

RECOVERY OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM IN MYANMAR

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ABSTRACT: *Myanmar's education system is in a very weakened state. The physical condition and human resource capacity of the system is poor by any standard, and teachers, whether in schools, colleges or universities, have few opportunities and little incentive for professional development. A process of recovery is getting underway, but it will take years before significant improvements are evident. Major cultural change is required in the style of leadership and management at all levels of government, and there is also a desperate need for more financial resources. This paper documents the current state of the education system in Myanmar and advances three priority areas for immediate attention.*

KEYWORDS: *Myanmar; education; development; Southeast Asia; reform*

Introduction

Myanmar's transformation from military dictatorship to civil society is by no means yet complete, but the momentum for political and social change is now stronger and the country is no longer a pariah state, shunned internationally because of its rejection of democratic institutions and a poor human rights record. As a result of over 50 years of military rule, however, Myanmar is now one of the world's poorest countries, and its education system is in a very weakened state. The system's physical infrastructure is poor; teaching methods have not progressed much beyond those widely practised in the 1940s and 1950s; and teachers, whether in schools, colleges or universities, have few opportunities and little incentive for professional development. Prior to the imposition of military rule, Myanmar (then known as Burma) had one of the better education systems in Southeast Asia. Now its education system must undergo a prolonged process of recovery that will present challenges.

This paper seeks to document systematically the current state of the education system in Myanmar. It advances three selected priority areas requiring immediate attention. The paper is based on interviews with students, teachers and educational managers during site visits to educational institutions in Myanmar over the period from 2011 to 2013, a time of rapid change for the education system, and one in which access by foreigners to information about the system has improved enormously. It builds on the existing literature, and especially on recent publications by one of its authors (Martin, 2011, 2013), and it draws heavily on reports recently made available in English by the Ministry of Education (see, for example, MOE, 2012a, 2012b), and on survey data available from an Integrated Household Living Conditions Survey conducted in 2009-10 (UNDP, 2011), and a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, also conducted in 2009-10 (UNICEF, 2011). Also of note is a recent comprehensive report on opportunities and challenges for Myanmar (ADB, 2012)

The Setting

Myanmar is in the World Bank's 'least developed nations' category. It has a population of about 60 million, a large landmass (the second largest in Southeast Asia), and a level of GDP per capita

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that is currently estimated to lie somewhere between US\$800 and US\$1,000 (World Bank, 2013). Agriculture is the most significant sector of the economy, generating 43% of GDP and providing a livelihood for over 70% of the population (World Bank, 2013). Myanmar's Human Development Index, though slowly improving, remains relatively low, and poverty, especially among the two-thirds of the population living in rural areas, affects over 25% of the population (UNDP, 2013; World Bank, 2013).

Ethnic diversity is a distinctive characteristic of Myanmar. It has as many as 135 different ethnic nationalities within its borders (Oxford Burma Alliance, 2013). The Burmans, accounts for 68% of population, and tend to live in the lowland and more economically developed regions of the country. Other nationalities, accounting for much smaller proportions of the population, include the Shan (9%), Karen (7%), Rakhine (4%), Chinese (3%), Indian (2%) and Mon (2%). They live mainly in the upland and more remote parts of the country. Myanmar was known as Burma until 1989 when the military government decided on a name change to recognise the non-Burman ethnic nationalities. Many inside and outside Myanmar resisted the change because of the undemocratic way in which it was decided. Over time, however, Myanmar has become widely accepted as the country's name.

Burman political and social dominance is an ongoing source of ethnic tension in Myanmar. British colonial authorities sought to advance the interests of the minority ethnic nationalities by recruiting large numbers of them into the police, the army and the bureaucracy. Burman resentment towards this policy fuelled pressures for independence from Britain during the 1930s, and again after the War in the 1940s. In 1948, independence was finally secured, but civil unrest based to a large extent on ethnic rivalries intensified, resulting eventually in political and economic collapse and a military takeover in 1962. A new Constitution promulgated in 1974 declared Burma to be a socialist State. Military rule, which has been vigorously contested on many occasions, continued until quite recently, in March 2011.

