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Society Case Study:
Why Formal Education is the Common Goal of Human Progress

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Abstract:

The case study discussed the importance of formal education not only as a means to economic empowerment but also its application in intra cultural harmony that may solve for many intra national and international conflicts. Education for women is emphasised as useful economic strategy whereby women participation in skilled labour force may improve the trading capacity of developing countries in international markets.

Keywords: Formal education, Conflict Mitigation, Cultural Harmony, Economic Empowerment

1. Educating Oneself through Formal Means

Formal education is the key determinant of globalisation and uniting the Nations for the common good of humanity and its future leaps towards science and innovation (Barro, 1991). Formal education is the first step to embrace social harmony and the first real step towards a united world where one is exposed to our common global quest and struggle of centuries which has lead us to very 21st century which is known as the century of technology and innovation.

We, who are academicians in the South are trying to make an effort of our own to be part of the positive change and progress of humanity while analysing many a challenges our global village face from extremism to environmental degradation, are actually among the lucky ones to be able to also receive formal education. We are more aware not only of the human success story to date but we are also concerned with the issues, which needs to be addressed. Because we are formally educated, we speak the same language of awareness and optimism but we are also ready to lead to make a positive difference in our global society. In other words we share the same values. In the West, there are many more like us but as we sit in this room we also know that the larger part of the world is

quite different to the select group of lucky one's whom we represent. Many and millions more, in underdeveloped regions of Africa and Asia live without education and most of them are the ones who are also still struggling to only earn enough to be able to survive a day after another. Their world is quite different than ours. For them, globalisation is an unfair process, where only richer among them can benefit and would continue benefiting because only the more affluent are destined to educate their next generations. The poor may never be able to break the shackles of poverty, if they are not given the opportunity to empower themselves by being more skilled and aware. And education is a pre-requisite for social and economic empowerment of such individuals. Education for all is the key factor to benefit from a scientific society at a global level and it is indeed one of the most important step to achieve a United World from it being an unfair, less aligned and less united body.

Formal education is the first step towards our awareness regarding the history of globalisation and its marvels. When we undertake subjects like Physics, Chemistry and Biology, we understand how a global quest to embrace a scientific society has been mapped throughout human history where knowledge was equally shared and utilised by all nations, irrespective of their culture and religion. Similarly, through the methodologies of formal education, we also come to know that art and literature has always been appreciated, promoted and preserved irrespective of its diversified cultural underpinnings.

Thus, more equal societies are the one's which are also more educated. Awareness, logic and reasoning, the key ingredients of a vibrant society, derive the same parallels. In the following lines, I would discuss some of the key social and economic issues to substantiate my argument further.

2. Education and Conflict Mitigation:

It is agreed that only education does not feed the bellies of the hungry. Formal education is rather a long term strategy than a short term remedy to a problem. In the short term, the ones, who are sceptical about globalisation and its fairness, need to be reached out. This may mean that many in the West have to go an extra mile to appease the sceptics and activists working against globalisation, by understanding their psychological apprehensions. Recently we have seen many conflicts erupting inside many developing

peripheries in the world which have also engulfed the larger globe. For example, some extremist elements are exploiting the sentiments of some ethnic and religious groups and many of the aware ones among us have drawn conclusions of haste upon our exposure to popular gossip thrown to us by media. This is how I see the problem of Islamic extremism, of which the West is quite worried about these days. I believe Islamic societies are far from being extremist, but they indeed are underdeveloped where formal education is not available to most of the people. Many fail to identify with the contemporary success stories of social freedom and economic empowerment, we cherish so much. They feel left out, marginalised and even exploited. And such sentiments make the breeding grounds for conflict. Most live in historic bitterness and easily form opinions of disaccord and thus they are prone to the manipulations by certain interest groups which indeed may have an extremist agenda. Since in the West, more are educated and more are aware, it has the responsibility to positively understand such societies and refrain from stigmatising them.

