

SECTOR ASSESSMENT (SUMMARY): EDUCATION¹

A. Sector Performance, Problems, and Opportunities

1. Following prolonged under-investment, in 2011, the Government of Myanmar redoubled efforts to strengthen the education sector, recognizing that human capital is a prerequisite for sustained, balanced, and people-centered economic growth and poverty reduction. The sector has made important progress in recent years, particularly in primary education (grades 1–5), which has attracted greatest attention from the government and development partner organizations (DPOs). However, progress in post-primary education (PPE)—i.e., the secondary education subsector (SES), technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and the higher education subsector (HES)—has lagged. PPE faces significant challenges in access, quality and relevance to rapidly evolving labor market needs, and management. Despite progress towards universalizing primary education, under-functioning SES and TVET constrain the country's education sector and economy; SES accounts for roughly 50% of entrants into non-agricultural formal wage labor, while TVET only accounts for about 1%. As a result, the Myanmar Business Survey 2014 identified human capital as the second leading constraint to business, with similar findings from other enterprise surveys. Addressing gaps in PPE will thus be critical for Myanmar to navigate socioeconomic transformations, advance inclusive growth and poverty reduction, modernize the economy, and advance technologically into higher value-added sectors regionally and globally.

1. Gaps in Equitable Access

2. **Secondary education.** Of the about 1.1 million new primary school entrants each year, just over 10% go on to successfully complete upper secondary education (USE; grades 10–11) eleven years later.² This leaves nearly a 'missing million' youth who exit basic education every year with limited-to-no access to many forms of employment, training, or higher education. Asian Development Bank (ADB) analysis—as part of Myanmar's Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR) and using data from the 2014 census—suggests that SES poses a critical bottleneck and is where most youth exit the education system. While more than 80% of youth complete primary education (grade 5), low transition rates into lower secondary education (LSE; grades 6–9) and high dropout within LSE mean that only 44% of youth complete LSE, leaving a majority with bleak prospects for entry into modern sector employment.³ Dropout remains high in USE, and nearly two-thirds of the about 300,000 students who reach grade 11 each year fail the final matriculation exam used to assess both USE completion and entry into higher education and many forms of TVET.⁴ Despite relative gender equity, large gaps exist across urban and rural areas and socioeconomic groups, and widen markedly from the primary to secondary level.⁵ Low and inequitable access to and completion of SES reflects interlinked issues of quality and cost (para. 4). Survey data indicate that "lack of interest" is a primary reason for SES dropout, reflecting in part perceptions of low quality and relevance to obtaining better employment

¹ This paper focuses on post-primary education levels—the main priority of Asian Development Bank (ADB) education support in Myanmar—and draws on: ADB. Forthcoming. *Assessment of Post-Primary Education in Myanmar*. Manila.

² ADB calculations based on data from the Ministry of Education's Education Management Information System.

³ C. Spohr. 2003. Formal Schooling and Workforce Participation in a Rapidly Developing Economy: Evidence from "Compulsory" Junior High School in [Taipei, China]. *Journal of Development Economics*. 70(2); and sources therein on LSE's role in employment outcomes.

⁴ In recent years, girls have comprised about 54% of grade 11 students and (thanks to higher pass rates) nearly 60% of matriculation exam passers. Many youth retake the exam in subsequent years, and about 18% eventually pass. See <https://www.adb.org/projects/documents/mya-spped-cesr-ph2-education-access-retention-attainment-tacr>.

⁵ For example, nearly two-thirds of urban youth finish LSE versus just above one-third of rural youth.

opportunities.⁶ Household cost burdens are another factor, particularly for poorer households. ADB-supported analysis suggests that the cost of having a child enrolled in USE exceeds that of any other education level, and that five-sixths of household spending on USE is used for (i) private tutoring fees, driven by rote-based curriculum and tests; and (ii) boarding, because of a limited distribution of complete SES schools and a lack of publically provided dorms. Opportunity costs are also an important factor for dropout, with boys most often drawn into various types of informal work, and girls often drawn into agricultural work or care for family members.

