centres are being set up to provide consultation and other services to teachers, along with weekend orientation courses. Networks of institutions (e.g. 'cluster institutions') providing support services to each other is another approach used for the in-service upgrading of teachers' competences through school-based or area-based programmes.

New structures for planning and management

Three important considerations influence the design of structures for planning and implementing UPE:

- i) the need to bring together the contributions of various departments and agencies of the government concerned with primary education;
- ii) the need to plan and manage the universal primary education programme in a way that will respond to the characteristics of the population groups concerned;
- iii) the need for the full involvement and participation of the communities.

In regard to the first consideration, governments have set up national level, primary education commissions or offices, which bring under one umbrella the contributions of different government agencies and deploy the back-up support of the required expert services

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in a co-ordinated manner. The second consideration, in some way the most crucial one, involves developing the structures and processes of micro-level (community, district) planning and management. The capabilities of supervision and back-up services are then organized at micro-level where the plans should match the characteristics and needs of the specific population groups and areas to be served. Such developments are now taking shape in several countries, for example, 'cluster schools' in Sri Lanka, 'centre schools' in Pakistan, 'leader schools' in Thailand, 'school complexes' in India. Parallel initiatives in involving the local communities, the third consideration, have been undertaken on a limited scale in several countries. These experiences indicate both the difficulties and the benefits of meeting this requirement for the effective attainment of UPE.

Complementary forms of education

Recognizing that conventional primary schooling may not be able to meet the needs of all out-of-school children, several countries in the region are experimenting with or have developed other forms of education to complement the conventional primary school.

In one country, 100,000 'non-formal education centres' have been established, enrolling nearly three million children. The curriculum is flexible and aims at achieving in two years the basic attainments reached by children in five years of formal schooling. In another country, 'literacy centres' and 'community learning centres' are being established to provide a parallel structure having links with the formal system to provide need-based learning opportunities to out-of-school children in the 5-10, 10-14 and 14+ age-groups.

'Slack farming' schools have been set up in one country with the task to enrol children who cannot go to full-time schools because of financial difficulties. Another country runs some schools having a simplified curriculum with 20-26 weeks of instruction, depending upon the actual conditions of the locality. Learning centres have been set up in another country, to allow school drop-outs to study at home and receive individual guidance and evaluation of achievement at the learning centre. In yet another country, five-year primary schools have been set up which use a condensed curriculum and run in shifts.

In a number of areas, children cannot attend schools because schools do not exist. This is particularly true in sparsely populated

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areas where the establishment of a school within a village or zone is not found feasible on economic grounds. Similarly, nomadic populations, moving from one place to another, require alternative institutional arrangements for education. A number of countries of the region have developed innovative 'moving schools' to meet this situation.

Multi-grade teaching, combination of grades, and new admissions on alternate years, are being adopted in some countries to rationalize the use of educational facilities in sparsely populated communities. The national study of China mentions that full-time schools with multi-grade teaching 'have become a major form in popularizing primary school education'.

Distance learning is emerging in many countries as a major means to reach those groups who, for various reasons, find it difficult to enrol in schools. Because of its flexibility, distance learning is able to cater to educational needs of diverse groups, including the in-service training of teachers.

In many countries of the region, radio and television are being used increasingly to support conventional and complementary educational activities. Television and radio lessons, which are listened to or viewed in schools or community centres, are followed by discussion under the supervision of a teacher. In one country, educational programmes are transmitted through a national satellite for the benefit of primary schools in selected rural areas.