Myanmar now has a limited parliamentary democracy – one in which the military retains control over one-quarter of the parliamentary seats. Recent changes in the political landscape are contributing greatly to increased political freedom and to the opening up of the country's institutions to international engagement. There has recently been a re-establishment of diplomatic relations with the West, and external investment is now flooding into Myanmar at a rapid pace (Reuters, 2013). Ethnic rivalries have not disappeared, and military action to quell civil unrest continues in several parts of the country.

In February 2012, the Ministry of Education, drawing on funds from an international consortium of development partners, initiated a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR), the purpose of which was to promote a "learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age". Though at an early stage of its functioning, the CESR is already of immense symbolic value because it gives hope that the State is becoming more committed to ensuring that every child in Myanmar should have the opportunity to complete a full cycle of basic education of good quality.

Basic Education

Basic education in Myanmar currently consists of five years of primary education, four years of lower secondary education, and two years of upper secondary education. The 5-4-2 structure of the education system is under review and will eventually be replaced by a 6-4-2 structure. Pre-school education is also available, but the pre-school sector is not effectively integrated with the rest of the education system and only about one-fifth of all eligible children attend a pre-school, with children in rural areas being the least likely to participate.

Primary school education is compulsory, but the net enrolment rate in primary school in 2010-11 was estimated to be only 84.6% (MOE, 2012b, : p.26), indicating that not all primary school students remain until successfully completing primary school at the end of grade 5. Data extracted from the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted in 2009-10 (UNICEF, 2011) show that the main loss occurs during the first two years of primary school, mainly for reasons of affordability and access. The data also show that by the end of the primary school years, only about 70% of students

who commenced in primary school five years earlier remain enrolled, and that the transition from primary to secondary school brings about a further loss of students. By grade 6, only about 50% of students who commenced in primary school six years earlier remain enrolled. The loss continues, and by grade 10 only 23% of students who commenced in primary school 10 years earlier remain enrolled. Between grade 10 and grade 11, there is a further significant loss, and by the final year of secondary school only 10% of the students who commenced in primary school 11 years earlier remain enrolled (UNICEF, 2011).

While some of the loss of students during the secondary years may also be attributed to affordability and access, what mainly impacts on retention during these years is the increasingly selective nature of the examination system. By grade 11, when students sit for the Basic Education High School Examinations, most secondary students have left school because they have not been able to pass the succession of examinations leading up to the completion of grade 11. Given that it is rare for more than one-half of candidates for the Basic Education High School Examinations to achieve an overall passing grade, the success rate of students who commence a secondary education program is indeed relatively small.

Both girls and boys are equally likely to remain in school through to the final year of secondary education. Girls are consistently more likely than boys to achieve better results in the Basic Education High School Examination, and they are also more likely to proceed to higher education – in 2012, for example, 60.1% of all higher education students were female (MOE, 2012b, p.26).

Young people from rural areas, and especially young people from poorer households, are the least likely to remain in school through to the final year. Data collected in 2009-10 by UNICEF, in collaboration with several ministries, show, for example, that whereas 76% of children aged 10 to 15 years from urban areas were enrolled in school, the comparable figure for children in the same age group from rural areas was only 52% (UNICEF, 2011, p.106). The data also show that, whereas over 85.5% of children aged 10 to 15 years from the richest quintile of households were enrolled in school, the comparable figure for children in the same age group from the poorest quintile of households was only 28.2% (UNICEF, 2011, p.106). These patterns are consistent by other survey data (see, for example, UNDP, 2011).

The Ministry of Education is mainly responsible for the provision of basic education in Myanmar. Two other ministries also involved are the Ministry of Religious Affairs (responsible for monastic schools) and the Ministry of Border Affairs (responsible for schools in the troubled border regions of Myanmar).

Vocational and Higher Education

Entry to pre-employment technical and vocational education (TVET) may occur upon completion of lower secondary education, and entry to higher-level TVET and to higher education may occur upon completion of upper secondary education. The boundaries between TVET and higher education are not clearly defined, and both sectors, but TVET especially, are structurally very fragmented.

