Governing the Lifelong Learning System

I am growing old but still learning many things.

Solon (c. 650–555 B.C.)

As the first two chapters have shown, establishing a system of lifelong learning requires changes in the scope, content, and delivery of education and training (table 3.1). To create high-performance, lifelong learning systems, countries need to make significant changes to both the governance and financing of education and training.

Trends in Governance

Several broad governance trends are affecting all sectors, including education and training, across the world. The need to improve public sector management has become more pressing in both industrial and developing countries (Strange 1996; UNCSTD 2001), in part as a response to a more informed citizenry demanding transparency and efficiency in public sector management (World Bank Institute 2001b). The common trend in government reform has been the quest for smaller government through efficiency gains, achieved by drawing on private sector management principles of efficiency; new processes, such as performance management and reengineering service systems; greater focus on transparency of government operations; and a strong emphasis on outcomes and results (Kettle 1999). Governments are trying to harness the power of information and communication technologies to push ahead with these reforms. E-government is giving citizens greater and more rapid access to information about the policies and outcomes of government (see, for example, Heeks 2001). There is evidence that e-government, greater access to
information, and improved public expenditure management systems have already produced efficiency gains—in the implementation of diagnostic Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) in Ghana, Tanzania, and Uganda (Reinikka and Svensson 2002), for example, and the review of public school teachers’ payroll systems in Argentina and Mexico (World Bank 1998e). A critical aspect of these reforms is the extent to which people in government view the information they have as a public resource, to be shared and subject to standards (UNESCO and COMNET-IT 2002).

Developing countries face a range of challenges to move forward with this agenda, in particular the need to increase transparency in the governance process. Transparency can be understood as openness about policy intentions, formulation, and implementation and the absence of corruption (World Bank 1997). The fight against corruption—including the fight against the loss of resources designated for education—has become a policy focus in developing countries (World Bank 2000b). NGOs active in education have monitored government performance by tracking education expenditure and outcomes and the extent to which earmarked resources go to specific programs or population groups. These trends provide the context for the dimensions of governance examined in this chapter.

In many OECD countries the role of government in the learning system has shifted from focusing principally on public financing and provision of

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
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<td>Scope</td>
<td>Formal schooling from primary to higher education</td>
<td>Learning throughout the lifecycle—in schools, on the job, after retirement</td>
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<td>Content</td>
<td>Acquisition and repetition of knowledge, Curriculum driven</td>
<td>Creation, acquisition, and application of knowledge, Diverse sources of knowledge, Empowerment of learners, Competency driven</td>
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<td>Delivery</td>
<td>Limited learning options and modalities, Formal institutions, Uniform centralized control, Supply driven</td>
<td>Multitude of learning options, settings, and modalities, New pedagogical approaches, Technology-supported delivery, Pluralistic, flexible decentralized system, Learner driven</td>
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education to creating a flexible policy and regulatory framework that encompasses a wider range of institutional actors and partners. In this context the main governance challenge is to promote efficient coordination mechanisms and to put increased emphasis on individual learners. This framework needs to be enabling, inclusive of disadvantaged learners, and responsive to learners’ needs (table 3.2). Within this framework incentives assume a greater importance than rigid policy directives and control from government. The framework includes legislation and executive orders; arrangements for ensuring coordination across ministries and other institutions involved in education and training activities; and mechanisms for certifying the achievements of learners, monitoring institutional and system performance, and promoting learning pathways.

