



A Look At Neoliberal Forces, Decentralisation and the Cost-Sharing of Education. Are Vietnam's Socialisation of Basic Schooling and Nepal's Decentralisation of Education Equitable Solutions?

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Abstract

One of the biggest concerns about the widespread decentralisation of education is the possible lack of equity, and the perception that the government is shirking one of its key responsibilities – a public good is becoming a private enterprise. Socialisation of education in Vietnam and the decentralisation of education in Nepal are two models that are very differently implementing this process. Both countries have several similarities, being post-conflict societies heavily influenced by communist ideologies. This paper explores how these societies are rolling out decentralisation, and what this means for their most vulnerable citizens.

Keywords: *Neoliberalism, Nepal, Vietnam, decentralisation, Socialisation*

Introduction

Neo-liberalism is like Marmite: You either love it or hate it.

Despite the flippant reductionism of the above 'snowclone neologism', it could be said that it has become as fashionable to berate neoliberalism as to praise it. It is either abhorred as a tidal wave of capitalist 'creative destruction' by social justice proponents (Harvey, 2007) or praised as the 'magic bullet' of international progress and prosperity (Day, 2004) by governments and institutions with enormous international leverage such as the USA and World Bank. Certainly, very few voices in the field of development, education, activism or economics can be said to be neutral about it. What is undisputed by various authors is that we "we live in the age of neoliberalism" and that it is "the dominant ideology shaping our world today" (Thorsen and Lie, 2009)

Education decentralisation and cost-sharing are seen by many to be a direct off-shoot of the current trend towards neoliberalist structural change. Especially when applied to 'developing' countries, such as Nepal and Viet Nam (where it is known as socialisation), the popular opinion is that decentralisation is the result of combined pressure from globalisation and international aid. While this is undoubtedly true, another point of view is that decentralisation of schooling is the logical and rational answer to providing locally customisable education, especially when it needs to be rapidly flexible in remote locations and/or sensitive to the needs of ethnic minorities.

After looking at how neoliberalism has brought about decentralisation, we will examine it within the context of education in Nepal and Vietnam. However, we will see that the way that Nepal's and Vietnam's very different governments have conceived of and implemented this process is not the same, though they share some similarities. Both the countries are post-conflict societies, though Vietnam's conflict is much older and more complex than Nepal's, with major international actors and ending in unification after decades of partition. Another similarity is that both political systems are strongly socialist, with communist parties being extremely influential in the psyche and construction of the economic and civil society. However, when it comes to structure of implementation, the two countries differ in some ways. The issues of finance and equity, though, hit the same notes as decentralisation and cost-sharing of education anywhere in the world.

Neoliberalism, Decentralisation and Education as a public good

Considering neoliberalism gets such bad press, there are surprisingly few precise definitions of it in the literature of developmental economics. Many authors are content to leave it undefined, agreeing with Saad-Filho and Johnston that it is "impossible to define neoliberalism purely theoretically" (2005, p1).

A good attempt at a definition is:

"Neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices proposing that human well-being can best be advanced by the maximization of entrepreneurial freedoms within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, individual liberty, unencumbered markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices."

David Harvey, *Neoliberalism as Creative Destruction*, 2007, p22.

EI (2009, p136) says that "education is a public good, and that public goods must be provided under the responsibility and control of governments." One of the many ways that neoliberalism affects educational policy, is by bringing about decentralisation of this public good. Even countries such as the UK have adopted decentralisation of schooling, and as the Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg (DCLG, p1) says in the foreword to *Decentralisation and the Localism Bill: an essential guide*, they claim that:

"Radical decentralisation means stripping away much of the top-down bureaucracy that previous governments have put in the way of frontline public services and civil society. It means giving local people the powers and funding to deliver what they want for their communities – with a particular determination to help those who need it most." The rest of the foreword is by the Minister of State for Decentralisation.

The following is a graphical representation of what such players believe decentralisation will bring to their countries, economies and civil societies.

EDUCATIONAL DECENTRALIZATION

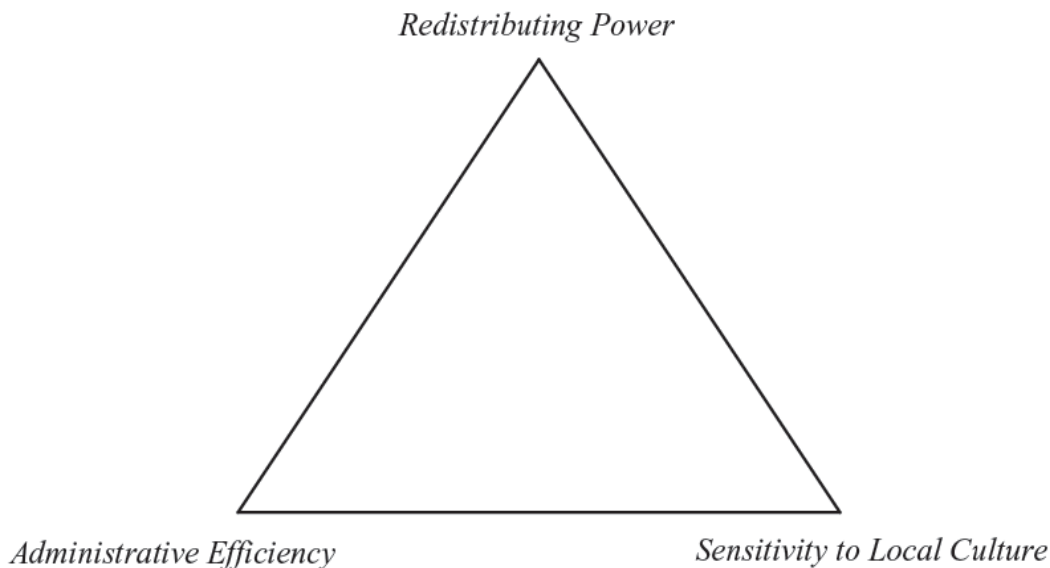


Figure 1: Common Arguments for Educational Decentralization.

Bjork (2006, p224)

Education is one of the essential public goods provided by the state. In terms of expenditure, it has always accounted for a large proportion of the government’s budgetary provisions. It is a public good both because it does the public good and because it is provided for by the public purse.

Neoliberalism is directly opposed to the concept of public goods and the understanding that the government has to invest in education as one. If investment in public goods is solely the purview of the market, then according to neoliberalism, there is the ‘free rider’ problem, where some people end up paying more than others. However, if we take the case of the USA, one dollar invested in education gives the government a return of seven dollars. So, even if we take the economic and financial view, cutting investment in education does not make sense (Trostel, 2008, p. 32).