The Ministry of Science and Technology is the largest of the public TVET providers. It manages a national network of technical universities, technological colleges and technical institutes, offering degree and diploma qualifications. The Ministry also supports a network of technical high schools and vocational schools. Many of the TVET programs provided by the Ministry require intensive full-time studies and provide pathways to a degree. Other ministries, together with an increasing number of private-sector providers, also conduct TVET programs, but these are more likely to focus on short-term training skills related to areas of specialist technical need. Little is known about where students who complete TVET programs find employment, or about whether the knowledge and skills they acquire during their studies are even relevant to their future workplaces.

The TVET sector has many deficiencies, succinctly summarized as follows: the limited relevance of curricula, materials, methodologies, and program designs; the lack of an alignment across TVET, higher education, and secondary education; quality control and accreditation, particularly in the

context of a proliferation of institutions and programs of varying quality; inadequacies in the qualifications of teaching staff and in the quality of professional support systems; and weaknesses in links to labour market demand, especially in emerging sectors and skill areas (ADB, 2012, : p.26). As a consequence, the sector does not enjoy a good reputation for the quality of its programs. In addition, trade skills, and hence TVET, are remarkably undervalued in Myanmar – workers with trade qualifications are not necessarily paid any better than workers without trade qualifications, and qualifications from universities are universally accorded far greater social status than TVET qualifications. Participation rates in TVET are not reliably known, and program completion rates are widely claimed to be less than 50% - though there are not sufficient data available to verify this claim. A lack of trained technical personnel is becoming increasingly apparent in areas of basic infrastructure, such as electricity, water and basic sanitation, especially in rural and remote areas of the country, but, to date, the TVET sector appears unable to respond with increased numbers of trained personnel. There is an almost complete absence of any direct participation by private-sector employers in the design and delivery of training programs.

The structure of the higher education sector remains largely as prescribed by the *University Education Law of 1973*, a rudimentary legislative instrument that serves only to restrict the development of the higher education system. As officially documented (MOE, 2012a), there are 13 ministries that exercise line-management responsibilities for a total of 164 universities and colleges. The Ministry of Education is the dominant ministry – its 66 universities and colleges account for 77% of all higher education enrolments. The Ministry of Science and Technology is also a significant provider – it now manages as many as 61 technical universities, technological colleges and technical institutes, accounting for 18% of all higher education enrolments. Whether higher education institutions belonging to the Ministry of Science and Technology should all be classified as higher education institutions, as opposed to being classified as TVET institutions, remains quite unclear – many programs offered by the Ministry's higher education institutions are qualitatively different from traditional higher education programs, and are more like trade training programs. Two other important ministries are the Ministry of Health, which manages 15 higher education institutions, and the Ministry of Defence, which manages five higher education institutions.

Nearly all universities and colleges, other than the longer-established and more traditional liberal arts and science universities (for example, the University of Yangon, and the University of Mandalay), are highly specialized, whether in economics, teacher education, foreign languages, engineering, computer studies, maritime studies, agriculture, forestry, medicine, nursing, veterinary science, and so on. Remarkably, but consistent with the pattern in basic education, 82.6% of all academic staff members are female. Most (60.3%) students enrol part-time, and, though there are some universities in Yangon and Mandalay with more than 15,000 full-time enrolments, the average full-time enrolment per higher education institution is only 1,145 students, reflecting a policy adopted by the military of seeking to contain student radicalism by avoiding large concentrations of full-time students at any single higher education institution, especially in the larger cities. This policy contributed significantly to a surge in the number of higher education institutions established during the 1990s and sprinkled across the country.

Challenges

Myanmar's education system faces enormous challenges. These are evident in relation to finance, governance and management, pedagogy, equity, and quality. They also exist in different forms across the school, TVET and higher education sectors.

