

Aid in Education: A study of Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal being one of the least developed countries in the world is dependent on aids from other nations and external agencies. Since, the inception of modern education system in Nepal, aids has been pouring in but the impact of education for overall development of the nation does not commensurate with the amount invested in the education system. The sheer amount of aid going by the amount given by outside agencies is very impressive. But looking at the final details at the nature and amount of aid tells somewhat a different story. Furthermore the amount is also found to be different in different sources. The amount publicised by the agencies very often does not match to the amount disclosed by the government of Nepal. Superficially, the both problem and solution of Nepal's lack of progress and development including educational appears very simple. Nepal being a poor country is not in position to provide all the resources needed, donor agencies and countries try to bridge the gap. But despite of long relationship between Nepal and donors and resultant foreign aid, it does not seem to be working sufficiently enough for the people of Nepal. In this article, the various factors that influences the nature of aids in Nepal's education system will be dealt with.

Keywords: Nepal, Education Policy, Foreign Aid, Gender disparity, Social inertia.

I. Introduction

Education is very crucial for the socio-economic and political development of a nation that is why the policy on education also bears the burden of moving a nation forward holistically. It is true that education mobilises the participation of people in political activities but the other truth is that political system decides what should be taught in schools. There is relationship between education and political power in terms of control and legitimization and also as a source of political discontent. Thus, political development and education are interrelated concepts. The prevailing understanding is that mainly the economic imperatives shape the education policy, which is basically rooted in how western education policies are framed. Thus, there is hegemony of UK and USA in the field of education as well. Therefore, other nations may be compelled to follow their model; however, in the process, a possible diversity of approaches may be missing to the issue of education policy development, one that is more holistic and sustainable towards the culture. While economic aim of education policy is to increase productivity, in the context of developing nations it must also be socially justifiable and culturally acceptable. The study of Nepal may add to the discourse of small country in developing education policy. However, apart from relevance for local issues, examining how education policy works in unique environment would add to the

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discussion about the relationship between education and nation building in terms of socio-economic and political development.

II. Reasons for aid ineffectiveness

Being a small nation Nepal is highly dependent on foreign aids and grants. Aid has been pouring in Nepal since it started taking foreign aid initially from India since 1950s. From 1950-2005 Nepal received, according to estimates, Rs. 268607.3 million in foreign aid published in Economic Survey, 2006. But the results are not commensurate with the expectations from the amount invested in education sector. One of the factors cited for this discrepancy is social inertia and gender inequality. Numerous researchers and commentators have focused on socio-economic conditions as a reason for lack of development in Nepal. Data also show significant gender gap in scholastic achievements. Status of female in Nepali patriarchal society has been described as a reason for this finding. However, Nepal is one of the few countries in South Asia where discrimination between male and female is not too constrictive. In livelihood generation women in Nepal has no less stature than men. Even in agriculture they could be found working side by side with the male counterpart. Rather women usually outnumber male in rural economic activities because men usually migrate to places in search of work and frequently outside the country. Thus, while patriarchal behavior does exist it is not as rampant as could be found in its cultural, geographical and ethnic counterpart in neighbouring states of India. Gender inequality, it seems, should not be a sufficient reason to forestall any progress in education and skill development. Further, employers in Nepal rather prefer women employees as male employees have a propensity to leave the country for better job prospects. It could be observed in the enrolment rates in schools that there is no significant difference between male and female enrolment data. The UNESCO report in 2016 shows net enrollment rate of male and female was 97.35 and 96.56 respectively.

Enrolment rates are also sufficiently high for a least developed country. It shows that there is a presence of eagerness to learn and attain a formal education to improve one's own life. Therefore, it appears that social inertia could not be a significant factor as an explanation for the disparity between expected goals and reality. Statistical analysis of enrolment provides a different picture. There is difference between educational achievements of female and male child. It is evident in survival rates and in proportion of students going for higher education.

The difference in gender has been attributed by many to the reason that a male child is most likely to go to another country to work. Some more education could be more beneficial in this regard same is not the case with female child. Further, the people do not expect their children to learn any valuable skills in school; rather they expect them to learn the minimum. By which they mean the ability to comprehend and understand the English language so as to smoothly work in a foreign environment. It shows that the people of Nepal do not have much belief in the education system in Nepal. People perceive education not as a skill development process but only a means of communication to be able to work outside the country. As Prajwal Shrestha also labels the education system as "a factory producing unemployment". Therefore, it begets the question that whatever the efforts of aid agencies and Government of Nepal, are fulfilling the basic

requirements that is expected out of the education system. Education should be differentiated from basic literacy which only means the ability to communicate by reading or writing. As M.N. Parajuli points out, "...goals of education needs to be directed not only towards setting targets or providing access to schooling to all, improving their retention and increasing their learning achievements but also to assess whether the education today is capable of contributing to transform lives of people."