However, despite these proven figures, ex-democratic institutions like the World Bank and IMF have pushed counties and governments to buy into the neoliberal idea that public funding in education needs to be cut. This is despite the disastrous consequences of this sort of restructuring in countries in Africa.

The editorial cartoon below humorously shows that the so-called “Bretton Woods” type structural adjustment demanded by players like the World Bank through disinvestment in public goods like education, made no difference to the plight of the affected countries. Indeed, some say it made everything worse. (Turner and Yolcu, 2014).

SPOT THE DIFFERENCE

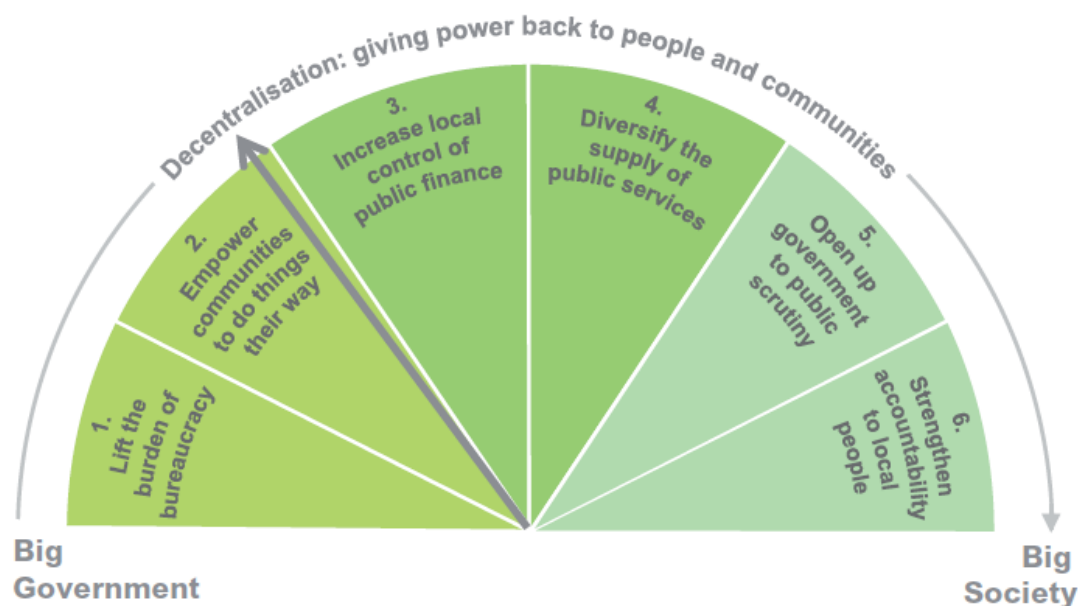


ANSWER: 10 YEARS OF IMF STRUCTURAL ADJUSTMENT POLICY
'SPOT THE DIFFERENCE'

Slow Death of the Bretton Woods System

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) targets have required that most developing countries provide free or minimal cost basic education. However, for many of the governments, fiscal constraints prevent them from being able to provide this schooling solely out of their revenues or purses. To solve this, many countries now charge tuition fees to recover some part of the cost and have encouraged privatisation or community-owned schooling to bear the burden of some of this expansion (Carney et al, 2007).

Though the worldwide forces of neoliberalism that promote decentralisation say that it is a move from “Big Government” to “Big Society” like this graphic from the Department for Communities and Local Government’s publication, it is useless when, as Fritzen (2007) says, reforms that ‘have the veneer of democracy’ but which are ‘easily manipulated by central and local elites’, and have ‘weak downward accountability to communities’ (1361).



(DCLG, p2)

We will see in the following pages, that many of these issues exist in both Nepal’s and Viet Nam’s moves towards decentralised cost-sharing of education.

Setting the Context

Socialisation in Vietnam

Vietnam is the world’s 13th most populous country, on the easternmost tip of the Indochina peninsula. It is the eight of the most populous Asian countries. It is bounded by China, Laos, Cambodia and the South China Sea. Hanoi is its political capital and Ho Chi Minh City its economic and cultural centre.

The modern concept of the state of Vietnam began with the founding of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh. Vietnam was divided politically into two rival states, North and South Vietnam, after fighting off the Japanese and French colonists. Conflict between the two sides intensified, with a lot of infamous intervention from the United States in what came to be known as the Vietnam War. The war ended with a North Vietnamese victory in 1975. Since its reunification in 1976 after decades of civil war and partition, Vietnam emerged as a united country under a communist government. It remained impoverished and isolated, but in 1986 the government began a series of reforms to open up the country to investment and economic progress.

Since 2000, Vietnam’s economic growth has been amongst the highest in the world and. As a result of its successful economic reforms, it joined the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2007. Vietnam recently entered the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) test, and in 2012, the results showed that it has surpassed many other developed nations that spent a lot more on education. “It ranked 17 out of 65 countries/economies. Enrolment rates at primary school are high (97%), although boys are more likely than girls to drop out of school early.” (Young lives, 2014, p1)

Through all the eras of education systems, whether classical, colonial, socialist, or contemporary, the state has always played a leading role in the policy and implementation of education. For a society that is socialist, Viet Nam’s people are extremely critical and vocal of their government’s education plans. While the state still retains much of the cost of public schooling, some education financing and governance takes place through non-state or semi-state schools, where the responsibility for financing education is falling on households more than ever (London, 2010).

In the 1990s Viet Nam adopted an “additional mechanism for social coordination: “socialization” (xã h^oi ho’a). ...in Viet Nam the term has a meaning diametrically opposite that in the rest of the world. Outside Viet Nam, socialization refers to the state assuming costs or ownership over a given social activity. In Viet Nam, socialization refers to “all segments of society contributing” to some sphere of social life.”: in this case, education. (London, 2010, p269)

Socialisation, in practice, means that the government expands and supports non-state and decentralised provision of education. By 2006, many pre-school and upper-secondary school students were either in non-state schools or in ‘semi-public’ schools that are partially supported by the government (London, 2010).

Decentralisation in Nepal

Nepal is a land-locked country located between the two most populous countries in the world. It is one of the least developed countries, with approximately 42% of its people living below the poverty line. It is a low income economy,

with a rank of 145th in 187 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI) in 2014.