Finance

The education system is grossly underfunded – a state of affairs that has existed for a very long time. The underfunding is related to Myanmar's status as a poor country, but, more importantly, it

has occurred because, under military rule, the importance of the education system was deliberately undervalued. Recent national budget figures for 2013-14 indicate a 4.4% allocation of the national government's budget to the education system – an improvement on previous years, but well short of the allocation of 20.8% being made to support the military (Htet, 2013). Furthermore, an allocation of only 4.4% of the national government's budget to education compares poorly with the proportions allocated to education by governments in the Association of Southeast Asian Nation (ASEAN), to which Myanmar belongs. Vietnam, which allocates almost 20% of its national government budget to education, stands out as a leader, but there are other countries, including Malaysia, that are not far behind. Not surprisingly, total expenditure on education as a proportion of Myanmar's GDP is also low. In 2012-13, it was only 1.7%, compared with an ASEAN average of 3.5% (World Bank, 2013). By comparison, the OECD average in 2009 was 5.1% (OECD, 2011).

The lack of sufficient public funds rests at the heart of a great many of the current problems being experienced by the education system in Myanmar. Because salaries for teachers, particularly for primary school teachers, are relatively unattractive, capable graduates are less inclined to pursue a career in teaching. Male graduates seem especially wary of becoming teachers because the salary levels for teachers are widely viewed as being insufficient to enable them to assume the role of sole provider for a family. In the absence of better salaries, teachers have a strong incentive to provide fee-based private tutoring classes, mostly delivering exactly the same material as they would have delivered in their regular classes, but with more of an eye on the needs of individual students. And, because of insufficient funds, schools, colleges and universities are typically in a very poor physical condition, with inadequate or even non-existent library and laboratory resources. Teachers must also manage large classes, though less so in the more remote regions of the country where schools must be provided by the national government even though student enrolment numbers are low.

Another aspect of the problem is that there is a significant reliance, thought to be increasing, on private household expenditure. The main items of private household expenditure on education include learning materials and textbooks, tuition fees and private tutoring classes. Attendance at primary school is supposed to be free, but, as in many ASEAN countries, fees are unofficially levied in order to supplement teacher salaries and to meet the capital costs of school construction and maintenance. These costs can amount to a significant proportion of household income. Private tutoring, in particular, can be quite expensive. Its impact has been investigated more closely in the context of higher education, where private tutorial classes in cities such as Yangon and Mandalay are estimated to cost in excess of US\$250 per month – the cost is usually shared between students in a group. This additional income for university lecturers is well above the mid-point salary level of a university lecturer (estimated at about US\$150 per month), which explains why academic staff members are most willing to conduct the classes. Attendance is universally agreed to be important to academic success, and students appear to prefer attending the classes because they feel more like they belong to a community of learners. However, the classes also present an opportunity for unscrupulous exploitation, and they potentially detract from the public esteem traditionally accorded in Myanmar to the role of teacher. At a practical level, they also reduce the amount of time that teachers have available for class preparation, and, in universities, they represent a more lucrative alternative to engaging with research.

Governance and Management

Challenges relating to governance and management are also significant. Issues of governance particularly concern the higher education sector, which in Myanmar has little or no self-governing capacity. The level of familiarity in Myanmar with a Western tradition of universities being self-regulating communities is unclear, but it is evident that this tradition held little or no attraction to the government while Myanmar was under military rule. The *University Education Law* of 1973 effectively deprived universities and institutes of institutional and financial autonomy. Instead, a highly centralised process of decision making was instituted whereby a Universities Central Council,

chaired by the Minister for Education and with a membership that included deputy-ministers from a wide range of ministries, director-generals from various government departments, rectors of universities, principals of colleges and institutes, and various other appointees representing political and community interests, numbering 42 persons in total, makes nearly all of the important decisions concerning the higher education system. Matters not decided upon by this body are decided by a subsidiary body, the Council of University Academic Boards, also chaired by the Minister for Education, and with a membership of 55 persons, many of whom are also members of the Universities Central Council. Within universities and institutes, any remaining decisions to be made tend to be purely procedural in nature.

