INITIAL ASSESSMENT (SUMMARY): POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION[1]

1. Sector Performance, Problems, and Opportunities

1. The Government of Myanmar has recently stepped up efforts to strengthen the education sector, recognizing the vital role of an educated population and workforce as a prerequisite for sustained economic growth and poverty reduction. This is reflected in the government's critical decision in early 2012 to embark on a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR[2]), as a basis for more clearly identifying sector challenges, priority areas, and strategic options.[3] The education sector has made important progress in recent years, perhaps particularly in primary education (grades 1-5), with the net enrolment ratio (NER) reaching roughly 90% in school year SY2009/2010.[4] However, progress has lagged in post-primary education (PPE) levels, with NER estimates for the secondary education subsector (SES) ranging from only 53.0% to 58.3%, and much lower for technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and the higher education subsector (HES). Moreover, there is evidence that SES, TVET, and HES face particular challenges in terms of education quality and subsector management. As Myanmar embarks on dramatic socioeconomic transformations, these subsectors must play a particularly critical role in promoting inclusive growth and poverty reduction, meeting rapidly evolving labor market needs, and rebalancing and equipping the economy to modernize and climb the technological ladder into higher value-added sectors and successfully enter into the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 and global markets. Addressing such gaps in access, quality and relevance, and management is thus a high priority.

a. Gaps in Equitable Access

2. **Low SES enrolment and completion rates pose a key bottleneck.** While total enrolments in middle school (grades 6-9) and high school (grades 10-11) grew at annual rates of 3.6% and 1.6% during SY2000/01-SY2007/08, they subsequently decelerated, with a sizeable decline in total high school enrolment during SY2007/08-SY2010/11.[5] IHLCS and MICS surveys suggest that nearly half of secondary school age children (10-15 years old) are out-of-school or lagging in their studies. Exit from school is particularly marked at the transition from primary to middle school: cohort-based analysis of primary school entrants in SY2000/01 suggests that up to 1 in 4 primary school completers never enter middle school, despite some signs of progress. Moreover, aggregate figures conceal sizeable geographic and socioeconomic gaps, and disparities appear to widen at the secondary level. Based on MICS data, 52.4% of 10-15 year olds from households in the poorest quintile are already out-of-school (versus only 9.5% for the richest quintile).[6] While aggregated figures show strong gender parity overall, girls in poor families, remote rural areas, and some ethnic groups may be particularly disadvantaged. Despite efforts to expand access[7], key issues remain, particularly in poor and ethnic areas. These include (i) disparities in completion rates and academic preparedness from primary schooling; (ii) demand-side factors such as financial and opportunity costs, language and other cultural factors,

[1] This paper draws largely on ADB. *Forthcoming*. Interim Assessment of Post-Primary Education in Myanmar. Manila.
[2] Coordinating inputs from relevant ministries and development partners (DPs), the Ministry of Education (MOE) leads the CESR process, which will come to fruition in the formulation of a Costed Education Sector Plan (CESP).
[3] The noted Initial Assessment and this paper were prepared by Asian Development Bank (ADB) staff—based on dialogue with MOE, other agencies, and DPs—to inform ADB support to in-depth analysis under the joint CESR.
[4] See (i) Project Technical Unit. 2011. *Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey (IHLCS) in Myanmar: Poverty Profile (2009-10)*. Yangon; and (ii) MNPED, MoH, UNICEF. 2011. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2009-2010. IHLCS and MICS estimates for primary NER (88% and 90.2%) are higher than MOE estimates (84.6%).
[5] ADB calculations using Education Management Information System (EMIS) data kindly provided by MOE.
[6] On aggregate, MICS data suggests that 29.8% of 10-15 year olds are out-of-school youth (OSY)—with another 11.9% still in primary school—with OSY comprising 34.4% of rural and 16.7% of urban children in that age range.
[7] These include expansion of "post-primary schools" (adding early middle school grades at primary school sites).

and disabilities; and (iii) supply-side factors such as gaps in school networks in remote areas, inadequate financial and human resources, and quality issues noted below.