Nepal was a monarchy for most of its history, ruled by kings from 1768 —until 2008. Since the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990, there had been a series of very volatile governments. The appointment of a Congress Government in 1991 led to a range of market-oriented reforms but later an electoral backlash as the people voted in a minority, communist-aligned government. There was a decade-long Civil War, which involved the Communist Party of Nepal or the Maoists. The cessation of this People's War ushered in weeks of mass protests by all major political parties, leading to the 12-point agreement in 2005 that promised equitable changes and more freedoms. An assembly was elected in 2013 to try to create a new constitution. Despite all these challenges, Nepal has been making steady progress, with the government promising to advance the nation from least developed country status by 2022.

The performance of the education system in Nepal cannot be disconnected from its struggle for democratisation (Carney, et al, 2007, p612). Educational development has rapidly increased since the introduction of the Education Plan in 1971. The number of private schools at that time increased from 10, 600 to more than 27,268 in 2003. The net enrollment rate (NER) in schools at the primary level was 83.5%.

In 2002, the NER for the lower secondary level was 42.9%, but only 26.3% for the secondary level. Boys had greater access to schooling and this shows in gender based NERs (Carney et al, 2007). Literacy rates remain low and gender disparity is pronounced. Achievement rates show that school quality is also poor (ibid).

The Education Act passed in 2001 allows school management committees (SMC) to manage and supervise community schools. Through this Act, the Government has begun transferring the burden of government schools to local communities. The World Bank provided funds in 2001 to support the introduction of community school management initiatives. According to Carney et al, 2007, the amount given by the World Bank is mobilising other donors to support local management of schools and to fund initial projects for this process. The plan of the Government in the long term is "to transfer all public schools to local communities" (Carney et al, 2007).

Comparing and Contrasting

Structure and financing

There are different ways of understanding and categorising decentralisation. In *deconcentration*, the implementation of procedures and the authority to do this is transferred to the local level but the power to make legislation and rules stays centralised. In the case of *delegation*, the local or community government is given some authority to make decisions on a limited scale. *Devolution*, requires that most power and authority be handed over to local players, with very little need to ask for permission from the centre for decisions and changes (McGinn & Welsh, 1999; Carney et al 2007). The type of decentralisation model or models chosen by a government will directly affect the potential impact of the policy implementation.

The following paragraphs show how closely the decentralisation of schooling in Vietnam and Nepal was brought about by the neoliberal forces of globalisation and international aid. They also show how differently Vietnam and Nepal are bringing about similar transformations.

Vietnam

In Vietnam, the drive towards neoliberal reform in education began after the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997, which caused the government to cautiously focus on building macroeconomic stability. This was followed by the signing of the Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) with the USA in 2000. The WTO approved Vietnam's accession package in 2006, but this required the economy to open up, allowing foreign investment and financial restructuring and decentralisation, known as the Doi Moi reforms in Vietnam.

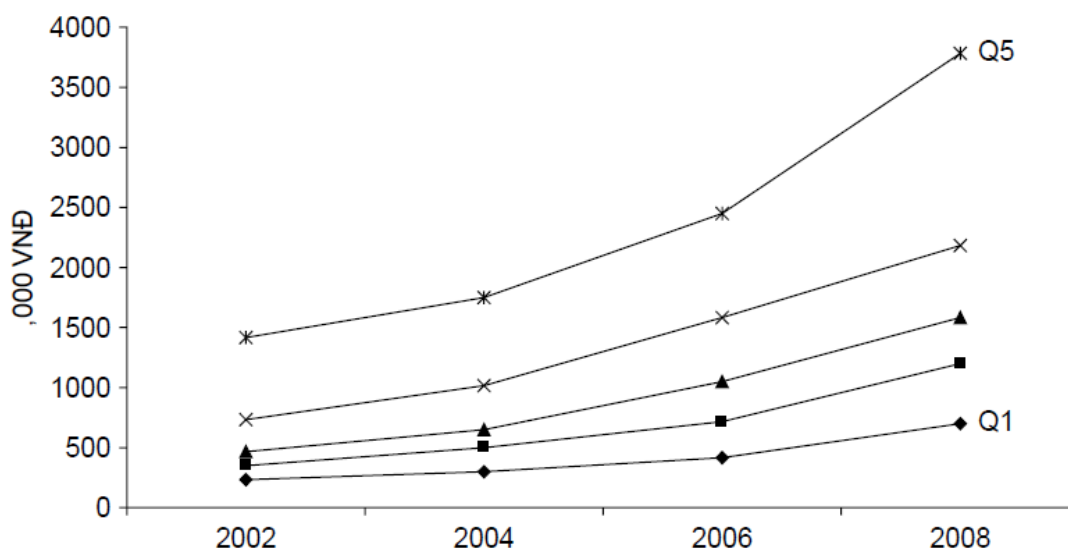
The World Bank states that:

"There are several potential advantages to increased user fees. In principle, charging fees can increase educational spending per student enrolled. It can also improve equity by allowing the public sector to target subsidies more effectively to students from poor families. Moreover, increased cost-recovery can improve school accountability to parents. In many cases, increased cost-recovery leads to increased parental involvement in running the school (World Bank, 1995a). Finally, selective charges on some learning inputs can increase the effectiveness of service delivery. For example, charging for books improves the on time delivery of materials" (World Bank, 1999, p1).

The idea of socialisation as understood in Vietnam means that it is the responsibility of the family, society and the other communist and Youth parties to educate the child in the community. As a result of this, cost-sharing is seen as the way to ensure that there is enough money to provide quality education (London, 2010; Carney et al, 2007).

Regardless of what degree of public or private schools students attend, they are very likely to pay some form of fees for their education, depending on their parents' means. Even in public schools, the amount of money paid towards fees and charges is substantial. Students pay so-called 'voluntary' contributions towards miscellaneous expenses like construction costs, uniforms, lunches and text books, to name but a few. In many places, parents have to pay extra for full day school. This makes the current high figures of enrollment slightly misleading, as it means that many students only attend a few hours of 'half-day' school. Pre-school and secondary education enrolment remains low for poorer and minority students, and this is exacerbated by the fact that they are the most expensive of the schooling stages (London, 2010).

Another aspect of the privatisation of Vietnam's education system is the rising popularity of "extra-study" (ho_c the^m) classes, after school hours, by public school teachers. Low wages for teachers initially brought about this phenomenon, but now it has become entrenched in the society, promoting inequality by making academic success dependent on the parents' income. *"Monthly fees for extra study for secondary school students can exceed US\$100, an unattainable sum for poor households."* (London 2010)



Sources: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2003, 2005, 2008, 2010).

