SECTOR ASSESSMENT (SUMMARY): EDUCATION

Sector Road Map

1. Sector Performance, Problems, and Opportunities

   a. Vision and Strategy

1. The Government of Mongolia’s overall vision for the education sector is to ensure the sustainable development, national sovereignty, and security of Mongolia through the education of civil society. The government’s policies and strategies for national and human development are further elaborated in its Comprehensive National Strategy, based on the Millennium Development Goals\(^1\) and the government action plan for 2008–2012, namely:

   (i) to increase employment opportunities, reduce poverty and social inequality, eliminate the rural and urban divide, and close gender disparity through further expansion of education services in rural areas and for vulnerable groups regardless of location; and

   (ii) to reform and upgrade educational services in compliance with social and cultural values and needs, improve education structure and content in line with international standards, and establish the education system that provides life-long and relevant learning opportunities for learners to be competitive in society and the labor market.\(^2\)

2. The above vision, policies, and strategies depend on a well-functioning, efficient, and effective education sector. To address this challenge and to set out the framework for education reform in the country, the government developed its Education Sector Master Plan (ESMP), a rolling plan recently updated for 2009–2015.

   b. Structure of Education

3. The new 12-year education structure was introduced into schools in September 2008 with the aim of bringing Mongolia closer to international standards and norms. Tertiary education is offered in three general types of institutions: (i) universities with full 4-year degree and postgraduate programs, (ii) colleges with 4-year degree programs only, and (iii) technical and vocational schools with 2-year training programs. The structure of Mongolia’s formal education system is shown in Figure 1.

4. In school year (SY) 2009–2010, there were 755 general education schools in Mongolia with a total of about 522,100 full-time students.\(^3\) There were about 26,100 full-time teachers employed in general education schools, giving a national average student–teacher ratio of 20:1. The gross enrollment ratio (GER)\(^4\) has been increasing steadily in recent years: the GER in general education increased from 93.7% in SY2006–2007, to 94.7% in SY2009–10. For primary

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\(^4\) GER, as defined in the Mongolian Statistical Yearbook, 2009, is the "proportion of number of pupils enrolled in a specific level of education, regardless of age, and the eligible official school-age population corresponding to the same level of education in a given school year".
education, the GER increased from 93.5% in SY 2006/07 to 99.2% in SY 2009/10, giving an indication of the country's progress towards Education for All.

**Figure 1: Structure of Mongolia’s Formal Education System**


### c. Challenges in the Education Sector

5. Despite progress in increasing enrollment, Mongolia continues to face challenges across all levels in providing quality education and equitable access, upgrading the quality of teachers and staff, reforming curricula, rationalizing education facilities, and reducing financial barriers, particularly for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. Dealing with growing internal migration from rural to urban areas has become a major challenge for efficient planning and management of education resources.

6. In addition to Mongolia's challenges in basic education, there is a need to ensure that the higher education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET) subsectors produce a sustainable and competitive workforce in terms of the creative and analytical skills required in Mongolia's move towards a knowledge-based economy as well as in global and regional markets.

7. The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science (MECS) provides effective leadership, including through the Education Donors Consultative Mechanism, and has obtained support for development of education from a range of multilateral and bilateral aid agencies.

### d. The Higher Education Subsector

8. For higher education, the government's overarching objective as stated in the National Education Program\(^5\) is to accelerate higher education reform, increase Mongolia's global competitiveness, and develop an education system that meets international standards. The ESMP describes the priority objectives for higher education as (i) access: improve the regulation of enrollment in higher education; (ii) quality: provide enabling conditions to ensure the guaranteed quality of higher education; and (iii) management: rationalize the management and financial system of higher education.