3. **TVET and HES access gaps place a ceiling on higher-level skill attainment.** While there is a dearth of data on TVET enrolments,[8] available information points to rising numbers of post-secondary institutions and students.[9] Females constitute at least 60% of HES enrolments but appear to be underrepresented in TVET. At the same time, while data is limited, it is likely that there remain sizeable disparities in access by socioeconomic and ethnic groups. As with SES, direct and indirect costs (e.g., transportation and accommodation) appear to be a key deterrent to access to TVET and HES for the poor.[10] For TVET, a key priority appears to be expanding access to training and skill upgrading for workers and un- or under-employed youth (including school leavers) and adults from poorer rural areas.[11] For HES, another major issue is the inability of fully three-fifths of high school completers to pass the matriculation exam.[12]

b. Gaps in Quality and Relevance

4. **Challenges facing secondary education.** There is a dearth of systematic data relating to education quality and relevance, but anecdotal evidence suggests challenges in terms of teaching (still largely rote-based) and learning outcomes. Overall, grade repetition in SES is low, but rises in the final year of middle school (grade 9) and becomes most marked in high school. Combined with high failure rates on the matriculation exam (see para. 3), this suggests problems in students' mastery of subject content. Priorities identified thus far for the CESR and subsequent CESP include (i) systematic review of detailed curricula and teaching materials used in SES, approaches to student assessment, and the use of English for teaching high school math and sciences; (ii) strengthening SES teacher training and support, to encourage a shift from rote-based to student-centered learning, as well as broader teacher human resource management;[13] (iii) investment in facilities and materials for teaching and learning; and (iv) efforts to address equity and quality concerns arising from private tuition (e.g., for-fee tutoring).

5. **Quality and relevance gaps in TVET and HES.** TVET and HES will need to play an increasingly key role in Myanmar's accelerating socioeconomic transformation. To do so effectively, both subsectors will need to introduce more fully competency-based curricula and address gaps in (i) relevance of curricula and materials, methodology, and overall program design to shifting demands, and alignment across TVET, HES, and SES; (ii) quality control and accreditation, particularly given a proliferation of institutions and programs of widely varying quality; (iii) faculty qualifications and professional support systems; and (iv) links to labor market needs, especially in emerging sectors and skill areas. A framework for private TVET and HES

[8] At least 10 ministries offer programs that could be termed TVET. Data is often lacking, but roughly 96,000 students were enrolled in SY2011/12 in 42 post-secondary TVET institutions under the Department of Technical and Vocational Education of the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), the overall lead agency for TVET.

[9] HES has expanded dramatically, from 32 institutions and 131,837 undergraduate and higher-level students in SY1997/98 to 163 institutions (under 13 ministries) and 510,891 students in SY2011/12.

[10] For primary and HES students, MOE initiated limited stipend programs, but coverage is unknown. Currently, there do not appear to be any systematic financial assistance programs for SES or TVET students.

[11] TVET expansion and system strengthening appears a high priority for promoting fully inclusive growth. The vast majority of the labor force requires improved skills to increase productivity: a difficult task given that more than 90% of workers nationwide appear to be engaged in agriculture and/or working in the informal sector or self-employed.

[12] Taken at the end of grade 11, this exam is the basis for both certification of high school completion and selection into higher education. In SY 2009/10, 61.3% of test takers failed, undercutting the benefits of high school education.

[13] While progress has been made in expanding pre-service teacher training, there is a lack of systems for supporting current teachers through in-service teacher education and training (INSET) and pedagogical support.

institutions is also needed.[14] Other HES challenges relate to the need to (i) overhaul the matriculation exam and student assessment; (ii) review the use of English to teach math and sciences; (iii) enhance applied research capacity; (iv) strengthen university governance; (v) introduce a framework for private HES institutions; and (vi) expand international linkages. For TVET, the CESR will be particularly critical in providing the first comprehensive and critical review of the subsector and identifying mechanisms for streamlining TVET and enhancing quality and relevance. Other priorities include developing an updated policy framework for TVET and occupational competency standards and qualification frameworks, as well as strengthening related capacities of the National Skills Standard Authority (NSSA) and other institutions.

c. Gaps in Education Sector Management

6. **Financing.** Inadequate financing remains an overarching issue for the education sector, despite signs of improvement. By fiscal year FY2011/12, the share of the national budget allocated to education reached only 3.74%, which is very low by international standards.[15] However, the new government's redoubled focus on education appears to be translating into increased resourcing: the FY2012/13 budget for education more than doubled in nominal terms, with the share of an increasing total government allocated to education rising from 3.74% to 6.26%.[16] Increased DP support may expand resources, however continued increases in (and careful prioritization and effective management of) state financing for education will be critical.

