

Thematic session III: Education and mobility¹

Education and mobility across the Pamir region is far from representing a unilineal process. Quite on the contrary, it is an example where ‘borders matter’ to significant degrees. The historical conditions of the Pamirs being divided between two imperial powers, the Russian and British empires, gave rise to very strict border regimes and different paths taken toward education also after independence of the former colonies of British India and the former Republics of the Soviet Union (SU), and especially Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Region (GBAO) as the seat of the Pamirs in the former SU.

In British India education was reserved for the elite, while in the Soviet area the educational system was indeed much more egalitarian. This can be interpreted as a result of Soviet ideology, or as an aspect of an early modernisation approach that the Central Asian Countries were confronted with. However, this early promotion of an egalitarian education in GBAO was also geopolitically motivated.

In terms of the current situation the phenomenon of “brain drain” deserves attention. In fact, the problem was identified as common to all countries of the Pamirian region and begs the important question here of how to create local economic dynamics and income opportunities to avoid out-migration of the most educated people. Conversely, the discussion of labour migration seems important too, as the contribution of migrants’ remittances to local development represents one of the most important factors that keep local economies intact. The role of education in this respect is seen as a contributing factor in finding higher paid, skilled labour as a migrant and in turn a higher volume of remittances in support of local economic endeavours.

More generally, it seems obvious that migration always occurs when there is an incentive, and that migration is a ubiquitous process motivated by a plethora of reasons.

A discussion of these aspects was triggered by the papers delivered in this session. Robert Middleton focused in his talk on the situation in GBAO and its very long history of education that is connected to the Ismaili tradition. This can be seen, in fact, by the formal status of education in GBAO that is higher than in other parts of Tajikistan. The same is true for the area of Gilgit-Baltistan where the areas populated by people adhering to the Ismaili faith show comparatively high rates of education. This fact was stressed by Majeed Kahn in his talk on education and mobility in Northern Pakistan. He conceded that the process of providing public education in Gilgit-Baltistan commenced rather late, but that the Paki-

¹ Based on minutes recorded Sarah van Bentum and Michael Spies

stani Government made significant progress since the 1970s in providing education in that remote mountain region.

Both speakers also stressed the problem of what has been termed ‘negative mobility’, defined as a process of unskilled labour migration to engage in menial work occurring at the expense of formal education. This was identified as a major challenge for policy makers when thinking about encouraging local development directed at providing income opportunities in both skilled and unskilled labour markets.



*Private schools are offering English medium instruction in Gilgit
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