Figure 2. Average expenditure on education per student in the past 12 months (2002-2008)

(London 2010, p371)

Figure 2 above shows the dramatic difference in the amount of money different families are able to spend on education across various regions and demographics of the population. This expenditure does not only show the difference in school fees by region and income-bracket, but also the amount households pay for 'extra-study' classes. London(2010, p371) says that "by2008, it was not uncommon for households in Ho Chi Minh City or Ha Noi to pay US\$100 per month, an unimaginable sum for poor households in any region." While more recent data shows that household expenditure on such extras has fallen from 20% to 15%. It nevertheless remains a significant amount. Here is an idea of how Vietnam's has begun cost-sharing its education between public and private stakeholders. There are two tables that tell their own tale.

Table 11: Funding sources of education expenditures (%)

| | | 1993 | 1998 | 2002 |
|-----------------|--|------|------|------|
| Primary | Public subsidy | 45 | 55 | 73 |
| | Contributions and direct expenditures by parents | 55 | 45 | 27 |
| Lower secondary | Public subsidy | 34 | 62 | 59 |
| | Contributions and direct expenditures by parents | 66 | 38 | 41 |

Source: Edited from World Bank (2005)

Table 12: Financial structure of primary education in Vietnam

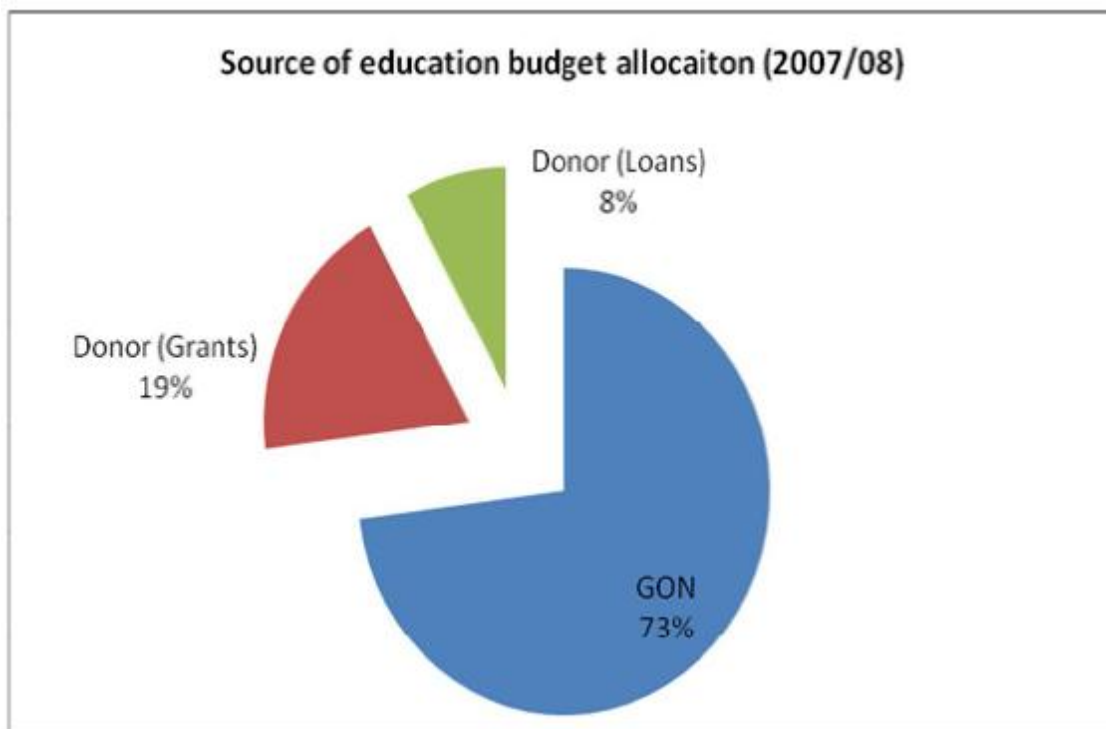
| Items | Funding structure |
|--|--|
| Teacher salaries | Funded by the central government, but extra salaries are funded by local governments, parents and communities. |
| Construction/maintenance of school buildings | Basically funded by parents and communities. In some cases, funded by central and local governments. |
| Textbooks, teaching aids, stationeries | Funded by parents |
| Uniform, transportation | Funded by parents |
| Parents Association | Funded by parents but not necessarily obligatory |
| Study Encouragement Association | Funded by parents but not necessarily obligatory |

(Ushioji & Hamano,2005, pp362-3)

Nepal

In order to build itself up from one of the world's least developed counties, Nepal accepted international aid from the World Bank and other donors, such as USAID, UNDP and JAICA. The Community School Support Project (CSSP) and the School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) under the World Bank was a pilot programme that began to 'return' the

ownership of schools to the community, in line with donor ideologies. The government estimated that the project would cost \$2.6 billion, of which \$2 billion would be invested by the government and \$0.5 billion by Donor Partners (DPs).



Education Financing Reference Group, 2010, p6

The figure above shows the difference in funds necessary in decentralised running of schools is made up by external funds by donors, in the form of grants and loans. This arguably creates a system that will require that when donor funding ends, the cost of running these community schools will fall largely on the people, unless the government finds other ways of replenishing its coffers, such as increased taxation.