The management culture across the whole of the education system is one of top-down decision making. The curriculum in schools, for example, is centrally determined, with negligible regard to local needs and circumstances, and it relies very largely on rote learning. Textbooks and materials are prescribed centrally. School principals, though accorded a high level of respect in their school communities, are primarily administrators. The incentives provided by the management system place more value on compliance with bureaucratic expectations than on the achievement of distinctive outcomes that meet the needs of local communities. There is negligible transparency in decision-making at the upper levels of management. A bureaucratic culture, manifesting itself in a passive indifference to problems, prevails. Excellent performance at any level within the education system is difficult to reward, and it is generally quite difficult to take disciplinary action against under-performing teachers or administrators, all of whom are civil servants.

Badly lacking in Myanmar's education system is a vision that is realistic and unifying. While 30-Year Long-Term Development Plans, commencing in 2000-01, have been developed for each of the sectors, these seem already to be slipping in terms of their relevance and impact. They have recently been supplemented by more specific National Development Plans. A characteristic of all of the Plans, though, is that they do not assign clear and specific accountabilities for the achievement of key objectives, and the timelines they propose are very loosely attached to the attainment of key objectives. Furthermore, the declared vision for the education system, which is "to create an education system that will generate a learning society capable of facing the challenges of the Knowledge Age" (MOE, 2012b), is lofty in aspiration but lacking in concrete relevance to Myanmar's current situation. The education system might well be better off focusing on a vision that explicitly recognises the long-term strategic importance of quality, efficiency, unity, equity and, most importantly, internationalisation.

Pedagogy

Fundamental challenges continue to exist in relation to pedagogy. In what is a very thorough review of the education sector conducted in 1992 by the Myanmar Education Research Board, it was stated that: "Myanmar's rigid school examination system, which encourages elitism, is a relic of the colonial period that survived Myanmar's gaining independence in 1948 and still dominates the education system. With failure rates high, success in examinations became an important target of education." (MOE, 1992, p.26) Two decades later, an examination culture continues to flourish. Teachers feel compelled to teach what will be tested, and students are inclined to learn only whatever might be on the exam. To make matters worse, parents often judge teachers on the basis of student success in examinations, and school authorities often judge teacher performance on the same basis, leading in some instances to teachers being even more anxious than their students about examination results.

The dominance of an examination culture impacts adversely on school retention and educational participation rates. The impact of the Basic Education High School Examination, which involves examinations across a selected set of six subject-based examinations, and which marks the completion of secondary schooling and is utilized for determining matriculation to higher education, is a case in point. In 2012, of 467,849 students who presented for the matriculation examination, only

34.4% passed. In other words, of the relatively small proportion (10%) of students who remained in school from the start of primary school to the end of secondary school, two-thirds were then blocked from proceeding further with formal education. Examinations are employed throughout the education system in Myanmar to identify those who are most capable of passing them, rather than to affirm levels of attainment achieved by all students sitting for them. This approach is wasteful of talent, and it is also socially inequitable – students who perform well in examinations come disproportionately from the more socially privileged class of society (Naing, 1992, p.22).

There is widespread agreement that teaching quality and teaching methods at all levels of the education system in Myanmar need improvement. Against a background of restricted resource availability, teacher-centred approaches reliant mainly on information dissemination are commonly adopted. In this regard, little has changed since 1992 when, according to the education sector report referred to earlier:

The emphasis in teaching strategies must be shifted away from the narrow goal of succeeding in examinations by regurgitating facts, towards a more functional use of learning. ... Most Myanmar students cannot think critically, raise questions or solve problems. Classroom instruction focuses primarily of getting students to understand and memorize the facts in textbooks, which are often out of date. (MOE, 1992, p.44)

Student-centred approaches to learning are now being officially encouraged (MOE, 2012b, p.15). The success of these approaches will, however, be affected by the availability of more library resources and by students and teachers having more freedom to access to the Internet. These approaches will also require retraining opportunities for teachers, few of whom have had much formal induction to student-centred teaching methods, and most of whom model their teaching practices on the examples provided by their own teachers. Recent initiatives implemented to encourage the exploration and application of new styles of teaching and student assessment are evident, but anecdotal reports suggest that, once back in their workplaces, teachers who attend professional development programs on these new styles tend quickly to revert to the traditional styles favoured by the majority.