3. **Technical and vocational education and training and higher education.** Differing from the pattern in many countries, access to TVET is much lower in Myanmar than access to higher education. Overall, training is highly concentrated in urban areas and on niche skills such as languages and computer skills. Less than 1% of youth receive training in industrial, construction, or agricultural skills.⁷ Supply and demand factors include that (i) most forms of TVET (such as higher education) require USE completion, (ii) TVET school networks are limited and the lack of targeted stipend programs; and (iii) perceived low quality and relevance depresses demand for TVET and trainee employability. HES access challenges are less urgent, as low USE completion is the lead constraint to enrollment (more than 90% of USE graduates enter HES). Females constitute at least 60% of HES students and graduates (14% of females and 9% of males aged 25–29 years hold bachelor or advanced degrees) but are underrepresented in the labor market, reflecting a combination of social norms and the weak relevance of higher education.⁸

2. Gaps in Quality and Relevance

4. **Secondary education.** In SES, quality issues—in particular, outdated and weakly relevant curriculum, poor pedagogy, and rote-based assessment—directly undermine access and completion rates by (i) depressing learning outcomes, evidenced in rising repetition rates in grades 9–11 and the two-thirds failure rate on the matriculation exam; (ii) driving up costs via private tutoring; and (iii) contributing to lack of interest as the lead reason for SES dropout. Quality is further undercut by gaps in facilities and teaching and learning materials, particularly in incomplete and branch secondary schools.⁹ Moreover, low quality and relevance in SES—which accounts for the largest share of entrants into modern sector wage employment—also undermines the contribution of critically needed soft skills (critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills) to the workforce, posing an obstacle to the emergence of modern service and industrial sectors.¹⁰ Finally, while females outperform males in secondary education completion, outdated curriculum and classroom practices reinforce gender norms.¹¹

5. **Technical and vocational education and training and higher education.** Quality issues also undermine the ability of TVET and HES to provide skills for a modern economy. Challenges include the need for (i) curricula and materials, teaching, and overall program design

⁶ ADB staff estimates, using data from the 2009–2010 Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey and a secondary school survey supported by ADB and Australia as part of the CESR.

⁷ Women are overrepresented in training in areas such as computers, but underrepresented in industrial skills.

⁸ ADB, United Nations Development Programme, United Nations Population Fund, and United Nations Women. 2016. *Gender Equality and Women's Rights in Myanmar—A Situation Analysis*. Manila.

⁹ So-called “post-primary” schools (constructed as primary schools but later allowed to add early LSE grades) comprise the largest share of schools serving LSE grades. Branch schools mix government and community support.

¹⁰ ADB staff analysis of data from the World Bank 2014 Enterprise Survey suggests that more than 80% of employers feel that the education system is failing to equip youth with needed skills, and less than 9% train their own permanent staff, reflecting employers’ view that rote-based education leaves entrants “un-trainable”.

¹¹ Gender Equality Network. 2016. *Raising the Curtain: Cultural Norms, Social Practices, and Gender Equality in Myanmar*. Yangon.

that are relevant to current and future skill demands, especially in emerging sectors and skill areas; (ii) strategic learning pathways linking SES, TVET, and HES; (iii) systematic quality control and accreditation; (iv) expanded capacities of teachers and managers; and (v) a legal framework for private TVET and HES institutions.¹² HES-specific challenges include (i) outdated student assessment, (ii) teaching and learning constraints because of English instruction, and (iii) limited applied research capacities. TVET-specific challenges include (i) limited engagement with industry, leading to misalignment with skill needs; (ii) a nascent system of occupational competency standards and qualification frameworks; and (iii) the need to shift from content-based to competency-based approaches.

3. Gaps in Education Sector Management

6. Management gaps combine with access and quality issues to undermine education sector performance. Under-resourcing and a dearth of data for policy-making, planning, and budgeting posed overarching issues, particularly prior to the government's rapid increase in education budgets and launch of the CESR in 2012 (para. 7). However, sector budgeting remains low by international standards, while DPO support remains limited and largely focused on primary education. SES, TVET, and HES face particular management challenges, including (i) lack of strategic alignment of SES, TVET, and HES in meeting evolving soft and hard skill needs; (ii) gaps in legislation, institutional capacity, and coordination across ministries; (iii) gaps in human resources, including technical and managerial capacity; (iv) weak quality assurance systems; and (iv) inadequate frameworks to engage the private sector.

