

**The Asian Development Bank
and the People's Republic of China:**

Partnership in Education

(January 2005)

1. Following upon earlier support in areas like education for all, minority education, higher education, and sector-level management and planning, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is currently supporting education in the People's Republic of China (PRC) through two ongoing technical assistance (TA) projects, as well as smaller overlapping initiatives, as outlined below.

I. TA 3958-PRC: Improving Basic Education in Underdeveloped Areas Through ICT

2. In recent years, the PRC has made impressive progress towards achieving universal compulsory education (UCE, comprising primary and lower secondary schooling), evident in increasing enrollments, falling dropout rates and gender gaps, and increases in the proportion of qualified and trained teachers. However, these mask substantial disparities between coastal and interior regions and between rural and urban areas. There is a particular challenge of ensuring access to quality UCE for minorities and girls in poor and remote regions of the Western Region. Improving teaching is a key part of this task. In addition to formal certification, teachers in underdeveloped areas need to be provided skills and tools to adopt new approaches to nurture pupils' creativity, problem-solving ability, and collaborative learning skills. Empowering teachers to innovate, moving away from exam-focused rote instruction, will require building effective peer networking mechanisms, as well as creating support among headmasters and local educational officials.

3. Faced with these continued challenges, the Government has recognized information and communication technology (ICT) as a potential tool for redressing educational inequities (access, teacher quality, instructional materials, and physical conditions) in poor areas and among disadvantaged communities.

4. Under technical assistance TA 3958-PRC: Improving Basic Education in Underdeveloped Areas Through ICT (approved on 30 October 2002), the Asian Development Bank (ADB) is working with the PRC Ministry of Education (MOE) to explore innovative and sustainable applications of ICT to advance UCE, improving equity, quality, and efficiency. The TA (with \$500,000 grant funding from ADB) places particular emphasis on soft components (i.e., educational content and materials, training of teachers to use new ICT tools for innovative teaching, support and feedback mechanisms, etc.), without which investments in ICT hardware/software often fail to deliver benefits in terms of advancing education objectives. It will also look for opportunities for combining mature technologies (i.e., radio, television, and print) with newer forms of ICT such as computers and the Internet) to flexibly address local education needs, ranging from training and information resources for teachers, to provision of useful content to communities to promote local development.

5. The TA's twin objectives are to (i) undertake a broad assessment of and identify promising innovations and strategies for the applications of distance education and ICT in education, with a particular focus on supporting access to quality universal compulsory education (UCE) among disadvantaged populations including minorities, women, and remote

communities; and (ii) support a very modest and targeted pilot testing of promising approaches and technologies with a tight pro-equity focus.

6. The TA's main outputs can be grouped as:
 - (i) compilation and dissemination of findings from
 - a rapid assessment, taking stock on ICT use in PRC education to date, as well as international lessons learned, and
 - pilot testing of innovative new approaches to applying ICT as a tool to support equitable, quality basic education; and
 - (ii) identification, dissemination, and stakeholder dialogue on policy and strategic implications on future use of ICT in this subsector.

7. The TA's executing agency is MOE, with the Division of International Organizations (MOE-DIO) overseeing day-to-day operations. The project also involves consultation with the National Center for Education Technology (NCET) under MOE, as well as dialogue across internationally-supported initiatives to ensure complementarity. Following the completion of principal background research, design is underway for the pilot study to be conducted in Xiangxi Prefecture (a poor prefecture in Hunan Province that is defined as part of the Western Region). It will cover a small number of schools in Fenghuang County, a nationally-designated key working county for poverty alleviation and development.

II. TA 4363-PRC: Support for Reforms In Compulsory Education Financing

8. The PRC has made significant progress in extending education coverage since enacting comprehensive education finance reforms in 1985, which decentralized the main responsibilities for rural education to townships and villages and encouraged diversified resource mobilization, and the 1986 Compulsory Education Law, which stated that all children should receive 9 years of education. However, major challenges remain. In particular, disadvantaged communities are least able to mobilize and manage resources to provide quality education. Leading scholarly research suggests disparities in per-student expenditure have grown fastest at the primary level.

9. ADB is supporting MOE under TA 4363-PRC: Support for Reforms In Compulsory Education Financing (approved on 22 July 2004) to formulate policy and institutional reforms in compulsory education finance (CEF) and develop viable mechanisms for implementation. Sound CEF reforms will be vital to sustaining and advancing UCE, linked to the second Millennium Development Goal and to achieving broader national economic and social development goals. They will also be key to improving education quality, access, and equity, as well as system efficiency.

10. The TA's overall purpose is to formulate and build consensus on viable strategies to enhance the level and allocation of resources financing compulsory education in the PRC. Based on thorough analysis of the PRC context and international models and lessons learned, as well as dialogue with key stakeholders, the TA's specific objectives are to

- (i) develop specific mechanisms across administrative levels to increase financial inputs, while alleviating burdens on poor families and addressing other resource-related obstacles to children's full participation in education;
- (ii) formulate concrete measures to rationalize and systematize education budgeting and expenditure allocation across

- administrative levels;
 - geographic regions;
 - urban-rural areas; and
 - primary, lower secondary, and other levels of education; and
- (iii) identify and propose systematic interventions to address priority gaps in intra- and inter-agency decision-making processes and human resource capacities in CEF planning and implementation at various administrative levels.

11. The TA's principal output will be a comprehensive framework and action plan setting out clear priorities and identifying financial and human resources needed. This will be based on findings from assessment of the macro-level context surrounding CEF, followed by extensive micro-level investigation. These will feed into 3 focused policy studies on:

- (i) funding responsibilities;
- (ii) allocation of government and nongovernment funding; and
- (iii) CEF implementation and outcomes.

12. The framework and action plan will also draw on findings from a focused pilot study on monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to track CEF planning, inputs (including planning and resource movements), and outcomes. The pilot study component will also include targeted capacity building among local personnel, and piloted M&E approaches and mechanisms will be evaluated with an emphasis on efficacy and viability of future scale-up.

13. Workshops integrated into research and policy dialogue processes will support information sharing across key stakeholders, refinement of draft research outputs, and building of consensus on the final framework and action plan.

14. The MOE Department of Finance will act as executing agency for the TA, scheduled for completion in July 2006. The TA is included in an ADB internal pilot study, under which MOE will be principally responsible for selecting consultants and supervising performance.

III. Other Activities Providing Secondary Support

15. Under the PRC component of regional TA 6109: Nongovernment Organization (NGO) Partnerships for Poverty Reduction, ADB supported construction of a primary school in Cuochi Village, a Tibetan minority community whose school had become dilapidated to the point where it was unsafe. ADB's support helped a local NGO ("Sanjiang") to implement a locally appropriate solution to respond to local needs, ensuring that local children in this poor, predominantly minority village to return to school in a safe environment conducive to teaching and learning.

16. Under TA 4118-PRC: Combating SARS in the Western Region, ADB has been working with the Ministry of Health Foreign Loan Office (MOH-FLO), local health bureaus, and other partners to provide initial emergency support to contain and combat SARS, and subsequently to address the threats posed by other infectious diseases while building critical, longer-term public health system capacities, particularly in rural areas of Ningxia, Qinghai, Xinjiang, and Yunnan. Support includes an initiative to develop and launch school-based information, education, and communication approaches to improve health awareness and self-protection knowledge at the grassroots level, with guidance and support from MOE, local education offices, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and World Health Organization (WHO).