Equity

Equity issues have been referred to earlier in this paper. The main point made was that young people from rural areas, and especially young people from poorer households, are the least likely to remain in school through to the final year. Data about the influence of social and economic advantage on educational participation and academic success derive principally from a Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted in 2009-10 (UNICEF, 2011). The advantages associated with having more educated parents and with coming from a better-off household are easily identified at every level of the education system, though these advantages appear to be especially pronounced in secondary education, where the pressure exerted by examinations becomes progressively more intense.

As also referred to earlier, traditional gender inequity, with boys succeeding at the expense of girls, is not immediately evident in Myanmar. Girls are, in fact, over-represented among higher education students. Of special note is the extent to which the teaching profession is predominantly (86%) female (UNESCO, 2011a). It is widely argued that the reason for this situation is that girls remain in school and are more likely to go on to higher education because they want to become teachers – teaching being traditionally regarded as a female occupation in Myanmar. A more likely explanation is that girls remain in the education system longer because they have fewer opportunities for paid employment if they stop studying. They are better represented in teaching because male students avoid teaching on account of its generally lower salary levels.

The role of monastic schools is of note. Education provided by Buddhist monks is a tradition dating back to the 11th century. Currently, monastic schools provide supplementary education for

needy children and orphans – filling a significant gap in the education system. However, the impact of monastic education is difficult to estimate. Sources differ on the likely number of students attending monastic schools – the figure may be somewhere between 100,000 and 250,000 children, accounting for from 2% to 5% of the primary school population (Martin, 2011, p.128; Buncombe, 2013). These schools invariably lack adequate teaching resources. They are heavily reliant on donations from parents and the public.

Quality

The challenge of the lack of quality is pervasive in the education system in Myanmar. To date, no national quality assurance framework appears to have been developed. At the level of basic education, a network of inspectorates functions with the expressed aim of supporting and maintaining the quality of the school system. In fact, however, the role of these inspectorates seems mainly confined to ensuring compliance by schools and teachers with Ministry of Education policies and regulations, though some professional support for individual teachers is also provided.

In the TVET and higher education sectors, there are no system-wide quality assurance frameworks for determining the extent to which the expectations of students, staff and the community at large are being met. Legislation regarding the quality and academic standards of the higher education sector has been discussed at length, but never approved. Myanmar is a member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network, the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, the University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific organisation, the ASEAN University Network, the Association of Southeast Asian Institutions of Higher Learning, and the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, but it is at a very elementary stage in terms of developing a quality assurance system for its higher education sector. The lack of institutional autonomy and the slowness of centralised decision-making are significant impediments to progress.

A matter of special concern for the TVET and higher education sectors is that there is no unifying national qualifications framework. In 2007, the Government established a National Skills Standard Authority under the Ministry of Labour with a brief to develop such a framework. Its focus was to develop occupational competency standards, and it did agree to a qualifications framework that had potentially significant implications for the higher education sector. It assigned bachelor and postgraduate degrees to particular levels within the framework, and proposed that graduates should routinely be required to complete a test to ensure that their skills, knowledge and competencies complied with standards expected for the relevant qualification level. The Authority's deliberations were never properly concluded, however, and, to date, its proposals have not been addressed by the higher education sector. Setting a test for all graduates for the purposes of establishing compliance with standards specified in the framework would be costly and administratively complex. A simpler approach might be to ensure that preferred graduate attributes are explicitly embedded in the curriculum for all bachelor and postgraduate programs.