B. Government's Sector Strategy

7. To provide an evidence base for reforms, in 2012, the government launched the CESR as the first rigorous education sector analysis in two decades, with support from ADB and other DPOs. The CESR helped inform the government's National Education Strategic Plan (NESP) for 2016–2021, which provides a unified framework for increased government and DPO investments in the sector and lays out priorities in all subsectors.¹³ Priority programs in the PPE subsectors include (i) sweeping reforms of SES curriculum, pedagogy, and student assessment to align with soft skills needed in the labor market;¹⁴ (ii) scale up of competency-based modular short courses (CBMSCs; para. 9) as a new TVET modality to provide industry-demanded skills to youth and workers currently unable to access TVET programs; and (iii) the transition of universities towards academic and managerial autonomy. The government has also established reform keystones, including (i) approval of a National Education Law and progress on drafting subsector legislation (including for TVET and HES); (ii) development and approval of a basic education curriculum framework (with support from ADB, Japan, and other DPOs); (iii) launch of initiatives to expand TVET access, including pilot-testing CBMSCs (with ADB support) and introducing basic stipends for all students enrolled in two-year government technical high school programs; and (iv) strengthened cross-agency coordination, particularly in TVET.

8. Risks include potential faltering in government leadership and multi-stakeholder coordination, as well as weak institutional capacities. However, the education sector has been a leading example of government leadership and harmonized DPO support (linked to the CESR and the resultant NESP). Moreover, the new government highly prioritizes education and is

¹² Current legislation only allows registration of private schools for basic education, though a new law is being drafted.

¹³ The NESP Policy and Programme Framework was approved in early 2016, and the new government is now finalizing the NESP's detailed operational plan.

¹⁴ These reforms will also extend the 11-year cycle of 5 years of primary and 6 years of secondary schooling by adding kindergarten and USE grade 12, to attain the international norm of a 'K–12' system.

expected to further accelerate investment in the NESP, alongside a high degree of continuity in Ministry of Education (MOE) leadership and strengthened cross-agency coordination.

C. ADB Sector Experience and Assistance Program

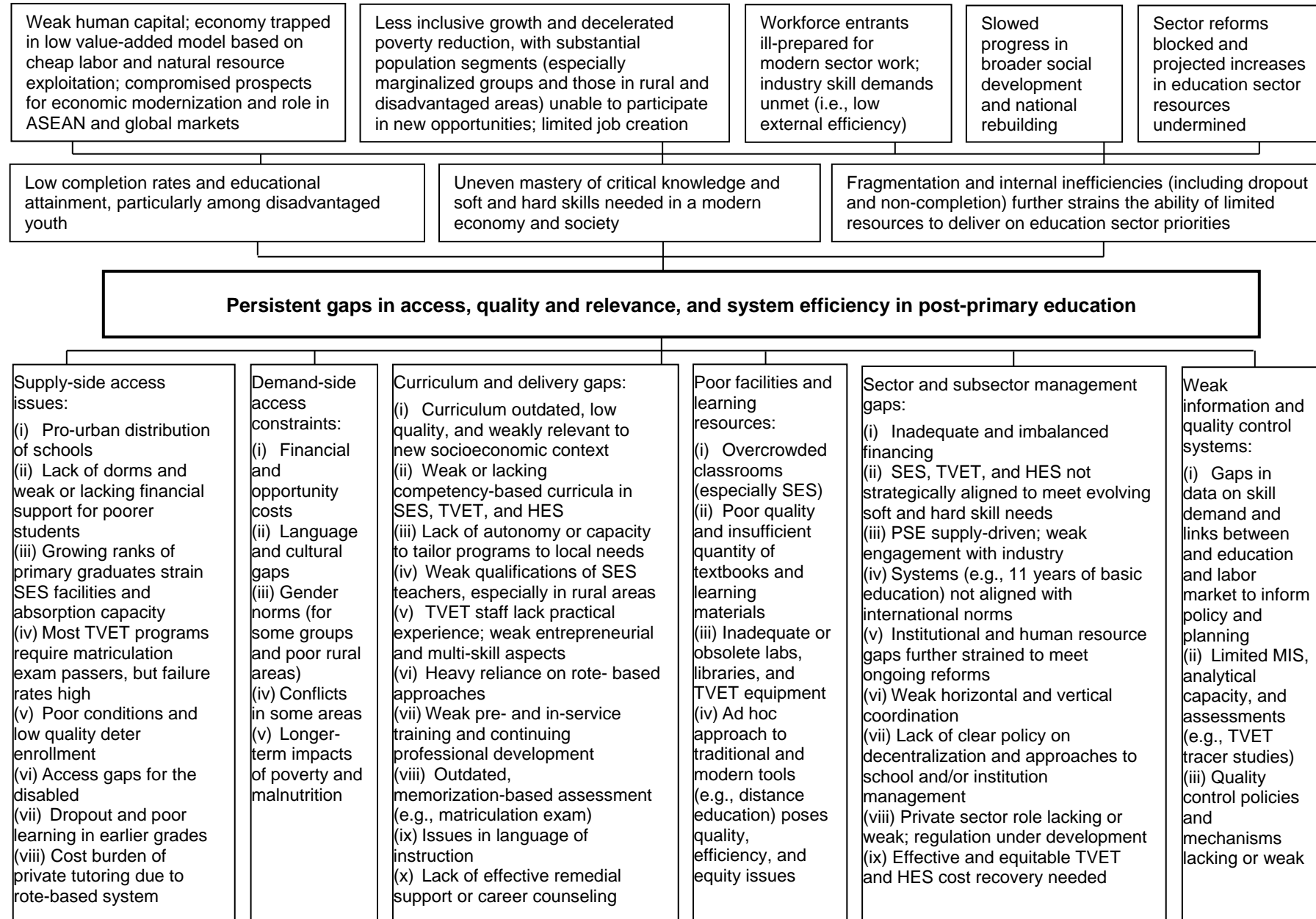
9. **Support to date.** Since reengaging in Myanmar in early 2012, ADB has established strong working relations with the government and DPOs, serving as a lead DPO supporting the PPE subsectors and complementing other DPO support for primary, pre-primary, and nonformal education. ADB is the only DPO providing concerted support to SES, while ADB and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) act as co-coordinators for a DPO technical group on TVET. ADB has provided sequenced support through four technical assistance (TA) projects totaling \$5.8 million, commencing with two Australian-cofinanced projects supporting analysis, capacity development, and policy and planning under Myanmar's CESR. These projects (in coordination or direct collaboration with other DPOs) supported (i) preparation of 12 CESR technical annex reports;¹⁵ (ii) MOE formulation of the NESP's PPE subsector elements; and (iii) MOE formulation of the Basic Education Curriculum Framework and preparation for reforms of SES curriculum, pedagogy, and assessment, in cooperation with Japanese support for primary education curriculum reforms. A third ADB TA project (a \$2.0 million grant financed by the Japan Fund for Poverty Reduction) supports a priority "quick win" TVET reform identified in the CESR: development and pilot testing of CBMSCs, to generate urgently demanded skills while targeting disadvantaged youth and workers who lack access to most forms of TVET. Building on these, a fourth TA project supports detailed design and pre-launch capacity development for a proposed 2016 loan (para. 10).

