

The Impact of Education Across Sectors: Democracy

Introduction

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is calling on the ‘civilian power’ of USAID to help foster long-term economic growth and democratic governance in the developing world (Clinton, 2010). Economic growth and democracy are described by President Obama as essential to supporting development that offers a path out of poverty, builds capacity to deliver quality services, unleashes broader prosperity, and is rooted in shared responsibility and mutual accountability. The interaction between education and democracy may represent USAID’s best opportunity to create the virtuous cycle of development to which President Obama is referring.

This policy brief summarizes the ways in which investments in democratic institutions and in education are mutually supportive. For example, well-functioning democratic institutions require an educated citizenry. Educated citizens are supportive of democratic ideals and institutions, and they play active roles in civic life and public decision making. Democratic regimes invest in education, and investments in better quality universal primary education lead to equitable growth. Furthermore, investments in societies with more education and greater civil liberties have higher rates of return. Finally, governments that demonstrate sound, equitable management of education services are more stable and credible to their citizens.

Education Lays the Foundation for Democracy and Development

Education has long been seen as an essential component of the democratic state. At the dawn of American democracy, Thomas Jefferson argued that the viability of the young nation’s democratic institutions and ideals depended on the adequate education of all citizens. A century later John Dewey stated that democracy is more than just a form of government. It is “a mode of associated living,” that requires citizens to extend their definition of the group with whom they share an interest, breaking down the barriers of clan, race, and class. Dewey defines education as the requirement for people to see outside traditional and cultural barriers, and thus define their individual interests as tied to a broader community of concerns (Dewey, 1916). Picking up the Jeffersonian line of reasoning, Dewey assigns the state primary responsibility for assuring education that can “discount the effects of economic inequalities,” and provide all citizens the skills and knowledge they need to build their own and their nation’s future.

The interests of foreign assistance today are no different than those of the U.S. in its earliest days: how to ensure prosperity, peace, and the pursuit of a better life for as many people as possible. Today, more nations are looking to build democratic institutions and promote active civil engagement and responsibility as key features of their development strategies. In fact, there is now a greater share of democracies among nations than at any time in history. Less than a third of countries could be classified as democracies



in the early 1970s. That grew to more than half in 1996, and to three-fifths in 2008 (UNDP, 2010). A central challenge of development therefore is not just how to promote economic growth, but also how to reinforce the democratic institutions that help ensure all citizens have a say in a nation's development and share in its fruits.

In his pioneering work, Lipset defined the socio-economic conditions that are prerequisites for democracy, with education figuring prominently among them (Lipset, 1959). Research identified education as one vitally important factor contributing to the emergence of more democratic states in Eastern Europe and Latin America, confirming Lipset's hypothesis (Valverde, 1999). Recent reviews of research reaffirm the primacy of the link between democracy and development, and education's role as a foundation for both. The consensus is that democracy does not come about randomly. The socio-economic conditions necessary for democracy to emerge, and importantly, sustain, must be fostered within each country. To do this, countries and providers of development assistance must invest in education (Wucherpfennig & Deutsch, 2009).

Education Contributes to the Spread of Democratic Ideals

Based on a survey of voters in 18 African countries, Evans and Rose show how education is contributing to the spread of democratic ideals. They conclude that people's levels of schooling predict their endorsement of democratic procedures and their rejection of non-democratic alternatives. Education has a stronger effect on attitudes towards democracy than other potential variables, such as social class, religion, or urbanity. Evans and Rose also argue that education offers a way to intervene in support of the development and stabilization of democracies. They affirm that, "The greatest aggregate gains in support for democracy are likely to be obtained by increasing the proportion of the population who complete primary education" (Evans & Rose, 2007).

In considering education's link to democracy, development practitioners should note that research indicates education's influence on political attitudes is not derived from instruction in civics or democracy oriented curricula. Rather, political attitudes are shaped through what is termed the 'latent' curriculum. This includes how classes are taught, (e.g., the level of self-expression and critical thinking that is promoted) as well as the larger climate of school governance. Participatory and democratic school culture, not a class in civics, is what contributes to social consciousness and increased adherence to democratic ideals (Ehman, 1980; Berman, 1997).