It is clear that there is a felt need in the society for education and there is investment also from government and donor agencies but it is unable to fulfill this need which might be due to its nature and functioning. Education in private sector is evidently better but is unaffordable and inaccessible to an overwhelming majority of population.

Another often cited reason is the nature of funding of schools. They are provided resources on the principle of per student funding. It has been reported that teachers over inflate the number of student attending their schools to garner more funds. This problem arises because the inspecting body is same as the one recruiting the teachers at the first place. This has been pointed out by a report by Al Jazeera titled -Doubts over Education Overhaul. This circular provision of funding has led to a scenario where there is a vast difference between official school records and the real number of children attending it.

There is evidently lack of executive over sight for this system to continue in its paradoxical state. It appears as not only a failure of implementation but also failure in planning stages of the policy itself. It is a problem that is easily remediable by action through executive machinery but it appears reluctant to do so.

The perception is that there is no political will to administer the required changes. The political establishment have been frequently criticised for being engulfed only in consolidating their power, those who have it or trying to get to it rather than working towards what is needed by the most. Rapidly changing government styles and composition is also considered to be a cause of disregard towards the education sector. From 2006- 2017, Nepal has seen eleven heads of state which held their post for varying duration. New York Times (August 11, 2016) editorial titled -The Cost of Political Instability in Nepal comments that "Nepal's political leaders are embroiled in interminable fights, the country's need are going unaddressed. Emma Reynolds Member of Parliament of the U.K. states that Nepal's education minister and other parliamentarians admit that resolving the country's political problems overshadows other priorities. She further adds, "It is compounded by an absence of elected of local government, which led to the politicisation of schools. Local education officials therefore spend most of the time fire fighting political problems. As a result, the capacity to implement and change and drive up standard is poor. Teacher management is weak and teacher recruitment is often political."

III. Actionable aid or questionable aid

The sheer amount of aid going by the amount given by outside agencies is very impressive. But looking at the final details at the nature and amount of aid tells somewhat a different story. Furthermore the amount is also found to be different in different sources. The amount publicised by the agencies very often does not match to the amount disclosed by the government of Nepal.

One of the reasons for this discrepancy has been explained as an accounting situation, which appears as an example of double counting. Donor agencies provide three types of assistance namely grants, loans and technical assistance. Loans are required to be paid back by the Government of Nepal in a previously agreed time-frame but Nepal being Least Developed Country finds it difficult to repay all the debts which it owes. Sometimes the donors write-off some portion of the debt. Writing-off of debts leads to transformation to the category of aid. When this happens, in donors' books it is reflected as fresh aid to Nepal. It adds to total amount of aid given to Nepal in books but practically no new aid is received by the country.

Difficulty in assessing accurately amount of foreign aid coming is also due to the fact that some of the aid is channeled directly through (INGOs) without prior information being available to the government as mentioned by Pyakuryal. Foreign aid statistics provided by economic survey of Ministry of Finance does not include the funds that are routed directly from INGOs. There is a plethora of INGOs operating in Nepal. It can be assumed that the difference in amount shown in official data and that of INGOs is being spent without any knowledge of the government. It is likely that this amount is unaudited and has difficulty in monitoring and thus lacks transparency.

Another cause of the discrepancy could be found between the amount committed and actual amount disbursed. Pyakuryal enumerates the causes as inability of providing matching funds, weaknesses on making claims for re-imbursments and inability to fulfill conditionalities. Principle causes behind the gap between commitment and disbursement rate include bureaucratic inefficiency, delay in implementation, delay in completion of initial work requirements and non-enthusiastic approach of implementers. Slow progress in projects not only hampers the same project but also in effect slows down all downstream projects. Thus, effect of non-implementation of a single project can have a long term detrimental implications on future projects.

IV. Conclusion

While many causes have been put forth to explain this phenomena as explained before, it appears that the primary bottleneck remains in the Government of Nepal itself. Education projects do not seem to feature in the priority list of the political executive of Nepal. Due to rapidly changing political situation with multiple power centres it is unreasonable to expect the political executive to have much interest in these projects, let alone evolve long term strategic vision and planning. Further, due to fluid political situation no one has security of tenure in governance. It greatly hampers implementation and functioning of policies and programmes. This is acutely problematic in sectors like education which have long gestation periods and results of which are not readily tangible. Such projects require stable administrative control for formulation, implementation and monitoring. Long gestation projects require frequent mid-term analysis, action plan and rational course corrective measures which, unfortunately, Nepal seems to be lacking. Without these even minor teething problems in projects might lead to fatal flaws and suspension of projects altogether.

Thus, in essence it seems that unless a stable political executive takes form to steer the education projects, they will continue to face delays in receiving of funds and utilising them optimally.

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