10. **Forward strategy.** Myanmar's PPE challenges are complex and will require sustained, sequenced, and cohesive interventions. In dialogue with the government, including MOE, ADB will pursue a long-term (15-year) programmatic roadmap to support PPE reforms, with an initial focus on SES (which supplies half of young workers into modern sector employment) and TVET (which urgently needs to expand).¹⁶ As a first step, the proposed Equipping Youth for Employment Project (EYE) will support cohesive reforms to realign SES and TVET to collectively provide hard and soft skills needed in a modern economy, while tackling the challenge of the 'missing million' (paras. 2–3). EYE is expected to be the principal DPO support to NESP's SES priorities, while TVET-related support will complement that from other DPOs. EYE will principally support national-level reforms, with a focus on enhancing quality and relevance, while also improving equity across gender and other dimensions through (i) introducing LSE and USE curricula that are more workforce-responsive and sensitive to gender and ethnic group aspects; (ii) replicating and diversifying CBMSCs and pilot testing a new needs-based stipend scheme with targets for female and ethnic group trainees; (iii) mainstreaming gender and ethnic group dimensions into capacity development programs for SES and TVET teachers and managers; and (iv) generally strengthening the role of SES and TVET in improving workforce outcomes for females and males, including promoting women's entry into non-traditional fields. Support for foundation-building and quality reforms under ADB's proposed country partnership strategy, 2017–2021 will provide the basis for ADB support to expand access and broaden the pool of highly skilled workers under the second and third stages of the 15-year roadmap.

¹⁵ ADB-supported annexes for CESR Phase 1 are at <https://www.adb.org/projects/46369-001/main#project-documents> and www.cesrmm.org. Those for Phase 2 are at <https://www.adb.org/projects/47177-001/main#project-documents>.

¹⁶ ADB will also continue to provide policy support on HES, including to promote learning pathways and other linkages with SES and TVET.

Problem Tree for Myanmar Post-Primary Education



ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, HES = higher education subsector, MIS = management information systems, PSE = post-secondary education, SES = secondary education subsector, TVET = technical and vocational education and training.