China, People's Republic of: Accelerating the Reform of Application-Oriented Undergraduate Programs at Local Universities in Yunnan Province

Project Name: Accelerating the Reform of Application-Oriented Undergraduate Programs at Local Universities in Yunnan Province

Country: China, People's Republic of

Project Status: Active

Project Type / Modality of Assistance: Technical Assistance

Source of Funding / Amount: TA 9526-P1C: Accelerating the Reform of Application-Oriented Undergraduate Programs at Local Universities in Yunnan Province
Technical Assistance Special Fund
US$ 400,000.00

Strategic Agendas
- Inclusive economic growth
- Regional integration

Drivers of Change
- Governance and capacity development
- Knowledge solutions
- Partnerships
- Private sector development

Sector / Subsector: Education - Tertiary

Gender Equity and Mainstreaming: No gender elements

Description: The proposed knowledge and support technical assistance (TA) will support the development of policy frameworks for accelerating the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities in Yunnan Province through research, capacity development, and policy advice to promote socioeconomic development and regional cooperation with Southeast Asian countries. The Government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has requested the TA from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) as part of its efforts to rationalize the higher education system in Yunnan Province to fill critical skills gaps in local and regional labor markets. Following a mission in March 2018, ADB and the government reached an understanding on the TA objectives, scope, implementation arrangements, costs, and terms of reference for consultants. The TA is included in ADB’s country operations business plan for the PRC, 2018-2020.

Project Rationale and Linkage to Country/Regional Strategy: The PRC’s higher education system is the largest in the world in terms of number of higher education institutions (HEIs) and students but has been growing rapidly, contributing to remarkable economic growth. Yet as the economy undergoes fundamental transformation and its growth has slowed, structural issues with the PRC’s higher education system have become more prominent. These include homogenization of colleges and universities, difficulties of graduates with finding employment, and insufficient capacity of HEIs for innovation and entrepreneurship. Against this background, the Ministry of Education issued guidelines for provincial governments to rationalize the higher education system by establishing a system for classifying HEIs, and to transform some local colleges and universities to offer application-oriented undergraduate programs which integrate discipline-oriented education and professionally oriented practical training through university enterprise cooperation and meet the needs of local socioeconomic development. At the same time, research universities were guided to enhance global competitiveness and state-of-the-art disciplines. Bordering Viet Nam, Lao People’s Democratic Republic, and Myanmar, Yunnan Province forms part of the PRC’s poor and underdeveloped western region. Its higher education system, comprising 79 HEIs (77 colleges and universities, and 2 adult education colleges), has been unbalanced in their capacity to meet the needs of local socioeconomic development, and graduates face difficulties with getting employed. When Yunnan Provincial Department of Education (PDE) initiated the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs in 2008, HEIs in Yunnan Province were undifferentiated from each other in programs they offered, particularly due to the upgrading of many three-year colleges to four-year colleges and universities (local universities) after 2000. Since then, Yunnan PDE has pursued a series of reforms to align the higher education system with skills needs in local and regional labor markets. For example, in 2014, ahead of the Ministry of Education’s guidelines, Yunnan PDE started to pilot the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at nine local universities. In 2016, it introduced a HEI classification system to comprehensively reform the higher education system, while it has started to develop world-class universities in 2018. Moreover, Yunnan Province strives to promote international cooperation in higher education, with emphasis on cooperation with Southeast Asian countries (the Belt and Road Initiative).

At present, all local universities are guided to implement the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs in Yunnan Province. Despite achievements, the pilot reforms indicate challenges and issues, including:
- (i) difficulties with adapting professionally oriented majors and clusters (i.e., groups of majors) fully in line with the needs of local industries due in part to time lag between the pace of industry transformation and upgrading and that of curriculum, teaching force, and training materials and facility development and upgrading, and to insufficient university enterprise cooperation;
- (ii) inadequate university entrance exam system based on discipline-oriented majors and graduation exam system based on thesis, as opposed to the emphasis on professionally oriented practical training in application-oriented undergraduate programs;
- (iii) underdeveloped capacity for training human resources to cooperate with Southeast Asian countries and implement the Belt and Road Initiative;
- (iv) limited public funds to develop practical training, innovation, and entrepreneurship facilities;
- (v) constraints on the autonomy of local universities, particularly that of public universities to seek funding other than from the government;
- (vi) unclear legal rights and obligations of the parties involved in university enterprise cooperation.

These challenges and issues are compounded by lack of policy frameworks at the national and provincial levels for different types of universities (public, private, independent schools and institutes subordinate to universities) which are coordinated with other policy areas, to accelerate the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities.

Impact: Higher education system in Yunnan Province in support of socioeconomic development and regional cooperation rationalized

Project Outcome: Reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities widely implemented

Description of Outcome:
Progress Toward Outcome
To be reviewed in 2020.

Implementation Progress

Description of Project Outputs
Status of the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities assessed
Good practices and lessons learned on the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs documented and disseminated
Policy recommendations on accelerating the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities in line with local industry transformation and upgrading plans developed

Status of Implementation Progress (Outputs, Activities, and Issues)
The consulting firm was fielded on 1 September 2018. Methodology and tools for assessing the status of the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at 31 local universities were finalized in early March 2019. Field survey team is expected to be mobilized towards the end of March 2019.

Geographical Location
Yunnan

Summary of Environmental and Social Aspects

Environmental Aspects

Indigenous Peoples

Stakeholder Communication, Participation, and Consultation

During Project Design
Relevant government agencies and some of local universities participated in the design of the TA.

During Project Implementation
31 local universities in Yunnan province will be consulted and actively participating in data and information collection and analysis and development of case studies.

Business Opportunities

Consulting Services
A consulting firm (international, 6 person-months; national, 13 person-months) has been recruited to design and conduct policy-oriented studies on the reform of application-oriented undergraduate programs at local universities. The firm was selected using the quality- and cost-based selection method, with a quality-cost ratio of 90:10 and simplified technical proposals. Output-based, lumpsum contract with a provision of fixed out-of-pocket expenditures was considered for the assignment.

Responsible ADB Officer
Asako Maruyama

Responsible ADB Department
East Asia Department

Responsible ADB Division
Urban and Social Sectors Division, EARD

Executing Agencies
Yunnan Provincial Department of Education
2 Xuefu Road, Kunming, Yunnan
Yunnan Provincial Finance Department Division of International Cooperation
Wuhuashan, Kunming Yunnan, Peoples Republic of China

Timetable

Concept Clearance
19 Apr 2018

Fact Finding
08 Mar 2018 to 12 Mar 2018

Approval
14 May 2018

Last Review Mission
-

Last PDS Update
28 Mar 2019

TA 9526-PRC

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Milestones</th>
<th>Approval</th>
<th>Signing Date</th>
<th>Effectivity Date</th>
<th>Closing</th>
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</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financing Plan/TA Utilization</th>
<th>ADB</th>
<th>Cofinancing</th>
<th>Counterpart</th>
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<th>Date</th>
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