An African Exploration of the East Asian Education Experience:

Insights from the 2006 East Asia Education Study Tour

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Outline of Presentation

- East Asia’s Economic Growth and Investment in Human Capital
- Enabling Conditions for Educational Development in East Asia
- The Role of Sector Policies
- Potential Lessons from East Asia
East Asia in the Headlines

- **WSJ Front Page on Jan 19, 2008:**
  - “Citigroup and Merrill Tap Foreign-Aid Lifelines; Damage Tops $ 90 billion”
  - Rescuers include Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Japan ….. and Korea, Singapore….
  - “New Masters of the Universe” pg. A10

- **IDA 15 replenishment in Dec 2007:**
  - $41.6 billion mobilized, 30% more than IDA14
  - 45 contributors, including….China & Korea among 4 former IDA beneficiaries (others are Egypt & Turkey)
East Asia Flashback

GDP per capita in 1962*

Korea $103
Singapore $430
Thailand $117

East Asia & Pacific $157
Sub-Saharan Africa $142

*in 1987 constant US$

Increasing shares of population ages 15+ with secondary and tertiary education … (e.g. Korea)

... and rising test scores of primary and secondary students on international tests

Note: Green: tertiary; Blue: secondary; Red: primary or none

Note: average score is around 500 on the international tests.
Enabling Conditions for Educational Development in East Asia

- A combination of reinforcing factors:
  - **External** to the education sector
  - **Internal** to the sector
Enabling Conditions: External Factors

1. Rapid long-term **economic growth**, creating a virtuous circle: improved skills promoted growth which in turn generated resources to finance education and training
2. National consensus on **pro-poor shared growth**
3. Rapid **demographic transition**
4. Strong public **institutions**
Enabling Condition (1): Economic growth ….

  - Rose from $157 to $715 (355%) in East Asia (EA)
  - Fell from $525 to 336 (36%) in SSA.

- **Impact of divergent growth paths on:**
  - **Education Finance.** SSA spent higher % of GDP on education than EA but difference in growth meant strong increase in education budgets in EA and stagnating budgets in SSA. This is major factor explaining why SSA’s strong education growth 1960-1980 stagnated between 1980 - 2000. In early 1980s: 16 countries (home to 50% of SSA population) had Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER) above 100%. In mid-1990s: 7 countries (7% of pop.) had GER above 100%.

  - **Political economy of reforms.** EA has been able to introduce reforms that are difficult to introduce in stagnating economies with deteriorating budgets and conditions for teachers

  - **Employment.** EA’s strong growth, well-functioning labor markets, and responsive education system ensured jobs for school leavers
Primary Gross Enrollment Ratios, 1960-2004 (selected countries)
Enabling Condition (2): Pro-Poor Growth

- Developed **national consensus** on policies for shared growth

- **Key element**: Rapid attainment of universal literacy and UPE through combination of “low cost policies” and high % of ed. budget for primary education: In 1965: 58% in Singapore, 66% in Korea and Thailand; less than 50% in SSA, declining to 44% in 1970 and 1975).

- **Result**: Low income groups benefited more than high-income groups from public education spending. Education “gender gap” closed more rapidly in EA than elsewhere, facilitating access to labor markets for women and enabling society and families to draw on benefits associated with education of girls and women
Enabling Condition (3): Demographic Transition

- **Fertility fell rapidly in EA countries.** E.g., Singapore’s population grew tenfold between 1891-1964 and doubled between 1947-1965. But fertility declined and the crude birthrate halved between 1957 and 1969, from 42.7 per 1000 to 22.1.

- **Size of Primary school-aged population** began shrinking with early onset of rapid fertility decline in EA, starting around 1970 in Singapore and Korea; early 1980s in Thailand; early 1990s in Vietnam.


- Korea and Singapore would have had to allocate twice as high share of GDP to primary education had their population grown at Kenya’s rate. Instead, these resources were freed up for quality improvements in primary education and expansion of post-primary education.
Enabling Condition (4): Strong Public Institutions

- Institutional strength covers many aspects, and building strong institutions is a complex task. Only three aspects considered here:

  - **Political will & leadership.** Important element in EA’s success, manifested by e.g., (i) priorities, policies and resources allocated to education, (ii) willingness to implement politically sensitive reforms, (iii) attention paid to develop consensus on these reforms; (iv) attention paid to ensure that education responds to national development agenda.

  - **Reputable & reliable civil service.** Confucianism only part of explanation. EA countries worked systematically to develop both technical competencies and institutional environment where professionalism, performance and integrity are required and rewarded. Merit-based and highly competitive recruitment and promotion; salaries competitive with private sector

  - **Consultative and consensus building mechanisms:** Created and maintained viable social compact based on consultation and cooperation between government, private sector, and labor organizations
Enabling conditions were essential but not sufficient ..... 

Also important for East Asia’s success in education were:

- **Forward-looking sector priorities**, policies, and strategies
  - Difficult trade-offs were made, not avoided

- **Effective implementation** of policies and programs
  - Adaptability
  - Learning by doing
  - Pragmatism rather than dogmatism
  - Value placed on technical expertise
  - Emphasis on developing national capacities
  - Focus on building national consensus
Education Sector Priorities, Policies and Strategies

Particularly striking to study tour participants:

- **Leadership at highest political level**, as reflected, e.g. in: (a) rapid attainment of adult literacy and UPE; (b) quick revision of curriculum after independence to reflect national goals; (c) early effort to make education programs responsive to labor market demands.

- **TVET**: Recognition that -- beyond basic education -- dynamic TVET sector needed to produce technical skills to transform economies from being driven by factor endowments to being driven by knowledge and innovation.

- **Holistic approach**: Policies to develop whole sector, not parts of it; also avoidance of “silos” to ensure that educational development is aligned with economic and other national development priorities.

- **Mobilizing public and private resources**: Basic education priority for *public* funding while *private* financing significant for higher education.

- **External aid**: Though low, financial and technical aid used strategically to build technical skills and R&D capacity, and acquire foreign technology.
Implementation of Sector Policies and Programs

Particularly striking to study tour participants:

- **Sequencing reforms**: First UPE through low “cost approach”; then upgrading quality starting with worse off schools; then improve inputs and management, especially of teachers, to enhance learning outcomes, etc. This approach of *progressive and continues improvement* applied to whole system.

- **Benchmarking for excellence**: Long tradition of measuring learning, now also against world standards (TIMSS, PIRLS, academic “Olympiads”); establishment of foreign university campuses

- **Attracting and retaining high quality staff**: Recognized importance of quality teachers and managers. Growth has permitted improved salaries

- **High quality, low-cost training materials** for all children

- **Pricing policies**: Fees common in public education; children from disadvantaged groups protected. Private costs increase by level of education
What Lessons from East Asia?

- It can be done!

- National leadership and ownership at all levels

- Coordination of policy and implementation between education and non-education sectors and within the sector

- Effective management of service delivery

- Pragmatism: Knowledge and learning to inform strategies, policies, and implementation

- Tracking results via external measures of success
Thank you!