Evans and Rose explain how schooling plays a role in building support for democracy in part by enabling educated citizens to have greater access to media. Media access and the comprehension of information are critical to the emergence of democratic attitudes (Evans & Rose, 2007). World events continue to demonstrate the power of information technology and social media to spread ideas and ideals. However, an adequate level of education is required before people can exploit these growing communication channels. If this is achieved people can broaden their perspectives and redefine, as postulated by Dewey, their sense of shared interest.

Democracies do a Better Job Investing in Education

Education underpins the development of democracy, and democratic approaches to governance tend to result in greater and better investment in education. For example, multiparty electoral competition is associated with higher levels of government expenditure on education. That higher level of funding also tends to be invested in primary education, while leaving higher education relatively unchanged. This has a redistributive effect, not only from one level of education to another, but from certain segments of the population to others (Stasavage, 2005). Increased investment in the expansion and improvement of primary education improves socio-economic equity, but only if those investments are adequate enough to ensure a sufficient level of quality. When enrollment rates are low, children of the poor are the ones out of school. Therefore, they benefit most from investment in expansion of the system. As long as that expansion does not lead to an erosion of quality, then society as a whole becomes more equitable (Birdsall, Ross & Sabot, 1997).

Improved levels of equity, for example in access to education, explain in part why some countries have better rates of growth than others. Birdsall, Ross, and Sabot demonstrate how equitably provided quality schooling contributed to higher rates of growth in East Asia than in Latin America (Birdsall, et al., 1997). In fact, the investments East Asian nations made in equitably expanding education laid the foundation for subsequent years of rapid economic growth (Birdsall, et al., 1997).

Access to education has been steadily increasing over the last 20 years, with growth in enrollment rates coming in those countries that needed most to expand the provision of schooling. Developing countries for the most part have extended their education systems into poor, remote areas and have done more to ensure that girls enroll and persist in school. While there is still more to accomplish, education systems are becoming more equitable. Equitable access to education is strongly associated with improvements in human development. Countries with the most equitable education systems have the highest Human Development Indexes, as depicted in Figure 1. (UNDP, 2010).

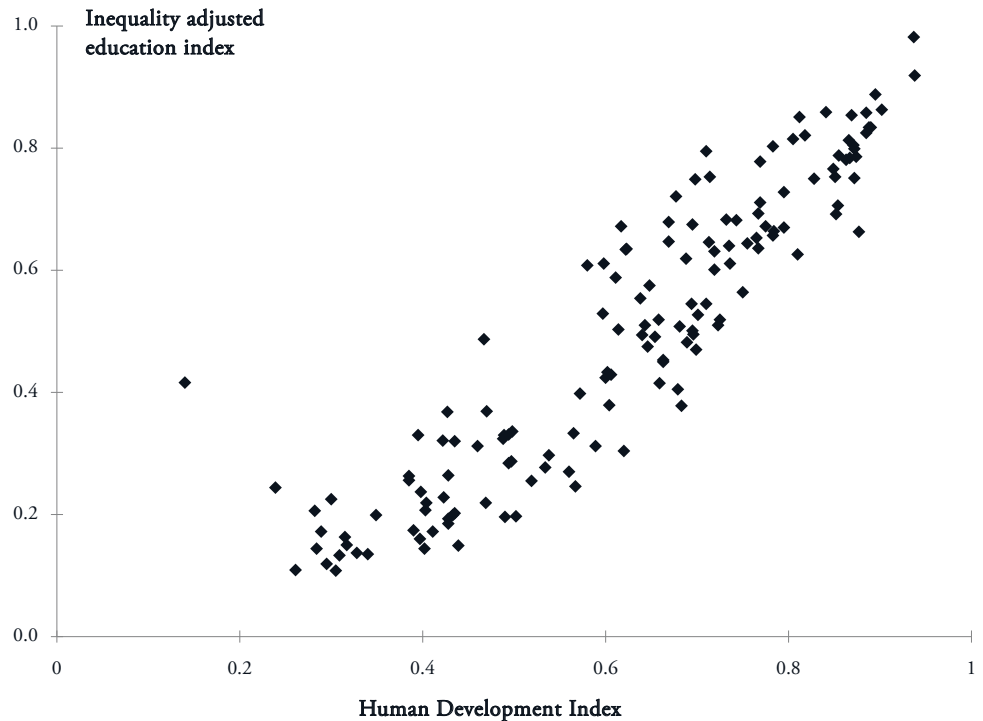
The 2007 World Development Report affirms that democratic participation enhances development outcomes. Countries with the greatest civil liberties have higher rates of return on public investments, and invest more in expanding access to education. Furthermore, higher levels of civic activity reduce corruption, improve governance, increase demand for human capital investment, and help prepare for and prevent disasters (World Bank, 2006).

