

Learning Lessons



Education Sector

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Asian Development Bank
6 ADB Avenue, Mandaluyong City
1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
Tel +63 2 632 4444
Fax +63 2 636 2444
www.adb.org

For orders, please contact:
Department of External Relations
Fax +63 2 636 2648
adbpub@adb.org

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Foreword

Learning lessons from evaluation is part of good corporate governance. To ensure that it invests responsibly, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) continually reviews its operations to assess their effectiveness, learn from experience, and improve the development of future policies, strategies, programs, and projects. Learning lessons from evaluation boosts the development effectiveness of ADB operations by providing feedback on performance.

This online edition of Learning Lessons: Education Sector complements ADB's *"Guidance Note: Education Sector Risk Assessment."* The Guidance Note offers a framework for mapping governance risks, which encompass institutional aspects (policy, legal framework, and regulation); organizational aspects (planning, financial management, procurement, and human resources); and sector operations. While the Guidance Note identifies entry points for mapping risks to development effectiveness in the education sector, lessons from evaluation can augment ongoing efforts for mitigating risks (inclusive of governance and non-governance risks). These lessons are largely drawn from independent evaluations, self-evaluations (project and program completion reports), and ADB's Evaluation Information System. All lessons are illustrative and are not intended to be interpreted as recommendations. Users of this paper are advised to review the lessons


Sandra Nicoll

Concurrent Practice Leader (Public Management and Governance) and Director, Public Management, Governance, and Participation Division Regional and Sustainable Development Department

carefully in the context of specific conditions and operating environments to broaden their understanding of these experiences and to utilize them in current and future sector challenges, as applicable. The challenges and solutions cannot be generalized as they differ from one scenario to another, given the country and sector contexts.

This knowledge product would not have been possible without valuable collaboration among individuals from the communities of practice—public management and governance as well as education—to promote lessons from evaluations. A team from the Independent Evaluation Department (IED) and the Public Management, Governance, and Participation Division (RSGP) of the Regional and Sustainable Development Department initiated the learning series. The team comprised Njoman Bestari (advisor), Jocelyn Tubadeza (evaluation specialist, operations coordination), Sergio Villena (research associate, consultant), and Michael Diza (associate evaluation officer) from IED; and Sandra Nicoll (director), Jessica Ludwig-Maarroof (former public management specialist), and Brenda Katon (former governance specialist, consultant) from RSGP. Members of the education sector community of practice who provided valuable comments included Ayako Inagaki, Ikuko Matsumoto, and Jouko Sarvi.


Ikuko Matsumoto

Concurrent Co-Chair (Education Sector Community of Practice) and Director, Urban, Social Development, and Public Management Division Pacific Department


Njoman Bestari

Advisor, Independent Evaluation Department



Abbreviations

ADB	-	Asian Development Bank
EMIS	-	education management information system
SWAp	-	sector-wide approach
TVET	-	technical and vocational education and training



Background

The long-term strategic framework (Strategy 2020) of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) identifies education as a core area of operations and guides sector development initiatives in developing member countries.¹ ADB's education sector policy, moreover, emphasizes (i) increasing equity and access; (ii) improving quality; (iii) strengthening management, governance, and efficiency; (iv) mobilizing resources for sustainable financing; (v) strengthening partnerships; and (vi) applying new and innovative technologies, especially information and communication technology.²

In July 2010, the Regional and Sustainable Development Department published the *Guidance Note: Education Sector Risk Assessment*, which identified entry points for mapping governance risks that can reduce development effectiveness in the education sector.³ These sector risks were classified within the frameworks of

- (i) institutional features (policy, legal framework, regulation);
- (ii) organizational aspects (planning, financial management, procurement, human resources); and
- (iii) operations (student admissions, scholarships; curriculum development and production of learning materials, teacher training and development; evaluation and examinations; graduation certificates and diplomas; school administration; and capacity development at central, provincial, and district levels).

Continuing from the guidance note, this synthesis reviews and analyzes lessons drawn from more than 80 higher level and project specific evaluations and technical and project/program completion reports on ADB assistance to the education sector over the last 10 years. It goes beyond the governance focus of the guidance note to provide an expanded perspective of risks that can reduce development effectiveness at the sector, program, and/or project levels. Thus, it complements the guidance note by covering a broad spectrum of lessons—in both governance and non-governance—and by sharing risk mitigation measures based on ADB's experience in the education sector. These lessons are not prescriptive. When viewed properly from a contextual perspective, however, they can help deepen understanding of ADB's sector experience and provide inputs into the design and delivery of future country partnership strategies, programs, and projects. A caveat is in order nonetheless: the paper may not have covered all relevant risks and lessons as these had been mainly based on existing completion reports of programs and projects, education sector-related evaluation reports, and some ADB technical assistance completion reports. Referenced works at the end of the paper provide further details on specific operating environments and context-specific measures for risk mitigation.



In July 2010, the Regional and Sustainable Development Department published the *Guidance Note: Education Sector Risk Assessment*, which identified entry points for mapping governance risks that can reduce development effectiveness in the education sector.



Key Lessons and Contextual Sector Risks

Institutional Risks

Policy

Strong government commitment to and ownership of sector policy reforms hasten achievement of expected results.