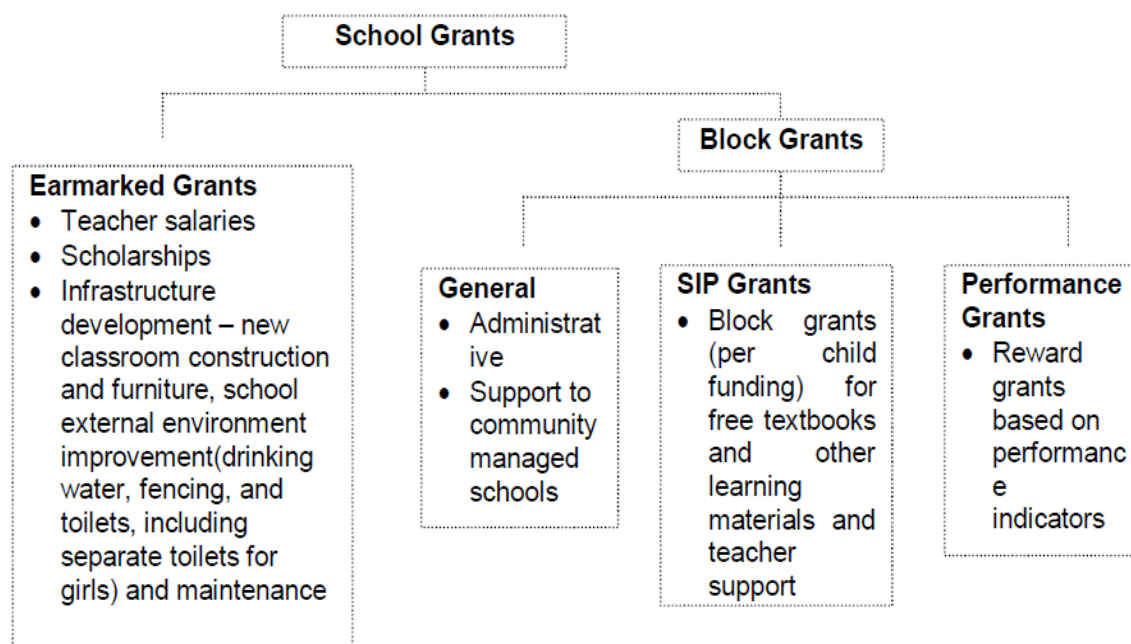
This has not gone unnoticed amongst the stakeholders in Nepal. For example:

“Frankly, this comes from the World Bank. It comes from Washington, DC. The Bank is now preaching the value of community management worldwide. We happen to be one of the recipients of loan money, so we had to accept this. This was a major condition. We would not be able to get huge packages of loans if we had not accepted this proposal. We never had a chance to see the implications and consequences of this proposal. (Official, Ministry of Finance)”

(Carney et al, 2007, p621)

Funding the SSRP takes many forms. Incentive grants of about Rs.100000/- are provided to the (at last count 1500) schools that elect to opt-out of being under direct government management. These grants to ‘community-managed government-funded schools’ are on a first come first serve basis. Below is a graphical representation of the different categories of grants.

Chart – 1: Types of School Grants



Education Financing Reference Group, 2010, p7

“Block’, ‘performance’, ‘supplementary’ and ‘other’ grants, ‘scholarships’ and ‘technical assistance for capacity building” is directed to approximately 250 schools that have been earmarked for ‘special treatment’. The schools that completely come other full project funding are chosen by the government using criteria that the World Bank and they jointly created. (Education Financing Reference Group, 2010, p7).

The schools that buy into the program are allowed to use these funds for teacher salaries (which account for about 80% of the monthly expenses from the grants), as well as for construction and to create funding opportunities.

Table 2: Government support to schools⁵

| Support | Community Managed School | Community School (aided) | Un-aided community school | Religious schools |
|----------------------|--|--|---|--------------------|
| Teacher Salary | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% salary of approved post | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 100% salary of approved post | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed salary support under | No support |
| | (including pension for permanent teachers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed salary support under <i>Rahat</i> quota PCF support | (including pension for permanent teachers) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fixed salary support under <i>rahat</i> quota PCF support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>Rahat</i> quota PCF support | |
| SIP Grant | Rs. 275 for Terai and Valley, Rs. 300 for Hill and Rs. 325 for Mountain | Rs. 275 for Terai and Valley, Rs. 300 for Hill and Rs. 325 for Mountain | | No support |
| Scholarship | Rs. 350 per student for 50% of the girls and dalits for primary level | Rs. 350 per student for 50% of the girls and dalits for primary level | | No support |
| Management Support | Fixed amount provided | Fixed amount provided | | Rs. 50000 per year |
| Textbook | Provided based on the number of students | Provided based on the number of students | Provided based on partial funding approach | No support |
| Construction support | Provided based on partial funding approach | Provided based on partial funding approach | | |
| Performance Grant | Provided based on performance | Provided based on performance | | |
| Incentive support | One time support of Rs.100000/- per level after taking management responsibility | | | |

(Education Financing Reference Group, 2010, p8)

The table above shows the plan for cost-sharing in the different types of schools.

“Currently, there are more than 8000 community managed schools. However, they are provided with autonomy in teacher recruitment, reward/ punishment, collection of resources and determination of expenditure domains. (Education Financing Reference Group 2010, p7).

Local government actors, teachers, parents and community members serving on the School Management Committees (SMCs) are seen as the principal stakeholders, with the Department Of Education (DOE) controlling things from the centre through its local representative the District Education Officer (DEO). The creation of community-spearheaded fund-raising opportunities is encouraged. The Head teachers are responsible both to the SMCs and the DEO. The DEO also has power over the ‘Project Advisory Committee’, ‘Project Monitoring Committee’ and ‘Social Audit Committee’ and can dissolve the SMC whenever he or she chooses, based on sport checks and ad hoc inspections (Carney et al 2007).

This decentralised community management was greeted enthusiastically by some, because it seemed to bring about new avenues for improving social standing and mobility. In some cases, the initial grant allowed physical and symbolic improvements that allowed public schools to mimic private schools in some ways:

“We have been able to convert our school into a ‘boarding-like school’. In fact, we call our school a ‘government-boarding school’. With the money we got after transfer, we bought furniture, constructed a toilet, erected a fence around the school and made a provision for drinking water. Teachers now sit on chairs. We bought a rotating chair for the head teacher who now gives instruction while sitting on the chair. (SMC chairperson)” (Carney et al, 2007, p624)

Equity Concerns

Vietnam

Primary and overall school enrolment has increased across all areas in Vietnam, but, as Table 1 shows, the rate of improvement has not been the same across regions, though Viet Nam’s least economically affluent regions – the northwest mountainous region and central highlands – have shown considerable improvement. There is also disparity of education enrolment based on income.(London, 2010)

Table 1. Net enrolment by region (2006).

| Region | Net enrolment by level of schooling (%) | | |
|-------------------|---|-----------------|-----------------|
| | Primary | Lower Secondary | Upper Secondary |
| Red River Delta | 90.4 | 86.9 | 68.3 |
| Northeast | 89.2 | 83.3 | 55.3 |
| Northwest | 82.9 | 61.0 | 34.7 |
| North Central | 91.8 | 84.2 | 59.8 |
| South Central | 89.6 | 81.6 | 58.1 |
| Central Highlands | 87.5 | 69.9 | 43.8 |
| Southeast | 89.1 | 78.2 | 55.2 |
| Mekong Delta | 88.4 | 69.3 | 38.4 |

Source: General Statistics Office of Vietnam (2008).