Education Signals Responsive and Effective Governance and Contributes to Political Stability

For over 50 years, USAID has supported and promoted democracy in the developing world. For over a decade, the World Bank (2001) has also recognized that broad and equitable access to education is essential to democracy and sound governance.



Figure 1. Association between equitable education systems and human development



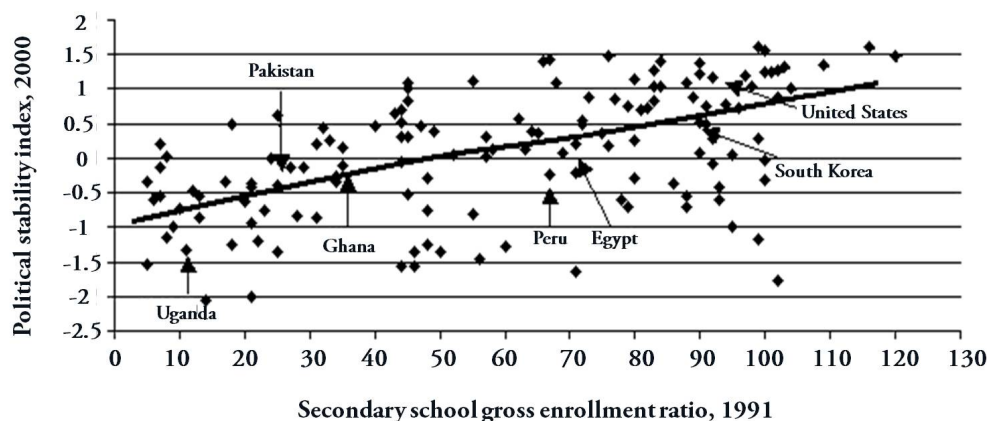
Systematic evaluations of effective governance—like those included in the Worldwide Governance Indicators developed by the World Bank, the Human Development Index, or the Arab Democracy Index—all rely in part on measures of government provision of educational services and of educational opportunity and attainment within a society. These indexes all explicitly recognize that one measure of a government’s effectiveness is the degree to which it ensures the equitable provision of education: for boys and girls, for rich and poor, for urban and rural populations.

Using data from the Worldwide Governance Indicators, Kaufman, Kraay, and Mastruzzi demonstrate how education contributes to political stability and reduces corruption. Countries that achieve certain levels of educational provision, as measured by the gross enrollment rate for secondary school, have higher levels of measured political stability as shown in Figure 2. The worldwide governance indicators also show that countries with higher levels of secondary school access have lower levels of corruption (Kaufman, Kraay & Mastruzzi, 2003).

In post-conflict situations and in otherwise fragile states, education plays an even more significant stabilizing role. Reopening schools helps to establish the credibility and legitimacy of the government, and demonstrates responsiveness to the needs of citizens. Education is the one public service that touches the lives of all, or almost all families. The quality of education system management is readily apparent to most people. Therefore, transparent and sound management of education services, with attention to

equitable allocations of resources, and accountability for inputs and outcomes can be outward signs of a government’s efforts to meet the needs of its citizens.