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9. At the start of transition from the socialist system, there were only 14 state-owned (public) higher education institutions (HEIs) when the government authorized the establishment of private HEIs. By the end of 2009, there were a total of 146 HEIs, including 42 public and 99 private HEIs, and five branches of foreign universities. Over the same period, the number of students increased from about 20,000 to about 164,700. In SY2009/20, about two thirds of higher education students were enrolled in public HEIs. There were about 7,200 teachers in SY2009/10, indicating an overall average student–teacher ratio of about 23:1. Over the last decade, the number of HEIs offering doctoral (and lower) degrees has remained static, the number offering master’s (and lower) degrees increased, and the number offering only bachelor’s degrees declined. The number of students enrolling in private HEIs has been rising compared to enrollment in public HEIs.

10. MECS is the highest administrative agency in charge of higher education while, at the HEI level, a governing board is the highest authority for each HEI. The minister of MECS appoints the presidents of public HEIs. The State Professional Inspection Agency is responsible for implementing regulatory requirements for the provision of higher education and for enforcing the norms and related standards as stipulated by law. The main mechanisms for quality assurance and control are the National Education Accreditation Council, an independent audit body chaired by the minister, and MECS, when performing the attestation function. Private HEIs are established and granted a license for conducting academic education by the minister of MECS if they satisfy the requirements for the establishment of educational institutions.

**e. Key Issues in Higher Education**

11. **Governance and management.** The rapid increase in the number of public and private HEIs since 1991 was fueled by high demand for higher education and was largely uncontrolled. Only about half of private HEIs have been accredited, and governance, management, and financing of higher education have not kept pace with the rapid growth. This led the government in January 2010 to begin consolidating public HEIs (from 42 to 16), with the aim of concentrating educational resources in fewer, higher-quality and better-managed public HEIs. Issues relating to governance and management include (i) an inadequate legal framework for guiding operations of HEIs, (ii) ineffective HEI governing boards, (iii) lack of autonomy and accountability in HEI operations, (iv) an environment that does not encourage strong leadership in HEIs, and (v) a lack of competition between HEIs. Governance and management cut across the entire higher education subsector and strongly influence the setting under which other aspects such as quality, relevance, equity, access, and financing may be improved.

12. **Quality and relevance.** While student enrollment in all degree programs (doctoral, master’s, and bachelor’s) has been constantly increasing, there is no evidence that the quality of the programs has improved. Rising demand for higher education apparently is not driven by quality considerations, and does not serve as an incentive for HEIs to improve the quality of their programs. Mongolian HEIs suffer in comparison with foreign universities, using commonly accepted quantitative indicators of quality. Issues relating to quality of higher education include (i) proliferation of small private HEIs without quality control; (ii) weak overall system of quality assurance and accreditation; (iii) inadequate recruitment practices and supply of teaching staff; (iv) irregular application of norms for workload, contact hours, and research time; (v) inadequate monitoring of the performance of staff; (vi) lack of a national study credit and levels framework; (vii) inadequate curricula, learning materials, facilities, and equipment; (viii) low research capability and inadequate research facilities; and (ix) weak networks and partnerships with regional and international universities.
13. With regard to relevance, it is generally acknowledged among HEI administrators, employers, and the higher education graduates themselves that the majority of higher education graduates do not have the knowledge and skills required by the labor market. As a result, many higher education graduates end up unemployed after graduation. Issues relating to the relevance of higher education include (i) lack of mechanisms to monitor labor market demand and the employment performance of new higher education graduates; and (ii) weak partnership among the government, HEIs, and the private sector.

14. **Equity and access.** Some segments of the population are either facing financial or social barriers to higher education access or are completely excluded from participation in higher education due to their specific circumstances. Issues include (i) a weak information base for capturing key social indicators in higher education, (ii) improper targeting of state support to disadvantaged groups, (iii) limited opportunity for higher education in rural areas, (iv) lack of student cross-mobility opportunities between higher education and TVET systems, (v) gender imbalance in higher education enrollment, and (vi) lack of awareness among stakeholders of social development issues in higher education.

