

# Education and the Basic Human Needs in the Third World

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## INTRODUCTION

Most of the countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America, collectively referred to as the Third World, became free from their colonial rulers after the end of World War II. The leaders of these newly independent countries as well as the leaders of the other historically independent countries of the region felt that their primary responsibility was to develop their economy as rapidly as possible and to raise the standard of living of their people. These countries had been underdeveloped historically. The gap between the socio-economic development of these countries and that of the developed countries was so enormous that the task to narrow this gap was very complicated.

The standard of living in the Third World countries was low primarily because the per capita output of goods and services in these countries was very low. Thus, since the early period of the 1950s, the Third World countries have devoted their development efforts towards raising the total output of their respective countries. It was believed that once the output of the country was increased, the problem of income distribution and poverty would be taken care of very easily.

In order to meet the goals of this development strategy, many researches were carried out on the determinants of output. It was found that output was positively related to: (1) capital, (2) labour, and (3) the state of technology.

During the early period of 1960s it was found that the volume of output was positively related to the physical inputs of capital and labour, while the productivity per worker was mainly related to the state of technology. The state of technology was determined by the general and technical education level of the population. There existed a surplus of untrained and uneducated labour in most of the Third World countries. Therefore, for the fulfillment of the development goals, the immediate task of these governments became to provide more education and training to their population.

It is clear that the importance given to education in the post World War II period resulted from the strong desire for national development. Following this strategy, most of the Third World countries after World War II increased the number of primary and secondary schools and established colleges and universities.

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The development strategy during this period however, was urban-biased. It focused on the development of modern industry and services sector in the urban area since it was believed that this was the only sector through which total output and productivity per worker could be increased. The agricultural sector in which majority of the people lived was left out of the development process. Both foreign aid and domestic savings were channelled to the development of the modern sector. But the urban area was composed mainly of a minority elite group. The education system was one of the main instruments for the creation of this elite group. This group not only was able to command most of the income of the country but also garner most of the fruits of the investment in education. The majority of the people living in the rural area remained as poor and illiterate as before. In the process inequality of income between the modern and traditional sectors further increased. In some of the countries the number of people below the poverty line also increased. In the later part of the 1960s, "educated unemployment" emerged as another important problem as the modern sector could not grow sufficiently to absorb the increasing number of school, college and university graduates.

This type of development strategy became very unsatisfactory to many of the governments and social scientists. Thus in 1977 one development economist, Michael P. Todaro, redefined the meaning of development as follows: "development essentially means the elimination of poverty, inequality and unemployment as well as the increase of aggregate per capita output growth." And in 1986 King Birendra of Nepal, in his address to the people said, "the goal of our development strategy is to provide basic human needs such as food, clothing, shelter, health, education and security to all the Nepalese people by 2000 A.D. at a level that is judged appropriate by the Asian standard."

We have seen that the meaning of development has changed over time. Presently the leaders and social scientists no longer desire to pursue a development strategy that creates inequality, poverty and unemployment. They are rather taking the approach of social development and social welfare -- the major component of which is to provide basic needs to its people.

#### WHAT ARE THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS ?

After the birth of a child its main need is milk, which contains the food and water required for its survival and growth. It also needs proper sanitation, bathing and health care. It needs clothing and shelter to be protected from the ferocity of the nature. When the child grows to youth/adulthood he needs proper knowledge and skills to earn a living. The skills to communicate with people, life skills such as the knowledge of health, safe drinking water, nutrition, family planning, etc. and production skills all come from education and training. Man also needs security and protection of his rights and the preservation of his freedom and self-respects. Thus, in short, the basic need of a man is to be entitled to get the minimum necessary amount of food, clothing, shelter, health, education, and security since these are absolutely necessary for his survival and growth.

## WHY DO WE NEED THE BASIC HUMAN NEEDS APPROACH TO DEVELOPMENT ?

As mentioned earlier, the Third World economies presently have a dualistic structure. While cities like Delhi and Karachi look like Europe and America, their hinterlands are still in the bullock-cart age.

