

ABSTRACT: Investment in children: the directions for the government, society and family to invest more.

This study looks into three aspects of investment in children: education, health and social services. The task is to review the trends of the investments borne by families, societies and governments and recommend on directions to make more investments.

Five sub-studies were designed to complement each other. The researchers were divided into 5 groups to focus their areas of study on education, health, social services, priority ranking and social expectations on children. The research teams then integrated the findings and came up with recommendations for better investment in children

Infant and preschool age

The governments have been successful in putting more resources for health promotion and prevention of immunisable diseases in infants and preschool children. However, the government's role on social services was limited to the programmes for family development and child development. The effectiveness considered on the ground of intelligence quotient (IQ), was not satisfactory. Recommendations on this age group include the following:

- The government should invest more on the programmes for child and family development. The two programmes should be tightly integrated into one to aim for better physical and intelligence developments.
- The family has an undeniable role in taking care of infant to be the foundation for full capacity development in the future.
- The local government (Tambon Administration) must be the medium to implement the child and family development activities at the lowest level closest to the family.

School age

Investment on education for the school age is huge. By extending the compulsory education from 6 years to 9 years, the retention rate of primary school children to secondary school doubled from 1992 to 1997. Households paid high value on education of their children. The cost of providing formal education was much higher than the informal education. Educational achievements were questionable for hard sciences. Recommendations for the school ages were as follows:

- Extend the education opportunities to the whole country regardless of geographical area, through formal, informal and non-formal education.
- Put more emphasis on the educational achievements: both academic and non-academic, according to the level of education.
- Integrate the revolving fund for school lunch with the fund for school milk to make the fund more sustainable. The activities in the school need to be extended to cover other health behaviour issues to enable school children to be less risky adolescent.

Adolescent

Health care cost per capita was high for the adolescent. The low preventive/promotive spending may be related with the high medical care cost. Education was also important for this age group, as it prepared adolescent to earn their living in the future. Recommendations for the adolescent were as follows:

- The government should put more emphasis on the health of the adolescent.
- Invest in the research on how to effectively improve the health of the adolescent.
- Liberate potential of the adolescent to be a part of social development.

The underprivileged children:

The underprivileged children usually arise from the problem families. They are the hard to reach group and the exact number of them was not easily to get. Recommendations on the underprivileged children are as follows:

- The government should invest in the underprivileged through non-governmental organisations.
- Civil societies need to be strengthened to take part in helping the underprivileged at the early stage.
- Information system of the underprivileged children needs to be established.

The gifted children:

Programmes on the gifted children have been drafted recently. They covered variety of special capacities from mathematics/sciences to performing arts. As yet no clear direction has been established. The followings are the recommendations:

- There should be a body to set the targets and steer the direction of the programmes for the gifted children.
- The goal of investment in the gifted children should be the benefits for the civil society.