15. **Financing.** The issues relating to higher education financing include (i) an inadequate funding model and cost-sharing for higher education; (ii) inadequate state grant and tuition loan programs; (iii) limited policy framework and regulations for HEIs to mobilize their own resources; and (iv) weak partnership among HEIs, government, and the private sector.

16. **Enabling environment.** A favorable enabling policy environment is needed to address many of the issues above. In particular, amendments to the Higher Education Law would be critical to the success of reform in the subsector.

2. **Government’s Ongoing Initiatives in Higher Education**

17. The updated ESMP sets out the framework for education reform in the country, including for higher education (Table 1).

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<tr>
<th>Objectives</th>
<th>Implementation Strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Access: Improve the regulation of enrollment in higher education</td>
<td>Expand services provided by higher education institutions (HEIs) and make them more open. Coordinate the activities of HEIs with the national economic structure and labor market demand. Provide support for those studying in engineering, technology, natural sciences, and agriculture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Quality: Provide enabling conditions to ensure guaranteed quality of higher education</td>
<td>Reform and improve the educational content and standards of higher education. Connect the accreditation of educational programs with international standards. Improve the human resource capacity of educators at the HEIs. Improve the monitoring of the quality of higher education and provide a favorable legal framework to encourage competition. Provide support for those studying in engineering, research, and the technical support base in HEIs. Establish an enabling study environment for capable students.</td>
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<td>Management: Rationalize the management and financial system of higher education</td>
<td>Reform the legal framework for management, financing, and structure of state loans for higher education. Strengthen higher education management capacities. Reform the structure of small HEIs to enhance their economic efficiency, academic quality, and curriculum effectiveness.</td>
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5 It is estimated that only about 40% of higher education graduates during 2004–2007 found employment in their respective fields after graduation.
18. The higher education subsector is currently undergoing dynamic and important changes. Within the framework of the ESMP, the government has announced or started major initiatives, including:

(i) **Downsizing of public higher education institutions, from 42 to 16.** As mandated by Government Resolution No. 15 dated 20 January 2010, MECS has started activities to downsize the public HEIs. The overall objective is to upgrade the quality of public HEIs by rationalizing them so that development resources can be concentrated into fewer, higher-quality HEIs. The HEIs that are not selected would be given the choice to either merge with stronger HEIs, close, or gradually transform themselves into TVET institutions under an incentive scheme.

(ii) **Higher education roadmap.** Using the updated ESMP as a basis, the government has articulated its policies, goals, objectives, and plans in the form of a roadmap for higher education reform over 2010–2021. The overall objective of the government for the higher education subsector as articulated in the roadmap is to sustainably supply Mongolia with the required human resources, knowledge, and technology for national development through updating of the higher education system, content, and standards and upgrading HEIs to comparable international standards. The roadmap breaks down its strategic initiatives into seven policies covering the following areas:

(a) **Legal environment.** Update and reform the legal environment to promote higher education development.

(b) **Governance, management, and structure.** Increase the government's role and social responsibility to upgrade higher education and bring it closer to international standards.

(c) **Quality assurance, training, and content.** Enhance higher education standards, training content, and research orientation to address social demand and requirements.

(d) **Enrollment process.** Provide students with equal opportunity to obtain high-quality higher education in accordance with their needs.

(e) **Human resource and teacher development.** Comprehensively resolve issues pertaining to the qualifications of teachers and researchers, methodological development, payroll and incentive systems, and social welfare.

(f) **Teaching and research environment.** Upgrade learning facilities, training aids, and textbooks to international standards.

(g) **Financing.** Improve financing of higher education and increase government support.

(iii) **Campus development plan.** The government is in the advanced stages of planning the development of several campus enclaves that would serve as "townships of intellect". The main objectives are to (a) rationalize the structure of national universities, which are the primary means of providing higher education to students and researchers; (b) enhance linkages between education, research, production, and business; and (c) increase university standards towards high, international levels.

19. The roadmap explicitly includes the proposed project as a key initiative entitled Strengthening Higher Education Project for 2011–2015, to be funded by ADB.