The majority of the population in all the developing countries live in the rural areas. Only the elite minority who are rich and educated live in the urban areas. The urban elite together with the rural landlords control most of the economic resources, education and government administrative positions. The rest of the people are uneducated, poor and have no administrative power.

Except for the urban elite and the rural landlords, the purchasing power of the people in the Third World countries is very low. The structure of the demand of the minority elite and the majority poor is quite different. The elite demand more luxury items while the majority poor are not able to buy enough basic items for their survival.

The main goal of the basic needs approach is to reduce inequality, alleviate poverty, regulate unemployment and create conditions for the higher standard of living of the society through the process of decentralization of decision making. This approach seeks to create a large number of the "middle class" families through the upliftment of the poor class and disincentives for large concentration of resources in the hands of a few. Thus, the approach will stress the creation of small sized farms in the agriculture sector by abolishing the presently existing feudal structure. In the urban areas it provides incentives for the establishment of many small and medium scale industries and distribution of shares of big industries in the hands of many. The approach is people oriented since it values every citizen equally.

The decentralization of decision making will increase the demand for basic needs goods and reduce the demand for luxury goods. In the education sector, the demand for basic education and skills oriented trainings will increase. Thus the education system in the Third World countries will require modification in the light of the changing type of demand for it.

## THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN MEETING BASIC HUMAN NEEDS

Basic human needs are essentially met by two things: (1) income, and (2) knowledge. A higher income person can afford to acquire more food, clothing, shelter, etc., while a more educated and knowledgeable person combined with higher income can live in better health conditions and obtain higher schooling for his children.

The relationship between education and basic needs is shown in Figure 1. The figure shows that education of a person enhances his/her: (1) communication skills such as literacy, numeracy and adaptability with changing culture, (2) life skills such as knowledge of health, sanitation, nutrition, disease preventing techniques, family planning, etc., and (3) production skills that increases his/her productivity.