Figure 2. Education underlies more stable governments



Source: World Bank 2007. World Development Indicators: Kaufmann.D., A. Kraav, & M. Mastruzzi. 2003

Education Supports Successful Decentralization

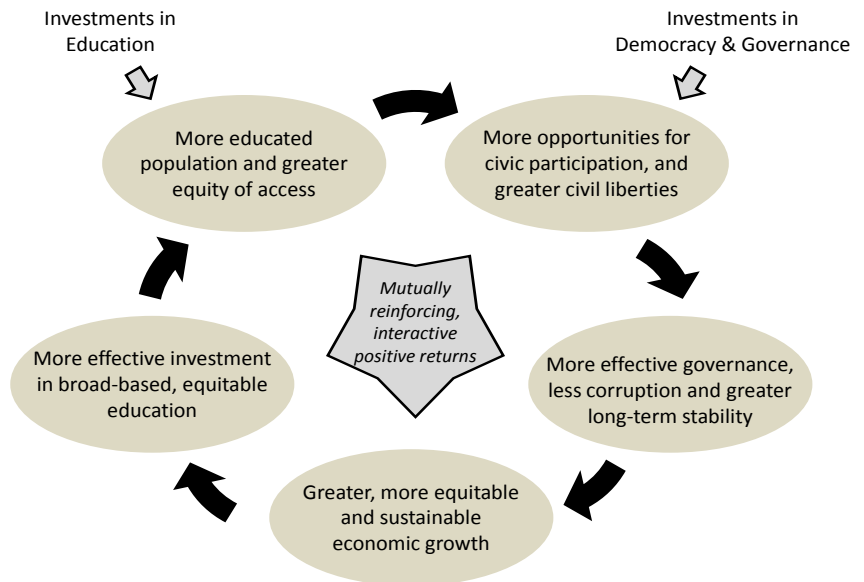
As more countries decentralize, the opportunities for democratic participation multiply. In 2009, about 80 percent of countries surveyed for the Human Development Report had local governments with elected legislatures, and half of those had both an elected local executive and legislature (UNDP, 2010). The education sector in many countries is also decentralizing. The coupling of administrative and political decentralization offers expanded opportunities for citizens to play direct roles in controlling, and/or assuring, accountability for the provision of education services. Community and parental governance of schools has led to schools that are more responsive to local needs, and therefore more effective in assuring access, completion, and learning (DeStefano, Moore, Balwanz & Hartwell, 2007). Investments in building capacity at the local level for effective public engagement in the governance and management of schools (essentially investments in decentralization) have high potential returns in terms of improved education and the spread of democracy.

The Virtuous Circle

Democracy, civic participation, and civil liberties improve development outcomes and create the foundation for long-term stability. Transitions to democratic governance may lead to short-term instability, but evidence indicates that in the long-term countries will benefit from that transition; provided they have laid a foundation of equitable access to a basic education that provides young people with tangible skills and knowledge. Investments in quality education therefore contribute to establishing the virtuous circle through which increased civic participation and greater evidence of democratic processes and institutions lead to higher rates of equitably shared growth and economic development. This leads to further investments in education that are equitable and

accountable, and therefore more effective, which continue to feed into greater and more equitable growth, and so on as depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Education and democracy: High potential for increasing returns



In a world where young people in a country can immediately mobilize to reclaim civil liberty by sending messages over Facebook, Twitter, and their cell phones, and where images of their democratic protests are immediately and ubiquitously available, Thomas Jefferson’s statement that, “Information is the currency of democracy,” has never been truer. Present and future generations can only benefit from the information that is so readily available to them if they have had adequate opportunities for education. Dewey warned that, “freedom of action without freed capacity of thought behind it is only chaos;” a particularly relevant observation given recent popular uprisings reclaiming more democratic and civically responsive leadership.

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