(London 2010, p372)

Though children go to school now more than ever before, they continue to face major obstacles in access to equitable schooling, frequently due to the costs of education imposed upon them. These problems are even more insistent for children in poor and remote areas or from ethnic minority backgrounds, although education is a concern for families across socioeconomic boundaries. The Vietnamese government's National Target Program has provided financial assistance, such as exemption from school fees and other contributions, for low-income and ethnic minority children only. The government gives monthly payments to poor households to allow their children to attend pre-school and to families that have children who attend semi-boarding schools. (London, 2010)

Table 17: Conditions for fee exemption

| | Net enrolment by level of schooling (%) | | | | | |
|--|---|------------------|-----------------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|
| | Partial exemption | | | Full exemption | | |
| | First (N=70) | Second (N=56) | Third (N=35) | First (N=120) | Second (N=80) | Third (N=65) |
| 1. Disabled | 2.9 | 1.8 | 5.7 | 0.8 | 1.3 | 6.2 |
| 2. Orphan | 0 | 12.5 | 25.7 | 6.7 | 5.0 | 21.5 |
| 3. Ethnic minority | 5.7 | 3.6 | 8.6 | 6.7 | 3.8 | 0 |
| 4. Low income | 18.6 | 41.6 | 25.7 | 20.0 | 18.8 | 23.1 |
| 5. Child of war martyr | 8.4 | 3.6 | 2.9 | 23.3 | 10.0 | 21.5 |
| 6. Child of disabled soldier | 41.4 | 25.0 | 20.0 | 10.0 | 55.0 | 15.4 |
| 7. Living in mountains, remote areas | 1.4 | 7.1 | 5.7 | 2.5 | 5.0 | 4.6 |
| 8. Mother or father is disabled cadre | 1.4 | 3.6 | 5.7 | 0 | 0 | 1.5 |
| 9. Other | 20.0 | 1.8 | 0 | 30.0 | 1.3 | 6.2 |

Source: Vietnam Living Standard Survey 1988
(Ushioji and Hamano, 2005, p367)

The recent figures show that around 20% of children in households that had been surveyed do not attend the correct grade at school. These figures do not even include migrant children.

For children living in remote or rural highland areas, especially if they are ethnic minority girls, or have HIV/AIDS or are disabled, access to school still remains a problem. Despite scholarships and fee-reduction strategies, the fact that many parents have to pay from their pocket for education remains a major obstacle in progress through the schooling system for some.

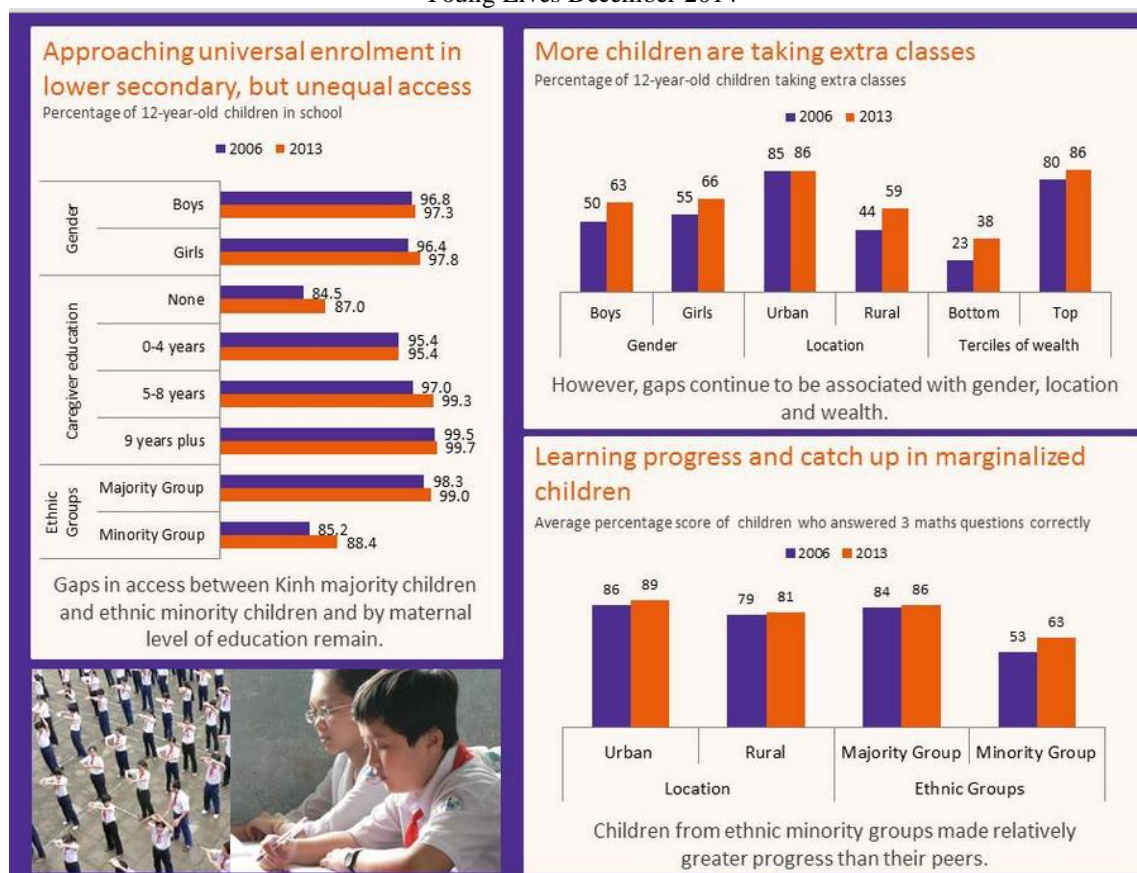
There is also the "achievement syndrome" (tha`nh tr`ch), that means that local officials succumb to the temptations of reporting figures that are obviously exaggerated but which allow the authorities to report "success". Tests and other evaluations were designed to improve the quality of education, but they result in high drop-out rates when children fail. Ethnic minority children especially face difficulties owing to minority languages spoken at home that are different from the medium of instruction and being about further discrimination in school from teachers and other pupils (London, 2010).

Figures and facts about Vietnam's educational system are difficult to come by in English. There is a wealth of critiques on blogs and websites in Viet by citizens, but most foreign publications and research tend to toe the party line. Many of the international figures are outdated or falsely complimentary.