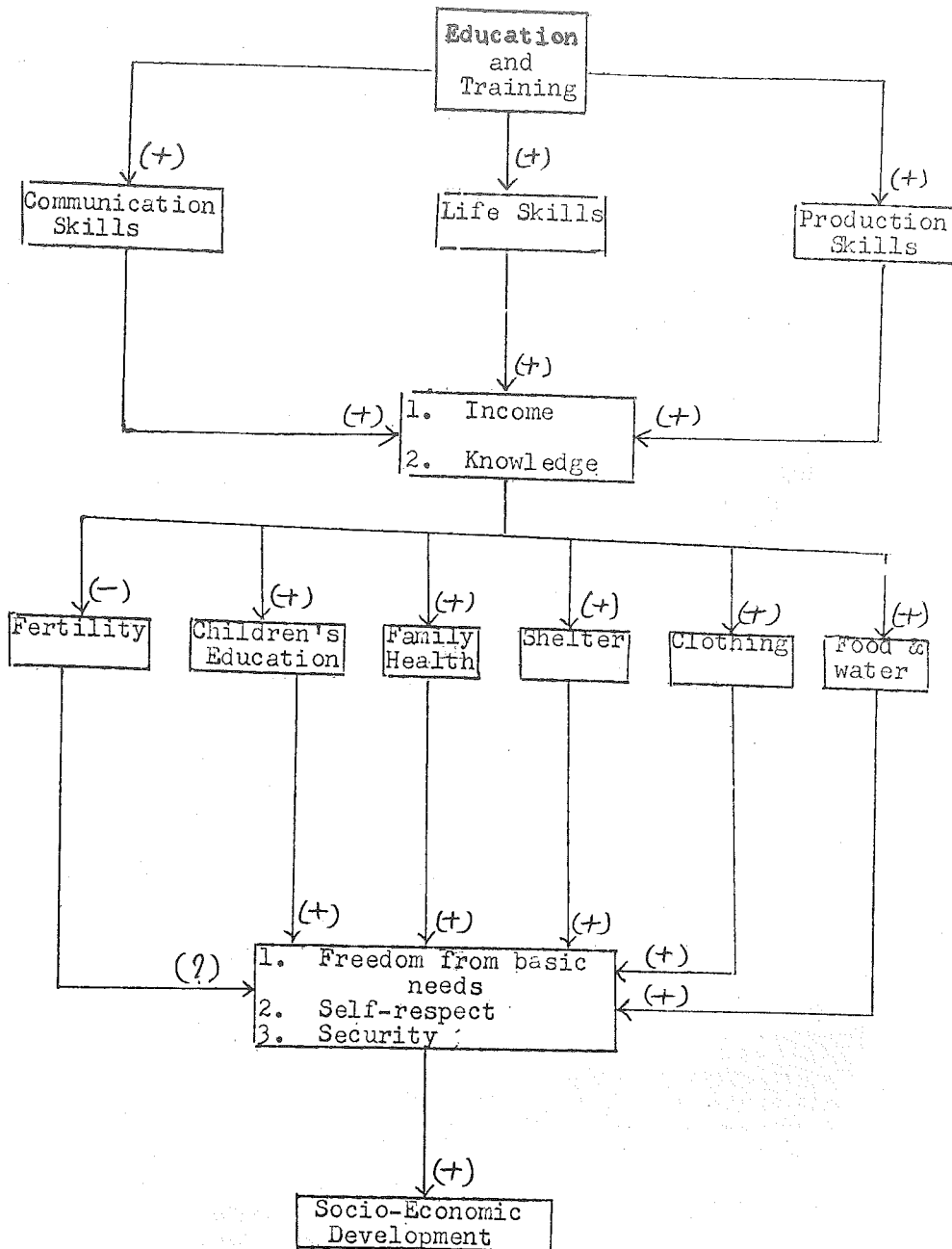


Figure 1

These skills increase the income and knowledge of the person which in turn increases his capability to purchase the basic needs goods such as food, clothing, shelter, health, education, security from exploitation, etc. Increased education will also reduce the presently existing high level of fertility in the Third World and helps families to diversify their spending on the quality development of the reduced family size. Fulfillment of basic needs will free people from the bondage of hunger and misery. This also increases security and self-respect of the person. At the same time the increased productivity per worker because of education and training will lead to the socio-economic development of the country.

#### TYPES OF EDUCATION AND ITS OWNERSHIP

Since we identified education as a key to providing basic human needs, we must clearly identify what type of education we need and who should own it. There are two main types of education in the world: (1) general education and (2) technical and vocational education. General education broadens the mind of the seeker of knowledge and it prepares student to climb up the ladder of academics. It makes man more theoretical, philosophical, research oriented and innovative. General education is the base from which one can move to different types of vocations. Technical and vocational education, on the other hand, are job oriented. They directly teach the students how to do a job. So technical and vocational education are practical training. Employers often want workers with specific technical trainings.

There is a great deal of debate as to whether a country should have general education or technical and vocational education. But each one has its merits and demerits. Without general education we would not have researchers, innovators or persons to lead the society, while without technical education we would not have persons to carry out the production tasks of the society. So, both types of education systems have their own merits. The demerit of general education is that, should to large a number of people be prepared with general education, the economy will not be able to absorb them. Hence unemployment will increase. Similarly, if technical education is provided without proper ground work in general education, it becomes a dull job.

In my opinion the Third World countries should follow a hybrid education. By hybrid I mean that the curriculum should include both general education and technical education. Secondly, science and mathematics should receive a high priority in the curriculum since it is science and technology that increases the productivity per worker.

With regards to the ownership of education it was frequently mentioned earlier that the concentration of education in a few hands is a stumbling block to social justice. The basic needs approach of development strategy seeks to provide basic education to all the citizens of the country and it discourages tendency to monopolize education by the minority elite only.