UNESCO's International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) appears to offer a sound basis for a national qualifications framework for Myanmar (UNESCO, 2011b). In areas relating to tertiary education, the ISCED distinguishes between: 'post-secondary non-tertiary' (Level 4) programs (essentially TVET programs), 'short-cycle tertiary' (Level 5) programs (essentially TVET and sub-degree university programs), and 'bachelor or equivalent' (Level 6) programs. The introduction of this framework to Myanmar might necessitate some uncomfortable but ultimately beneficial reforms. At present, there are far too many bachelor degree programs being delivered by lecturers who would not normally be regarded as being sufficiently well qualified to deliver Level 6 programs, and there are degree-granting universities that might more realistically be classified as providers of Level 5 programs. Addressing these matters promptly is essential to the international credibility of Myanmar's higher education institutions, as well as to the international mobility of graduates with degrees awarded in Myanmar.

Priorities for Improvement

There are a great many aspects of Myanmar's education system that require improvement. For reasons of emphasis and economy, only three will be addressed here. The first is the most obvious: the education system needs more public funds. As indicated earlier, the proportion of the national government budget allocated to the education system is completely inadequate to meet the needs of the system, and it also compares unfavourably with benchmarks for other ASEAN member states. As a result of inadequate public funding, the physical infrastructure of schools, colleges and universities in Myanmar is almost uniformly in bad shape, with buildings needing to be repaired, libraries needing to be restocked, and laboratories needing to be reequipped. The human resource capacity of the system is also in a weak state. Significant public investment in Internet technologies for use in teaching and research is especially critical. A distributed system of Internet access across a country the size of Myanmar would provide enormous long-term benefits, as well as contributing significantly to a pressing need for greater internationalization.

The second is that primary school teachers require more support. In the education sector review concluded in 1992, it was reported that:

Teachers' high social status in Myanmar contrasts with their relatively low economic status, particularly at the primary level. When teachers are under-motivated because of low pay and poor career prospects, even the very best teacher training will not do much to improve teaching. (MOE, 1992, p.45)

This observation remains true. Primary school retention rates must be improved in Myanmar. Providing more public funds to achieve an improvement will not be effective if the skills, attitudes and levels of commitment of primary school teachers are not also addressed. There is a most pressing need to improve the training, professional development and remuneration of these teachers.

The third is that the TVET sector needs to be better developed. A recent declaration by the World Economic Forum that Myanmar's economy has the potential to quadruple in size by 2030 (Sampson, 2013) should be sufficient to indicate the extent to which there will soon be a most pressing need for more well-trained and highly skilled staff in areas of tourism, construction, water management, sanitation, power and agriculture. As noted earlier, the TVET sector remains fragmented, financially constrained and socially undervalued. The capacity of existing TVET providers to train more students is very limited. Ministries determine existing curricula centrally, without much regard to the needs of private-sector employers. TVET provision in rural areas is especially restricted. Better coordination across the TVET system is critical. The TVET sector needs a quality assurance framework, underpinned by a suitable national qualifications framework. Private-sector employers must become more involved in the national system of training for persons seeking trade qualifications.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has sought to document the current state of the education system in Myanmar, and to identify selected priority areas for attention. Trying to bring together in one paper a large volume of detail about an education system as complex as Myanmar's is an ambitious undertaking, but hopefully the paper will serve as a springboard for more detailed investigations and reports. Without doubt, Myanmar's education system is badly in need of repair. A great deal of destruction has been wrought on the system by over 50 years of military rule.

As Myanmar's economy and society open up, opportunities will become more widely available for a new generation of leaders to play a significant role in restoring the education system. These people will need to be able to access far more public funding than is currently being provided to the education system. They will also need to develop and share a common vision for the system –

one that is inspiring and well integrated with global needs. They will need the freedom to exercise initiative, that is, to be free of the present culture of centralized control and top-down bureaucracy. International aid organizations have a great deal of responsibility for helping to identify and develop these future leaders.

An appreciation of the current situation of Myanmar's education system is helpful to an understanding of the stages that many education systems must work through when recovering from the effects of prolonged periods of military rule or civil dictatorship, often in the aftermath to civil war. Indeed, the education systems in countries such as Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia may be seen in the past to have progressed through these same stages. Regrettably for Myanmar, the lesson from the experiences of these other countries is that the recovery process can be slow and difficult (Hayden and Martin, 2011; Hayden and Le, 2013).

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