

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE COMPLETION REPORT

Division: AWEH

TA NO./NAME: 3073-SRI: Improving Education Planning Project			TA AMOUNT APPROVED: \$800,000	SOURCE: Japan Special Fund (JSF)
			REVISED AMOUNT: \$800,000	
EXECUTING AGENCY: Ministry of Finance and Planning			TA AMOUNT UNDISBURSED: \$134,116	TA AMOUNT UTILIZED: \$665,884
APPROVAL: 23 September 1998	SIGNING: 14 October 1998	FIELD: March 1999	CLOSING: ORIGINAL: 30 April 2000 ACTUAL: 7 August 2000	
<p>TA DESCRIPTION</p> <p>The development of tertiary education in Sri Lanka is strategically important for its economic and social development. However, the sector's performance in the past 4 decades has not enabled the country to build upon its strong literacy base of 90 percent and high human development indicators. Presently only 2 percent of the age cohort to enter the state universities annually –one of the lowest ratios in the developing world. Unemployment among university graduates is high. This reflects the sector's deficiencies in the quality and relevance of its curricula and teaching. The policy framework for tertiary education lacks breadth and flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities and challenges in the sector. Reforms are urgently needed in the postsecondary sector. In 1998, ADB provided the Government of Sri Lanka an advisory technical assistance (TA) to improve education planning and management in the tertiary education sector to reduce the high unemployment rates among graduates and to improve the quality of public higher education.</p> <p>TA OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE</p> <p>The objective of the TA was to assist the Government to improve education planning in order to reduce high graduate unemployment by (i) strengthening the capacity of the education planning units (Human Resource Development Center and the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission) in planning, monitoring and evaluation- in data collection, utilization and analysis; and in coordination among themselves and with the labor market; (ii) developing an action plan to promote the absorption of graduates from advanced level (AL) into private post secondary institutions and the labor market; and (iii) developing an action plan to improve the quality of public higher education.</p> <p>TA INPUTS EVALUATION</p> <p>The original TA terms of reference, which were timely and relevant to the existing situation in tertiary education in Sri Lanka had to be revised, in line with the Government's reform agenda, in the process of the TA implementation so that the emphasis was focused on (i) policy and quality reforms in state university education, including a stronger market-driven and liberalized learning environment with participation from the private sector; (ii) increased access of AL holders to university and postsecondary education, including alternative institutions in the public advance technical institutes and private institutions, open university, and external degree programs; (iii) increased labor market absorption of AL holders and graduates and institutional capacity building of the planning and data management agencies; and (iv) instituting cost-recovery and resource mobilization measures to attain financial sustainability in the long term.</p> <p>The original team of Consultants consisted of 8 international consultants (totaling 20 person-months) and 8 domestic consultants (totaling 20 person-months). The Government established a project implementation unit headed by a project manager (Director, Human Resources Division, and National Planning Department) and provided counterpart staff. The consultants worked from March to October 1999. A national workshop was held to review the Midterm Report circulated by the consultants on 4-5 September 1999. The Midterm Report required substantial revision. The original TA team did not establish rapport with EA so little institutional strengthening took place. The performance of the original TA team is considered less than satisfactory. ADB provided additional inputs including 2 international consultants (2 person-months each) and 2 national consultants (2 person-months each) to revise the Report and ADB supervision was intensified. ERD organized a second National Conference on 12-13 February 2000 to review the revised Draft Final Report. The participants provided comments and recommendations and endorsed the Report for finalization.</p>				

Prepared by: Motilal Sharma

Designation: Sr. Education Specialist

TA OUTPUTS EVALUATION

The new team of consultants revised and updated the Draft Final Report, prepared action plans, and developed five case studies on institution building. The report produced by the consultants has been accepted by Government and stakeholders and is of acceptable quality. The new team leader, at the request of the Government, also produced a technical paper entitled "Advancing Knowledge and Skills for Development and Competitiveness: the Tertiary Education Strategy". The technical paper has been accepted both by Government and ADB for submission to the Development Forum- Paris 2000.

This study identified areas for future Bank lending at the postsecondary level. Its output will also support implementation of the reform agenda of the Presidential Task Force on Higher Education. It also lays the foundation for Donor coordination in the support of postsecondary and tertiary education. The study has been successful in generating a strong sense of ownership by the stakeholders and realization of the need for quality improvement, strengthening of institutional capacity, expanding access to the nation's youth, and mobilization of new resources through introduction of resource mobilization measures, and increased participation by the private sector.

TA OVERALL ASSESSMENT/RATING

In spite of initial problems, the Final Report was accepted and appreciated by the Government and the stakeholders. It also provided the basis for the preparation of the paper "Advancing Knowledge and Skills for Development and Competitiveness- the Tertiary Education Strategy" for the Development Forum – Paris 2000. The University Grants Commission, Ministry of Education and Higher Education, Ministry of Finance and Planning, and Vice Chancellors of state universities, as well as private sector institutions, has endorsed the proposed reform agenda. The Government is committed to mobilizing resources to implement the reform agenda to raise the quality of postsecondary, including tertiary education, private sector involvement, and mobilization of additional resources to sustain the reforms. The TA played a catalytic role in bringing together stakeholders in postsecondary education and tertiary education to share information, experience, and recognize each others' role, and the need to improve the quality of higher education as well as mobilization of additional resources. More importantly, the findings of the study have built strong ownership among all stakeholders, and committed them to implement the reforms. It mobilized strong interest of other Donors to support developments in this sector. In addition, the private sector sees this as a new opportunity for increased participation in providing an alternative and competitive system for higher education for the nation's youth. However, very little capacity building activities were undertaken by the original TA team hence the objective of strengthening of capacity of educational planning units could not be achieved. Therefore, TA is considered partly successful.

MAJOR LESSONS LEARNED

Effective monitoring and supervision of the consultants by ADB, the consulting firm and the government is crucial to ensure that the project implementation gets started on the right track. ADB's initial supervision was mainly through e-mail and telephone communications. This proved inadequate. The consultants should have established better rapport with government counterparts and should have been more willing to listen to their views. The Bank should have provided earlier field supervision. However, once the problems became known, ADB acted quickly to mobilize a new team of consultants. ADB's intensified supervision was successful in getting the TA back on track. The consulting firm was also highly cooperative in facilitating this and maintained its commitment to the TA. This demonstrates that even a problem TA can be rectified if quick action is taken. The strong commitment of the EA and other stakeholders to education sector reform was a key ingredient in developing a satisfactory final product. The frequent stakeholder workshops served to generate commitment for and ownership of the reform agenda. This Project also demonstrated the importance of having a "champion" to drive the reform process.

FOLLOW-UP ACTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

Based on the findings of the TA, the Government has requested ADB to prepare a project to improve the performance of the postsecondary education. World Bank has indicated its interest in co-financing the project and an appropriate project to support implementation of the reform agenda and quality improvements in tertiary and postsecondary education in the year 2001. At this stage, government needs to take the following steps: (i) passage of the New University Act 2000; (ii) completion of the Master plan for University Reforms; (iii) completion of Corporate Plans by the 12 state universities; and (iv) promulgation of Policy on Private Education and establishment of the Commission on Private Education.