**Coordinating Policy across Ministries**

Critical in a lifelong learning perspective are coordination between line ministries in the central government as well as close linkages between general education and vocational education, and training on the one hand and education and work on the other. To promote coordination

| **Table 3.2. Traditional Role of Government and New Role in the Knowledge Economy** |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| **Policy issue**                | **Current role**              | **Role in the knowledge economy** |
| Integration/coordination at national level | Adopts compartmentalized, sectoral approach | Coordinates multisectoral approach |
| Coordination across governance levels | One-way control and regulation Controls and regulates | Two-way mutual support and partnerships Creates choices, provides information and incentives, facilitates cooperation and provision |
| Government as an enabler | | Demand is learner driven |
| Linkage between education and the labor market/society Qualification assurance system | Supply is institution-driven | Diverse system of recognition and quality control |
| Administration and management | Provides rules and regulation | Creates incentives, facilitates diverse providers |
several OECD countries have combined central ministries. In 2001 the Korean government upgraded the Ministry of Education, renaming it the Ministry of Education and Human Resource Development (MOEHRD). Headed by a deputy prime minister, MOEHRD coordinates the policies of line ministries (for example, the Ministries of Labor, Science and Technology, Information and Communication, and Economy and Finance) that have implications for human resource development and lifelong learning. In similar moves, Germany created the Federal Ministry of Education and Research in 1998 and Japan created the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology in 2001. Other countries have developed knowledge and learning strategies that require coordination between education and training ministries and ministries that deal with such issues as early childhood development, science and technology, information and communication technology, industry, trade, and finance. Australia and the United Kingdom, which had combined education and employment ministries, have now separated them to ensure that Cabinet-level discussions focus equally on learning and economic issues.

Under the World Bank Lifelong Learning and Training project, Chile is horizontally and vertically changing the way it validates skills acquired on the job or in training institutions and revamping the coverage and quality of tertiary technical education. Vertically, the curriculum offered in grades 11 and 12 in all technical secondary schools is being aligned with that offered in tertiary institutions’ technical and professional courses. The horizontal alignment attempts to link education quality and labor market demands by establishing local collaboration between the business sector and training institutions (World Bank 2002b). In addition, the national government has created a council, headed by the minister of finance and including the ministers of education and training, to oversee the project. Though these reforms are based on good practice elsewhere, it is too early to determine whether these structures as developed in Chile will be effective.

The Nordic countries have shown that coordination pays off in improving the transition rates of young people from initial education to working life. In these countries most graduates immediately find jobs, youth unemployment is low, and almost all young people are either in school or working. These countries have achieved these results by emphasizing both prevention and remediation (with a focus on rapid reintegration of school drop-outs); integrated education, labor market, and welfare policies (using subsidized employment to increase skill levels, not just provide young people with jobs); and delivery mechanisms that, critically, are managed at the local level and have responsibility for and ability to coordinate across several agencies (for example,
education, employment, health, welfare, and police) at different levels of government (OECD 2000c). Such a system requires a clear framework for action, adequate resources, and, especially, administrative capacity to track individuals and work across ministries and levels of government.

Finland has used policy coordination to develop an effective lifelong learning system that starts with a vision of lifelong learning. Its lifelong learning strategy begins by offering all children access to preschool education. After completion of compulsory schooling, young people are encouraged to enter upper secondary general or vocational education and to complete their studies. Finland offers many non-university higher education programs, and it provides opportunities for adults to study for university degrees. It is also developing methods for recognizing nonformal and informal learning.

The strength of the Finnish economy and the opportunities that exist for lifelong learning owe much to the development of a comprehensive and inclusive education and training system and significant investment in human capital (box 3.1). As a result of that investment, Finland’s students are among the best educated in Europe, placing first in reading, third in science, and fourth in math in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (OECD 2001e).

**Box 3.1. Systemic Reform for Lifelong Learning in Finland**

For decades Finnish education policy has focused on improving the overall level of education and ensuring equal access to lifelong learning for all groups in all regions of the country. School-age students are required to attend formal schooling. The system also provides opportunities to participate in and complete any level and form of education and training after school age.

Finland’s national statement outlines its vision of lifelong learning. That vision includes:

- Providing one year of preschool education for all children before comprehensive school.
- Helping more young people apply for and complete upper secondary general or vocational education.
- Developing students’ learning skills in all sectors of the education system.
- Increasing the provision of non-university higher education.
- Expanding opportunities for adults to study for a university degree.