#### THE NEED FOR EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN THE THIRD WORLD

The curriculum of education in most of the Third World countries today is outdated. The educational system in most of these countries was initially brought by their colonial rulers in the past. The colonial rulers were basically interested in ruling the colony in order to make money. So they provided curriculum that suited their own needs and the interest of the empire. The immediate interest in providing education by these rulers was to produce people who can speak their language and assist them in the day-to-day administration and other activities.

Thus the context in which education was initiated by the colonial rulers in the Third World countries in the past was to consolidate and perpetuate their rule and popularize their language and culture rather than to develop the colony.

The present education system in most of the Third World countries is the legacy of the colonial education systems of the past. The present context is different. The present situation demands that education to be an active partner of national development under the basic needs strategy. Thus the curriculum of the education system must be reformed. It must impart more knowledge of science and technology, produce required number of skilled manpower, and support the national development strategy.

#### A FINAL OBSERVATION

Earlier, we discussed the need for reform in the formal education system in order to meet the skills required by the basic needs development strategy. What about the large number of people who never got a chance to go to school or who dropped out? Should education be provided to them?

One of the very important feature of the Third World is that in these countries a very large percentage of people are still illiterate and untouched by education and training. Most of these people and the school dropouts are engaged in the production process. Most of these people either live in the subsistence agriculture areas or in the slum areas of the cities. Their per head productivity/income is very low. But their productivity can be increased if education, information and on-the-job training is given to them.

Formal schooling is not suited to this group of adults. They cannot afford the time to study in formal schools. Neither would they like to study together with the children in the schools. They need adult education outside of the formal schools. For example, evening sessions in their homes or on-the-job training in their work place.

Education, information and on-the-job training can be provided by different organizations. For example, the ministry of education can provide literacy and numeracy programmes, the ministry of agriculture can provide agriculture extension and training, the ministry of industry can provide industrial skills to specific groups. Similarly, the banks and cooperatives can provide specific types of training to certain target groups.

The education and training activities can be expanded by formally establishing adult training centers in each population centers. The activity of such training centers should be to assess the training needs of local populace and to impart the required training. Such training centers should be given full responsibility of coordinating and executing all the adult education and training programmes in the local area.

#### CONCLUSION

The development problem of most of the Third World countries today is how to achieve growth with social justice. Growth without social justice is enemical. In the last few decades some economic growth has been achieved in most of the Third World countries. But social justice has been impaired. The earlier development strategy created a dualistic structure in the economy in which a minority elite group controlled most of the resources of the country. The majority of the people remained poor and illiterate. Number of people below the poverty line, inequality, and unemployment increased. The living standard of the majority could not be improved. Thus, a new strategy of development, in the form of basic human needs, had to be evolved.

The problem of development is multi-faced and cannot be solved by a single parameter. Education is one of the, but very important parameter of development.

Education is an asset. It increases the income and knowledge of its holder. Those who get right amount of employment oriented education come out of the bondage of poverty as soon as they are employed. The persons with salable education in the job markets can easily fulfill their basic needs.

Thus, education should not be allowed to be owned by only a few persons in the society. Every citizen in the country should be provided with this valuable asset as far as practicable.

The education system of most of the Third World countries today is the legacy of the education system provided by the colonial rulers in the past who introduced the curriculum in order to produce people who would assist them to rule the colony rather than to develop it. The present context is different. The present context demands education to provide skilled manpower and social scientists required by the developing economy. If the education system acts as per this demand, the problem of unemployment will not arise. Education should also promote and disseminate the knowledge of science and technology, since it is this knowledge that has been responsible for the accelerated growth in the developed countries in the last 200 years.

There are a large number of adults who are illiterate and unskilled and schools dropouts in the Third World countries. This group cannot go to study in the formal schools. Productivity of this group can be increased if education, information and skills training programme is provided to them outside of schools. So far different ministries and agencies are running their own training programmes. Adult education programme

would probably be more effective if training centers are established in each population centers and these centers are also given responsibility to assess the need for training and organize required training programmes in the local area.

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