7. **Governance.** Detailed analysis under the CESR is needed to pinpoint and address other key gaps in sector management that interlink with access and quality issues to undermine education sector performance. Many of these appear most pronounced in SES, TVET, and HES, including gaps related to (i) coordination across the 13 ministries involved in education, and across the MOE departments directly in charge of Basic Education (three) and Higher Education (two); (ii) data and information, needed as a basis for policy, decision-making, and needs-based planning and budgeting; (iii) overall institutional capacity; (iv) human resources and technical and managerial capacities; (v) systems for assessing teachers/faculty and learning outcomes, as well as broader quality control; and (vi) new frameworks for mobilizing private sector actors.

2. Government's Sector Strategy

8. **Policies and plans.** The 30-Year Long-Term Basic Education Development Plan, 2001–2030 and associated 5-year plans set broad strategic directions, including for expanded access to and quality of PPE to meet the needs of society and the economy.[17] The government's renewed commitment to education is reflected in the noted doubling of the education budget, and the decision in early 2012 to conduct the CESR. Commencing from a rapid assessment of sector performance, policies, and legislation, the CESR will be fundamentally important in providing a more in-depth understanding of sector challenges and an evidence basis for identifying needed reforms, defining clear priorities and targets. In turn, the CESP will embed concrete and sequenced action plans, thus ensuring that increased financing translates into improved sector performance and contributions to successful socioeconomic transformations. A broad array of DPs have committed to align support to the CESR process.

[14] Starting in SY2012/13, MOE plans to allow registration of private schools, but only for grades 1-11.

[15] In recent years, nearly 90% of education budgeting has gone to salaries and other recurrent expenditures, leaving very scarce resources for capital investments (e.g., school construction and improvements) or non-salary recurrent costs that may be critical to enhancing quality and equity (e.g., teacher training, provision of free textbooks, etc.).

[16] The share of the education budget in GDP is expected to double from 0.69% to a projected value of 1.4-1.5%.

[17] As reemphasized in a Ten-Point Education Policy issued by the President in March 2011, the government sees education as critical to nation-building. Its vision for the education sector is to "To create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age".

9. **Risks and risk management.** In this process, initial risks and challenges include Government leadership and multi-stakeholder coordination, and institutional capacities. For the former, however, the education sector has thus far stood out as a leading example. MOE (as overall coordinator for the CESR process) has established technical working groups (TWGs), including representatives from MOST and other key ministries as well as major DPs, who have firmly committed to and maintained solid coordination and harmonization to support the government-led CESR. In addition to supporting careful prioritization and sequencing of subsequent initiatives, the CESR's rapid assessment phase will also help to pinpoint institutional gaps, and DPs have also committed to provide related capacity development support.

3. ADB Sector Experience

10. ADB has not provided country-specific loan or technical assistance (TA) for education in Myanmar, but has conducted periodic sector analysis and maintained modest but strategic engagement through regional TA (RETA). ADB's support for the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS) Working Group on Human Resource Development (WGHRD) under RETA 7275 will include ADB support for Myanmar's hosting of the next (Eleventh) WGHRD Meeting in early 2013.[18] Recently-approved RETA 7957 also involves engagement with Myanmar on issues including education and related challenges and opportunities for Myanmar's entry into the noted AEC.[19] At the same time, ADB has particular regional experience (including in countries facing similar contexts and reform agendas, such as Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Viet Nam) in PPE, in which government needs for international support have attracted more limited DP support.

11. ADB has been involved from the earliest stages in conceptualizing the 2-year CESR process, and has been called on to play a leading role in PPE subsector analysis, complementing support from other DPs.[20] ADB is well positioned to contribute its regional experience in PPE, drawing on (for example) regional HES-related interventions (including Myanmar) under the GMS WGHRD, to growing regional support and knowledge-sharing on TVET, and support for SES reforms in neighbors like Lao PDR.[21]

[18] ADB. 2009. *Technical Assistance for Implementing the GMS HRD Strategic Framework and Action Plan*. Manila. ADB is also preparing a follow-up RETA to support the next phase of the GMS HRD Framework and Action Plan.

[19] ADB. 2009. *Technical Assistance for Support for ASEAN Leaders Forum on HRD towards an Integrated ASEAN Community*. Manila.

[20] Support from most DPs is expected to focus on primary, pre-primary, and nonformal education.

[21] For example, Myanmar is considering SES curriculum reforms to extend Basic Education to the global norm of 12 years, along with better SES-TVET-HES linkages. ADB is now the lead DP supporting similar reforms in Lao PDR.

Appendix 1

PROBLEM TREE FOR MYANMAR POST-PRIMARY EDUCATION (PPE)