(continued)
In some developing countries, such as Jordan and Mauritius, many ministries often oversee, manage, and finance training, and competition for scarce resources prevents collaboration, promotion of high-quality training, and a continuum of training opportunities. Elsewhere, as in Turkey, a single ministry is responsible for both vocational and general education, but there are several specific types of vocational schools. Since

Box 3.1. (Continued)

- Expanding opportunities for adults to study for upper secondary and postsecondary vocational qualifications and to pursue other studies that improve their employability and capacity for further learning.
- Developing methods for recognizing nonformal and informal learning.

The government provides many incentives to encourage people to pursue education throughout their lives. Compulsory comprehensive schooling, upper secondary education, and vocational education are free. Students pursuing compulsory education through upper secondary schools receive free meals, and meals for higher education students are subsidized. Student housing is free for upper secondary and vocational education students. Financial aid is available for full-time post-compulsory studies.

Since 1992 Finland has also been developing alternatives to university studies. Its polytechnic schools offer shorter, more practical courses of study in technology and engineering that meet the needs of high-tech industry.

Except for university education, adults can participate in all levels of certificate- and noncertificate-oriented education. Adults can also complete primary or general upper secondary education and take part in the matriculation examination. Provision of basic education for adults (except for compulsory education) is not as strictly regulated as compulsory education. The 1999 Vocational Education Act caters to the needs of adults, providing, for example, the opportunity to pursue distance learning. Finnish universities do not offer special arrangements for adults, but adults account for one-fifth of students at the polytechnics. Various types of noncertificate-oriented courses are also available to help adults upgrade their skills, and financial support for adults is available. In 1998, 58 percent of Finns between the ages of 25 and 65 reported having participated in learning within the previous 12 months, the highest in the OECD.


In some developing countries, such as Jordan and Mauritius, many ministries often oversee, manage, and finance training, and competition for scarce resources prevents collaboration, promotion of high-quality training, and a continuum of training opportunities. Elsewhere, as in Turkey, a single ministry is responsible for both vocational and general education, but there are several specific types of vocational schools. Since
each type has its own hierarchy within the ministry and its own curriculum, management, and financing, the result is a fragmented and ineffective approach.

Vertical coordination, in the form of policy guidelines and budget/subsidy allocation from the center to the regions, will remain important as countries continue to decentralize their education policy decisions and implementation plans, which in turn will determine the quality and equity of education. Vertical coordination is particularly challenging in transition economies, which only recently moved from centralized command and control systems. Under those systems, at least in theory, coordination was simple, as subnational units were merely implementation agents of the central government (World Bank 2000a).

**Forming Partnerships with the Private Sector and Civil Society**

The state will have to play a more pluralistic role in providing, financing, and managing education. It will no longer be the (almost) sole provider and financier of education but will have to cooperate with the private sector (both for-profit and not-for-profit institutions) and civil society, using comparative advantages and synergies to reach common education goals more effectively and more efficiently (OECD 2001d).

The private sector can provide education in both traditional ways (owning and operating private schools and providing inputs, such as books, materials, and equipment) and novel ways (operating public schools under contract). Enterprises also provide training and are increasingly involved in developing occupational standards and curricula.

Policymakers need to create a level playing field between public and private providers. They can do so by, for example, ensuring that publicly funded student loan programs can be used at private institutions (as in the United States) or at institutions that offer distance programs, short-duration training, or other nontraditional courses; by ensuring that subsidies to publicly managed institutions do not crowd out private providers in the same fields; and by adopting accreditation procedures that guarantee quality and protect learners from fraudulent practice, while respecting the institutional diversity that private institutions bring.