3. Education and Some success stories of Globalisation

Education has been key to the economic development of countries (Barro and Lee, 1993a; 1993b). Countries which have invested more in equal opportunities for education for all are more developed today. In other words, education gives the fair chance to every one to benefit from economic and scientific progress. For example, let us compare East Asian and South Asian economies. The differences in human capital and differences in the convergence level seem to move together in both regions. For instance, East Asian Developing countries witnessed unprecedented increases in GNP per capita over the last three decades, e.g. 10 times for Malaysia, 65 times for Republic of Korea and 13 times for Thailand. While during the same period for Asian least developed countries (Bhutan, Cambodia and Lao People's democratic Republic) and South Asian developing countries (Bangladesh, India and Pakistan) only a meagre increase of 2 to a little over 5 times took place.

It is intriguing to note that in 1960s when most of these countries were at similar stages of economic development, East Asian developing countries were far ahead of both Asian least developed countries and South Asian developing countries in human capital. In fact, the total literacy rates for East Asian developing countries in the 1960s were as high as 71 percent for the Republic of Korea, 68 percent for Thailand and even Malaysia had a rate

of over 50 percent. On the other hand, in case of all Asian least developed countries and South Asian developing countries, the total literacy rates were as low as only 9 percent for Nepal and 15 percent for Pakistan with Cambodia having 38 percent literacy. (Barro and Lee, 2001)

After three decades, while Asian least developed countries and South Asian developing countries have somewhat augmented their human capital stocks, the total literacy rates are still far below 50 percent in the cases of Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. During the same period, however, East Asian developing countries have more or less achieved the formidable task of educating most of their people. As a result, in the late 1990s, the total literacy rate of the Republic of Korea has reached 98 percent, and Malaysia managed to achieve a rate of about 90 percent. In short, economic progress in East Asia during the 1980s occurred because of their well developed human capital endowment which gathered momentum in the 1960s or earlier. (Barro, 1999)

4. Education and Gender Empowerment:

Education for all is also a first step towards the social and economic empowerment of women. (Barro and Lee, 1996) Illiteracy among women is one of a key determinant of their exploitation in developing countries. For example, women are generally exploited because of their low skills in national job allocation profiles. They are exposed to the brutes of industrialisation in countries like China and India, as more labour demand leads to more female labour enrolment into the industrial activity at wages far less than men. For women, though it is a significant move from informal labour activity where they are paid nothing or less than the formal activity, they are still being exploited. And to make matters worse, reliance on cheap female labour in developing countries may further reinforce and ratify social norms of gender inequality. Only if women are more educated, they would also benefit from industrial spill over of white collar jobs where the pay difference among men and women are far less. Further more equal education opportunities for women may actually help a country move up the industrial ladder to higher value-added production and move the country out of labour-intensive export led growth trap which many developing countries of today find themselves into. If export success and growth come at the expense of gender equality and women's human rights, this may result in long term adverse effects on the terms of trade in developing countries found by some of the recent economics literature.

5. Education and Higher Education Bias

The commitment to more education for all primarily comes from increase in education budgets. However, it is generally witnessed that many developing countries find it difficult to allocate sufficient funds to primary education as they are faced with resource constraints at the fiscal level but also want to promote higher education for higher education focus brings high GDP growth dividends. Thus there is a competition of resources within education sector. Though the governments are justified to promote higher education, but if it would lead to lesser resource allocation in primary education, poverty reduction and fair development is jeopardised. In such a scenario, foreign assistance by donor agencies like World Bank is much needed to promote education for all in developing countries.

6. Education and Multiculturalism

I would also like to introduce briefly my international exposure at the institution of higher learning, International Institute of Social Studies of Erasmus University¹, where students and researchers from around the globe come together to learn and discuss about the complex issues pertaining initiatives like Sustainable Development Goals, their limitations and their potential in global development. At the institute, we got the opportunity to learn the other perspective also where development initiatives are critically evaluated all in an effort to address the qualms of those in the developing countries who still live in impoverished circumstances. We tried to look into development as a progressive and inclusive phenomenon, where development strategies are not only an outcome of Western concern for underdevelopment in Southern lands but where development becomes a discourse where the poor and marginalised themselves have a say of their own. We learnt to make them the part of solution making rather than just dealing them as a part of the problem. In such an exercise, we learn how important it is to also make their voices and concerns heard instead of us trying to be their voice. And all this is just being educated.

¹ The author was associated with the Institute from 2000 to 2008

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