There is some gender parity in urban and high income groups, with more girls than boys enrolled, which is unusual for a country in Asia with this GDP. However, this is not true amongst ethnic minority groups, and enrollment decreases as the grades progress as children are an important source of livelihood (Young Lives, 2014).

The Young Lives Table below is from the latest report in December 2014, and shows that there has been an improvement in equity, though access is still an issue. It also shows, however, that more children are taking the extra classes, and this means that poor children are further disadvantaged.

Young Lives December 2014



The socialisation and decentralisation of education has brought some positive results. There have been improvements to school infrastructure and facilities, as well as laudable results in tests like the PISA. The financial contributions towards education have risen and there has been an expansion of schools as well as increased enrollment (Loc, 2006).

Nepal

Nepal is a highly classist and casteist society. The World Bank states that the “overall intent of the SSRP is ‘winning back the original patrons’ of the public school system (being the middle class or ‘elite’ groups who have since flocked to the private school system) and ‘building the capacity of its constituency mainly consisting of poor parents’ (World Bank, 2003, p. 2).

“Social mobilisation, especially of historically excluded groups such as ‘females, dalits (note: lower castes), and disadvantaged ethnic groups’, is seen as central: ... social mobilisation will lead to a social contract, which is at the core of the CSSP design, between the excluded community and the school management committee (SMC) witnessed by the community benefiting from the school, the local government (VDC or municipality) and the district education office. (ibid, p. 24)”

However, this does not seem to be the case. In fact, it is having the opposite effect. As this teacher states: “This is an attempt to inject a new form of privatisation. What has happened is that the opted-out schools have taken some measures that hurt the poor. They have introduced school uniforms, extra English books and homework. All these things cost money, and many parents simply cannot afford these new costs. Many children from poor households will be pushed out of the schools as the opted-out schools gradually undertake market-oriented actions in the name of autonomy. (Teacher educator, Pokhara). “ (Carney et al.2007, p623)

Teachers are another group of affected and marginalised stakeholders. Due to the increased control of local community leaders, political parties and parents, the teachers have not become partners in the process of community ownership. They have become case as “‘local servants’ in a system oriented towards serving the needs of parents”. “We have been left out in this whole initiative. A handful of people decided to opt out without actually discussing this with us (teachers) and the parents. We were never consulted. We knew only after the decision had been taken. (Teacher)” (Carney et al, 2007, p622)

Teachers used to have a great deal of power during the time before, during and after the People’s War, where they were strongly aligned with political parties. The new decentralised management structure for local schools almost completely excludes teachers in decision-making. The Project Document by the World Bank states that the initiative will have ‘profound implications for teachers’, because it aims to create a ‘terms of service’ that promotes ‘efficiency’ rather than autonomy or allegiance to state, union or political bodies (World Bank, 2003,p. 7).”

Several stakeholders see the new cost-sharing and community management of schools are not a long-term viable solution because it has been brought about by external forces, rather than as a response to internal organic needs of the system. They do not see it as a sustainable thing, which will end and then create a new set of problems.

“Schools have chosen to opt out for short-term, financial gains. Most of these schools are desperate schools, and many of them are those that do not get any support from the government. They are so desperate that they will take anything. None have opted out with the long-term goal of a greater community role in school management, or of improving the quality of education. (Former Secretary, Ministry of Education)”

And:

“Eventually, we will be the losers. One day, the Government will stop giving us financial support and the entire burden will be on our shoulders. (Chairperson, SMC)”

(Carney et al, 2007, p624)

Concluding Analysis

The ideas presented in this paper show that in structure, finances and equity of decentralisation, Nepal and Vietnam are similar and different at the same time. Some of the reasons I think this might be are in the following paragraphs.

Socialism, ethnic divides and post-conflict societies

High quality education is repeatedly being stressed as important to the national well-being and economic development of a country (World Bank, 1999; UNDP, 2003), but whether or not this can be brought about by decentralisation of schooling is largely untested (McGinn & Welsh, 1999). It is, however, evident that when such reform is brought about by externally imposed agendas and ideologies, it can affect quality and access to education, teacher conditions and their professional status (Carnoy, 1999).

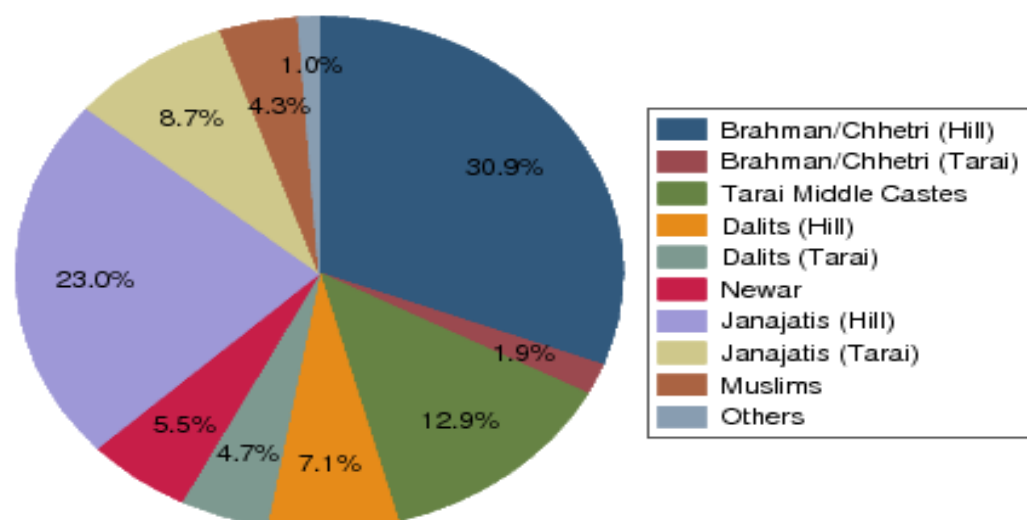
“Neoliberalism has not proven effective at revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded in restoring class power... The redistributive tactics of neoliberalism are wide-ranging, sophisticated, frequently masked by ideological gambits, but devastating for the dignity and social well-being of vulnerable populations and territories. (Harvery, 2007, p29)”

One of the reasons that Vietnam’s government has such a centralised hold on the process of decentralisation (which sounds like an oxymoron but isn’t) is because Vietnam has been a one party socialist system for several decades. Even during the days of the partition, the South (capitalist) Vietnam still took its ideology for schooling from the Marxist – Leninist party line of mass free education (London, 2010). While Nepal favours decentralisation and handing over the running of local schools to the community, Vietnam still maintains a strong hold centrally over things like curriculum and teacher training and deployment. In Vietnam it is more difficult to find information on the true effects of this community sharing of educational costs, as social research is extremely closely monitored by the government (London, 2010).