Another way in which the private sector can participate in education is for nongovernmental organizations to operate public primary and secondary schools or take responsibility for parts of the curricula in public schools on behalf of the government. Examples include Fe y Alegría in Venezuela (and many other Latin American countries); the SABIS School Network in the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States (box 3.2); and Cisco Systems, which has established “academies” in more
Box 3.2. Forming Creative Partnerships between the Public and Private Sectors to Run Schools

Established in Venezuela in 1955, Fe y Alegría (FyA) is a regional federation of national educational organizations, each of which provides a wide range of educational services in highly marginalized communities. Services focus primarily on delivery of formal primary education and technical training, ranging from farming to secretarial skills. FyA now serves schools in 14 countries, reaching more than 800,000 students. Governments provide some funding to FyA schools, to meet operating or set-up costs. In 1998 FyA was allowed to take over three failing public schools in two poor neighborhoods of Caracas, Venezuela. Under an agreement with the government, it leased the buildings for 50 years and operates the schools.

The SABIS School Network is a network of 22 public and private schools serving more than 18,000 students in the Middle East, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Each school is financially and administratively independent. All schools use the SABIS Educational System, which consists of an internationally oriented college-preparatory curriculum emphasizing English, math, science, and international languages.

Sources: O'Donoghue 1998; World Bank reports.

than 145 countries that offer computer networking qualifications recognized in the labor market. The Universitas 21 consortium brings together 17 major public and private universities from around the world with a publishing company to develop and deliver distance education courses internationally (www.universitas21.com). Heineken reached an agreement with unions in the Netherlands that included a guarantee that all current employees would continue to be employed by the company but that they would undergo training, individually or collectively, for their new functions. Redesign was worked out from the bottom up, with trade union representatives and work counselors working on design teams (European Industrial Relations Observatory Online 1999). Enterprises are often the most important providers and financiers of training for workers, even in the poorest countries (Johanson 2002).

Developments in education and training delivery mean that, increasingly, the capabilities needed to improve and transform the education and training system will reside in the private sector. Private media and publishing houses and technology-driven manufacturing companies already have the skills and knowledge to develop Web-based and multimedia courses and materials for distance learning.
Developing countries face significant challenges in attracting competent personnel to fill creative, technical, and managerial positions in the education sector, especially where the sector is dominated by public sector terms and conditions (Grace and others 2001). Teachers trained to use new technologies, and math and science teachers, can often find more remunerative jobs outside the education sector. Part of the solution to attracting them to teaching lies in increasing the number of technically competent people, thereby reducing the premium for these skills. The need to do so underscores the point that solutions to problems in the education and training sectors often require cross-sectoral approaches. Another part of the solution may be more flexible pay scales and conditions of employment.

**Framework for Quality Assurance**

New quality assurance mechanisms which certify learners and accredit institutions are needed to promote lifelong learning. This is because existing arrangements do not capture new and important skills and competencies, nor do they value informal and nonformal learning.

**Certifying Learners’ Competencies**

Learning needs to become more flexible and diverse to allow alternative delivery mechanisms, such as distance education and e-learning, open entry and exit, flexible enrollment, modular courses, and training that is available as and when needed. As this happens, learners’ acquisition of skills and more and more learning will take place outside of formal educational institutions. In addition, a new and diverse set of competencies and skills, described in chapter 2, will be acquired in various nonformal out-of-school learning activities, as well through formal channels.

These changes call for a more flexible system of recognizing learning. Such a system should promote alternative pathways for learners within and between different levels of institutions. It should provide linkages between different types of qualifications, vocational and academic. It should articulate training standards and qualifications that help link formal and informal education and training and integrate learning, licensing and qualifications, and labor market needs (box 3.3). It should also enable learners to have their achievements recognized across countries.

