

WORLD CONFERENCE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education in the Twenty-first Century

Vision and Action

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Note1: To meet UNESCO publishing standards, some editing of papers has been required.

Note2: Authors are responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in signed articles and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

**Speech of Mr. Shamsui A. Chowdhury
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Mr. President, excellencies, ladies and gentlemen:

Human development is one of the key strategic development objectives of the Asian Development Bank. The Bank recognizes education as both a human right and a necessary condition for development. The Bank seeks to assist its developing member countries in the formulation of appropriate education policies and in the provision for financial assistance for specific interventions consistent with the overall framework. The Bank's education sector strategy emphasizes (a) improvement of the quality and relevance of education, (b) equity in access to education of high quality – especially for women, and (c) a significant role for the private sector.

From 1970 to 1996 the Bank funded education projects totaling about \$3.3 billion, constituting about five percent of total Bank lending. In addition the Bank has given education technical assistance grants for project preparation, sector studies, capacity building, and regional activities such as conferences totaling about \$75 million. The amount of lending has increased significantly in recent years. More than 60 percent of education sector lending has taken place since 1990 accounting for over \$2.0 billion. About 40 percent of Bank's education lending went to basic education while higher education accounted for about 22 percent.

Asia has achieved a remarkable and widespread expansion in access to education during the past three decades. Although access to primary education is far from universal for everyone in Asia – countries in South Asia, especially lag behind, as do women and those living in rural areas – the improvements have been enormous. A large-scale government-led expansion of secondary education is likely to be the main educational achievement in Asia as a whole during the next three decades.

This in turn will create enormous pressure for expanding higher education. Projections indicate that demand for university enrollments in Asia will nearly triple during the next two decades. This raises the difficult financing issues that will be exacerbated by the expected rise in the share of university students who study science and engineering, fields that are particularly expensive. Public spending on higher education has been rising rapidly in Asia. Between 1980 and 1990 it grew at nearly 7 percent in East Asia, faster than in any other Asian subregion and in all other parts of the world. Total spending by Asian countries as a whole on higher education is projected to increase sharply in coming years growing at an annual rate of 7 percent and total annual expenditures will reach approximately \$58 billion by 2002.

The Bank recognizes the paramount importance of higher education for economic and social development. Institutions of higher education have the main responsibility for equipping individuals with advanced knowledge and skills required for positions of responsibility in government, business and professions. These institutions produce new knowledge through research, serve as conduits for the transfer, adaptation, and dissemination of knowledge, and support government and business with advice and consultancy services. The contributions of higher education to the high performing economies of East Asia have been adequately captured in recent studies funded by the Bank.

For over two decades, the Bank has had an important role in assisting the expansion of postsecondary education in the region. The Bank's lending and technical assistance were mainly directed toward institutions that train professionals and technicians for the economy and teachers to support the expansion and quality improvement of lower levels of education. Since 1990, the Bank has been paying increasing attention to higher education issues relating to quality and relevance, responsiveness to market demand, equity in access, capacity building including cost sharing and private sector participation. In recent years, the Bank has also been assisting the transition economies in adjusting the education systems to the new demands of the emerging market-driven economy.

Given the above, the findings and conclusions of the conference could be used fruitfully in the Bank's sector dialogue and in project formulation and design. We look forward to the deliberations, findings and conclusions of the World Conference on Higher Education. Thank you for your attention.