While the Nepali government’s forays into decentralisation are recent compared with Vietnam, their conflict has also been much more recent. Both countries lost a lot of time and resources due to their civil war. The Vietnamese government’s taxation system is still not mature enough to allow it to finance its own public education (London, 2010). Nepal, however, is very much dependent on international aid. Many of the sources of funding for the two cost-sharing community-schooling measures are similar, with donor funding, community contributions and fund-raising at a local level, to augment the government’s share (Carney, et al, 2007; London, 2010).

The principles of the great communist and socialist thinkers are alive and well in the two countries we are analysing. Nepal’s its government is still weak due to the multi-party and federal system of rule. The Maoists that were key players in the People’s War are still very much a part of Nepal’s government and this echoes the communist manifesto of Vietnam’s government.

Both Vietnam and Nepal are highly heterogeneous societies with mixes of class, caste, ethnic, religious and geographical backgrounds. They both have issues with equity that always existed due to the various divides, but have now become exacerbated by decentralisation of schooling.

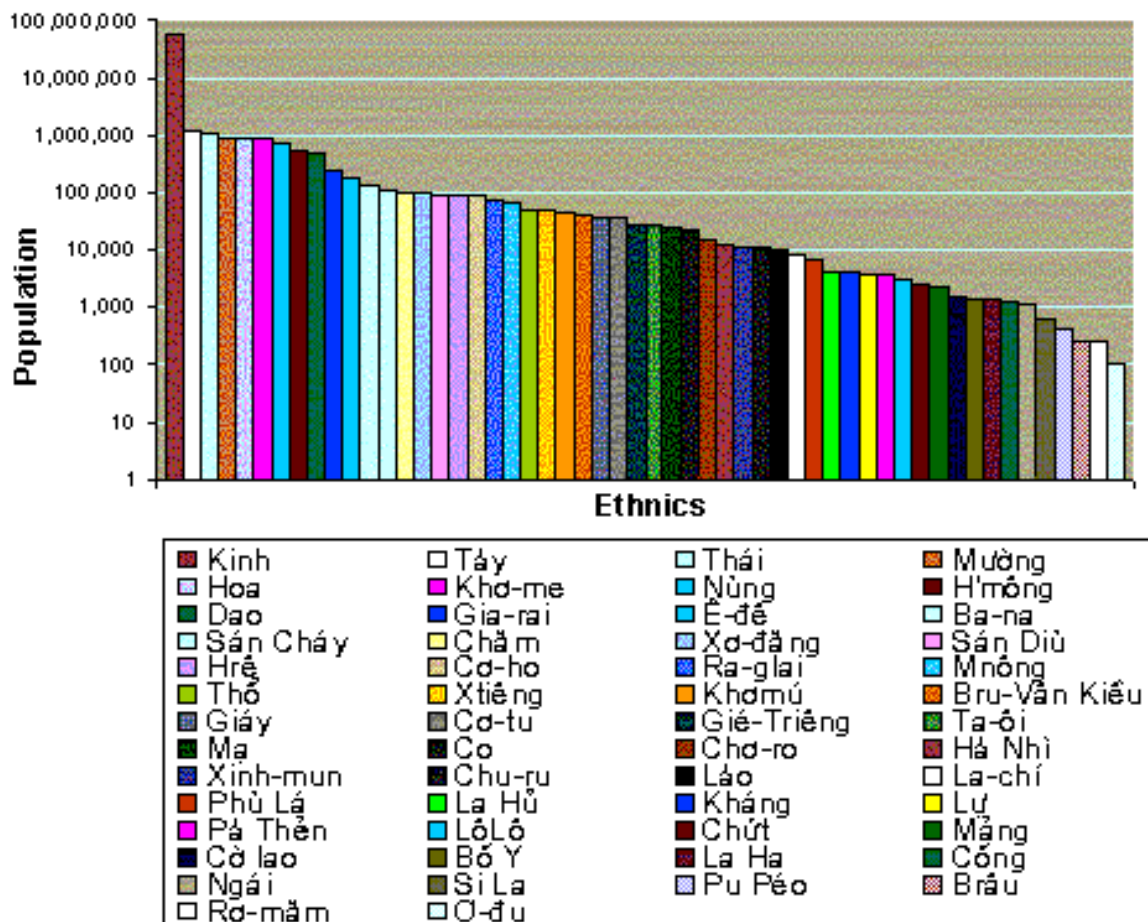


Friedrich Huebler, May 2007, huebler.blogspot.com

Ethnic and Caste diversity in Nepal (distinguished geographically) (World Bank/DIFID, 2006)

Though it seems like it should be the reverse, due to the perceived benefits of decentralisation as lauded by neoliberal thinkers, here is what a stakeholder from Nepal says:

“Schools have chosen to opt out for short-term, financial gains. Most of these schools are desperate schools, and many of them are those that do not get any support from the government. They are so desperate that they will take anything. None have opted out with the long-term goal of a greater community role in school management, or of improving the quality of education. (Former Secretary, Ministry of Education)”



Composition and Distribution of the Vietnamese Ethnic Minority Groups

This shows that what Edwards (2011) says is true, that decentralisation policies are usually created and implemented without participation by key downward stakeholders, but are instead externally applied due to pressure by development agencies and foreign aid donors. Because most developing countries rely on aid from neoliberal players they are highly influenced by the ideologies of these countries and institutions (ibid) and by the economic policies that are being diffused by the same forces through globalisation (Astiz, Wiseman, and Baker, 2002).

As Harvey says,

“Neoliberalism has not proven effective at revitalizing global capital accumulation, but it has succeeded in restoring class power. The redistributive tactics of neoliberalism are wide-ranging, sophisticated, frequently masked by ideological gambits, but devastating for the dignity and social well-being of vulnerable populations and territories.” (Harvey, 2010, p2).

Therefore, this paper concludes with the thoughts that though neoliberalism has so far not been proven to be successful at bringing about efficiency or equity from decentralised cost-sharing of education, it is still a Juggernaut that does not look like stopping anytime soon.

As Turner says, while paraphrasing Adam Smith’s in/famous words:

“Left to its own devices, the “invisible hand” of market theory will ensure that the greatest good of the greatest number of people is achieved.”

(Turner & Yolcu, 2013, p1)

Perhaps not.

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