A learning certification system needs to recognize nonformal learning to provide incentives for people who have not completed a level of schooling or who are engaged in nonformal learning. This is particularly important in developing countries, where access to formal education and training institutions is limited.
Several significant issues need to be addressed before a country can move in this direction:

- **Establishing key competency and assessment standards.** Competency and assessment standards set up a universally recognized set of indicators against which all learning can be evaluated (see chapter 2). Many countries have established occupational and training standards for vocational education and training, and some are beginning to develop cross-national approaches and benchmark national standards to international requirements (Fretwell, Morgan, and Arjen 2001). Chile, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Romania have initiated projects with World Bank support to develop a system of national occupational competency and skill standards meeting the specific needs of their economies.

- **Recognizing nonformal learning.** An alternative approach to evaluating learning based on key competencies is to allow learners to demonstrate that their informal learning is equal to formal learning and to issue them certificates from formal learning institutions. Such a system is already in place in France (the *bilan de compétence*) and the Republic of Korea (box 3.4). While the lure of a qualification may serve as an incentive for some learners, this approach leaves traditional “supply-side”

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**Box 3.3. Building a Lifelong Learning System in Chile**

In Chile, as in most developing countries, barriers exist between the university and non-university sectors. Typically, a student who graduates from a non-university tertiary education institution, such as a vocational training institute, a technical institute, or a community college, has no choice but to enter the world of work. It is not possible to transfer directly to a university or even to a higher academic level in the non-university sector. It is also very difficult for these graduates to begin formal university studies after a few years of professional experience.

A recent initiative by the Universidad de Concepción aims to break this barrier. A two-year postsecondary vocational training center, a four-year technical institute, and the faculty of engineering of the university will be integrated, under a grant from the Competitive Quality Improvement Fund, supported by an ongoing Bank-financed higher education project. The curricula of all three institutions will be adjusted to allow for direct transfer of credits, and the vocational training center and the technical institute's qualifications will be recognized in determining admission to the faculty of engineering.

*Source:* Oxenham and others 2002.
Box 3.4. The Republic of Korea’s Flexible System of Recognizing Learning Outcomes

The Korean government has recently strengthened the Bachelor’s Degree Examination Program for Self-Education. The program makes it possible to obtain a bachelor’s degree through individual study without attending a regular college or university by passing the examination administered by the government. The program aims to realize the philosophy of lifelong learning, contribute to individual self-actualization, and develop society as a whole. A degree from this program is recognized in the same way as one obtained from a higher education institution. Degrees are offered in Korean, English, and Chinese language and literature; business administration; public administration; computer science; law; math; agriculture; nursing; early childhood education; and home economics.

Source: Bank staff working in the Republic of Korea.

institutions, which may or may not reflect the needs of the knowledge economy, in charge of the certification process.

- Reducing tensions between formal and nonformal institutions. Some formal institutions, particularly in higher education, may have difficulty accepting the idea that learning can take place outside a formal institution. These institutions, and related ministries of education, may feel threatened by nonformal learning approaches. For their part, nonformal institutions, such as traditional African apprenticeship systems, may fear that formal recognition may impose inappropriate standards. Enterprises may resist efforts to regulate and recognize their internal training.

Accrediting Institutions

Policymakers need to rethink the accreditation of institutions. This is because, on the one hand, the relationship between government and increasingly autonomous institutions is changing and, on the other, individuals are less and less likely to start and complete a qualification at a single institution over a single period of time. Reviewing accreditation mechanisms needs to establish a new link between the assessment of individual competencies and the evaluation of institutional capacity and performance.

The trend in OECD countries is toward accrediting institutions based on output or performance (such as graduation rates or the acquisition of knowledge and competencies) rather than inputs (such as the size of the faculty or
the number of books in the library). This is also true in some developing countries. In Bangladesh, for example, private secondary schools must achieve certain pass rates on the university entrance examination to remain accredited (although this regulation is rarely enforced). In private (but not public) institutions of higher learning in Armenia, a certain percentage (currently 50 percent) of students must pass the final examination. Increasingly, funding of institutions is also based on performance.

A wide range of developing countries in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean have introduced independent assessment systems at the tertiary level (such systems remain rare in the Middle East and North Africa and in South Asia). Nigeria, for example, has had a system of regular accreditation assessments for 25 years. International experience suggests that while it is important to have a compulsory licensing process to ensure a minimum level of quality, regular accreditation and evaluation should be voluntary activities that institutions value as a way to improve their performance. Accreditation and evaluation can be encouraged through public information, financial incentives, and nonmonetary rewards (World Bank 2002c).

The fact that learners increasingly acquire skills and knowledge from multiple sources poses an even greater challenge to quality assurance, especially at the tertiary level. Currently, learners receive their degree or qualification from the last institution they attend, regardless of the contribution of that institution to the learner’s overall learning gains. Where articulation agreements exist, including joint degree programs, both institutions award a degree, even though neither was responsible for providing all the learning gains. These new challenges remain contentious for industrial and developing countries.

To control quality and maintain accountability, many countries, including Chile, Colombia, France, and the United Kingdom, have established national standards and assessments at the primary and secondary education levels (Leithwood, Edge, and Jantzi 1999). It is important to distinguish between selection tests for access to the next level of education, which virtually all countries have, and tests at various stages of schooling certifying learning and providing for accountability, which are less common. South Africa, which had no national assessments under apartheid, introduced systemwide national assessments for grades 3, 6, and 9 to boost outcome-based, learner-centered education (Howie and others 2000). The assessments, which focus on achievement of defined learning outcomes, allow students to progress at their own rate and be assessed accordingly. They continually assess performance by monitoring portfolios, observation sheets, journals, project work, and assignments.

Accreditation and certification systems also help learners move easily and efficiently between different types and levels of learning. Several
countries have developed national qualifications frameworks that assign qualifications from different institutions to a set of levels, with each level linked to competency standards. In this way learners can see what qualifications are of equal value and how they are sequenced (OECD 2002c). Since the mid-1980s several countries have been developing such frameworks. English-speaking nations (Australia, England, New Zealand, and Scotland) were the earliest to do so. More recently many other countries (China, Mauritius, Mexico, Trinidad and Tobago, South Africa, and Uganda) and regions (the Southern African Development Community and the Pacific Islands Forum) have developed or announced plans to develop frameworks (South Africa, Departments of Education and Labour 2002). A report on South Africa’s experience (South Africa, Departments of Education and Labour 2002) suggests that most countries’ national qualification frameworks have changed significantly, often following comprehensive reviews. It notes that debate is both an inevitable and positive part of the development process, since different traditions of education and training have to learn to speak to each other in common terms.

Frameworks for certifying qualifications come in various types, and all have evolved over time. (See box 3.5 for Namibia’s experience.) Frameworks vary by the types of qualifications covered (occupational or vocational only, academic only, both); types of institutions included (university institutions only, all types of tertiary institutions); levels of qualifications involved (higher education, secondary education, first degree, postgraduate); fields of study (all vocational and academic fields, selected fields for which standards are developed); and how institutional participation is encouraged (voluntary, public funding available only for qualifications within the framework).

Perhaps the most developed example of a regional framework is that being established by the European Union (EU) to create a European Higher Education Area. The emphasis is on increasing mobility across undergraduate and graduate programs, in conjunction with the EU’s European Credit Transfer System. Vocational and technical skills are not covered, nor are non-university institutions.

Making Information Available to Learners

Quality assurance systems must also make available information about the performance and offerings of learning providers. The Netherlands and the United Kingdom release information on assessment results by school, allowing parents to choose the public school they would like their child to attend.

Reliable information should be provided about programs offered by international providers. The fact that accreditation and evaluation
schemes of domestic institutions are weak in developing countries suggests that monitoring international providers will be difficult.

Effective grievance procedures and protections can be useful in ensuring quality and protecting against fraud. A survey in India revealed that 46 of 144 foreign providers (32 percent) advertising higher education programs in the newspapers were neither recognized nor accredited in their country of origin (World Bank 2002c). This raises the question of how learners can make informed choices about value. Hong Kong (China), India, and Singapore require that distance education offerings by international providers be subject to the same quality assurance procedures in their originating countries that on-campus courses in those countries face (World Bank 2002c). The development of international quality assurance mechanisms is another option.

Box 3.5. The National Qualifications Framework in Namibia

In 1996 Namibia passed the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) Act, intended to help transform education and training and recognize the learning that results rather than merely draw equivalences among different types of qualifications. To oversee the process, it established a 35-member council, made up of representatives of government ministries, labor unions, the private sector, and nongovernmental organizations. The council is chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Higher Education, Training, and Employment Creation.

The National Qualification Framework was intended to embrace all learning and all qualifications. The NQA Council adopted an eight-level framework, starting with compulsory schooling at level 1 and ending with doctorates at level 8. The Council approved 12 thematic areas, with the intention that a national standards-setting body would develop standards in each area following national consultation. Industrial or occupational groups are responsible for developing national standards in each area, based on a common set of steps developed by the Council. There has been considerable flexibility in developing the standards, which use international standards as the starting point.

The lack of an accreditation process for training providers has slowed implementation of the National Qualification Framework. The need for accreditation has become more urgent, especially given the presence of foreign providers. But funding for the Council’s work has been inadequate, and the Council suffers from staff shortages.

Increasing Equity

Access to learning—and consequently learning achievement—is highly inequitably distributed in all societies. While the nature of the disadvantaged groups varies across countries, women, people in rural areas, ethnic minorities, the unemployed, people who work in the informal sector, and older workers generally have less opportunity to learn. The barriers these groups face are varied and in many cases individuals face multiple hurdles. For example, discrimination against women in the labor market reduces their incentive to invest in or complete education (Gill, Fluitman, and Dar 2001). Lack of access to schools within reasonable walking distance disadvantages rural children in Africa (World Bank 2001d). Employers tend to fund training of employees with higher levels of education and training (Hong and Batra 1995; O’Connell 1999).

The World Conference on Education for All, held in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1991 declared that all children should be able to complete primary education and that girls should have the same access as boys. People with only basic literacy and numeracy skills may have been able to function in mass production, agricultural, or informal economies (although disparities in education lead to social divisions). But, in the global knowledge economy, access to continuing education and training—that is, to lifelong learning—is a necessity for people who want to have high-valued-added and secure well-paid jobs. A major focus of a government’s policy for lifelong learning, therefore, must be improving the ability of disadvantaged groups and those with low educational attainment to access learning.

This report describes several ways this can be done. Changing the learning process, both by focusing on a broader range of competencies and transforming pedagogy, will enable more people to achieve the skills they need. Establishing accountability systems, often mediated by guidance and counseling systems, could help learners and their families make informed choices, not restricted by prejudiced or ill-informed word of mouth. Recognizing that informal and nonformal learning is a route to genuine skill acquisition enables people with less formal training to demonstrate the skills they have. Gender assessments in education have proved useful in identifying specific gender gaps in access to education and the use of knowledge as girls try to enter the labor market. They can help policymakers develop community- and country-specific mechanisms that address obstacles.

Another important policy tool is decentralization. The transfer of responsibilities from central ministries of education to local education authorities, communities, postsecondary institutions, and schools has become common. In Colombia, for example, decentralization reforms,
designed with a focus on equity, have empowered poor communities through targeting mechanisms and voucher systems (Fiske 1996).

Conclusion

Refocusing government policy and reforming the policymaking system requires fundamental changes across a wide range of issues. These changes require a move toward a learner-centered system, the deployment of public resources and effort on learners with the greatest needs, and the creation of a flexible system of learning opportunities that responds to the different aptitudes, circumstances, and goals of learners. Making a lifelong learning system a reality will depend on giving people, enterprises, and communities the resources they need to pursue their learning goals—the subject of the next chapter.