Government commitment and reform ownership are fundamental to achieving reform objectives. To strengthen ownership, policy reforms must be driven by relevant sector needs and underpinned by a continuing policy dialogue. Government ownership of policy reforms is reflected in engagement in advocating, crafting, and implementing sector reforms and in consistent policy pronouncements. Strong commitment is manifested in resolve to earmark adequate

resources—an important enabling factor—to speed up and sustain reforms. In Bangladesh, for example, the government demonstrated its strong commitment through an annual increase in budgetary allocation to cover various expenditures (specifically for new infrastructure, repair and maintenance of dilapidated structures, teacher salaries, textbook supplies, and teacher training), which sustained reforms on the quality and efficiency of primary education. In Mongolia, strong government commitment boosted the successful implementation of comprehensive education policy reforms (such as rationalization of school facilities and staffing and others), which widened access to education, increased the number of



In Mongolia, strong government commitment boosted the successful implementation of comprehensive education policy reforms, which widened access to education, increased the number of qualified teachers, and improved achievement levels in primary, secondary, and higher education.

In Uzbekistan, the government successfully implemented the textbook rental scheme to deliver low-cost, quality textbooks to all students.



qualified teachers, and improved achievement levels in primary, secondary, and higher education. In Uzbekistan, the government successfully implemented a textbook rental scheme to deliver low-cost, quality textbooks to all students. It also institutionalized a legal mechanism to ensure the financial sustainability and proper management of the scheme.⁴

Inadequate understanding of the policy reform environment can derail reforms.

Policy reforms built on an apolitical process and that lack understanding of country contexts are bound to fail. To succeed, policy reforms should be supported by a careful assessment of the reform environment, allowing better understanding and management of the risks, and should be articulated clearly in countries' policies.⁵ Furthermore, strong collaboration and consistent dialogue—with host governments and development partners alike—are necessary to manage the changing context and increasing complexity of work in the education sector.⁶

Realistic goals and timeframes for achieving education reforms are important to the policy reform process. Systemic change in any social development sector

(such as education) is an incremental process that requires a reasonable implementation period to achieve milestones. Reforms may initially face weak support, or even resistance from stakeholders. Goals and timeframes must therefore be realistic, factoring in potential delays and pursuing measures to enhance awareness and to drum up support. Timeframes should reflect a country's capacity, or lack thereof, to implement reforms, making technical assistance for capacity development crucial before introducing major reforms.⁷

Implementing complementary interventions to demonstrate visible results enhances the achievement of policy reforms in the education sector.

As noted, new policy reforms tend to attract skepticism, resistance, or even rejection from stakeholders. This is most evident in the case of pioneering policy reforms, which have no record of successful experience in other countries. Nonetheless, the Education Sector Development Program in Mongolia demonstrates that skepticism of the “complex schools” model—bringing several adjacent neighborhood schools under a common management to rationalize the system—can be overcome. The program did this through a built-in package of complementary project interventions that included (i) better

management, (ii) monetary and nonmonetary incentives for teachers, (iii) better teaching equipment and textbooks, and (iv) in-service teacher training. The concrete improvements arising out of the interventions helped win over the skeptics.⁸

Regulation

Overly restrictive requirements for establishing and registering private schools deter potential education providers. Extremely restrictive entry criteria may discourage private investors from establishing new schools. While regulation is meant to protect consumers from substandard education services and dishonest operators, this consideration must be balanced against the adverse effects of overly restrictive requirements, particularly where education demand exceeds public sector supply. Exorbitant registration fees and onerous approval processes can also work against setting up schools in under- and poorly served areas and encourage

corruption.⁹ The registration requirements for private education and training providers need to be (i) realistic while meeting policy goals, (ii) objective and measurable to minimize discretion and limit scope for corruption, (iii) openly available to prospective education providers, and (iv) applied consistently.¹⁰

Effective enforcement of an accreditation system for educational institutions helps reduce the risk of poor education quality.

An independent body for accrediting education institutions is part of regulatory mechanisms to maintain standards in the sector. The accreditation process helps institutions develop effective educational programs and assures the educational community, general public, and other organizations that an accredited program or institution conforms to specified standards of quality and effectiveness. In Indonesia, for example, the national accreditation board certifies that a university, institution, or program generally meets quality standards

In Indonesia, the national accreditation board certifies that a university, institution, or program generally meets quality standards set for faculty, curriculum, administration, libraries, financial health, and student services.



set for faculty, curriculum, administration, libraries, financial health, and student services. Universities and polytechnics take accreditation seriously. Every 3–5 years, curriculum reviews and updates take place. Continual curriculum assessment is vital for maintaining quality and keeping pace with global benchmarks and trends.¹¹

Good regulatory practices foster the effective delivery of quality education services. Apart from setting the desired performance standards, the education sector regulators need to implement other practices that foster better delivery of quality education services. Several measures from a case study of the primary and secondary education subsectors in Bangladesh help indicate how to avoid poor delivery: (i) require schools to disclose information to regulators and the general public about the education services they offer; (ii) require the collection and dissemination of information based on certain indicators, including the quality of infrastructure, facilities, and curriculum; qualifications offered; and class sizes, fee levels, teacher qualifications, and examination scores; (iii) enforce independent school review systems to provide information on the performance of schools; and (iv) introduce independent accrediting agencies that focus on school performance.¹² The Government of Viet Nam, for example, demonstrated how regulatory requirements could be modified to improve the quality of higher education. Apart from requiring education providers to comply with specific quality standards, it supported regular assessments by external independent organizations and upheld accountability and transparency.¹³

Partnerships and Networks
Government capacity to enter into partnerships with competent, non-state education providers improves access to quality education. Broadening access to education calls for the participation of competent, non-state entities (such as civil society and private sector organizations) in delivering education services. Public–private

partnerships, especially when state-recognized, can expand service coverage and resources to meet educational needs.

The partnership between the Government of Pakistan and the Punjab Education Foundation, for example, involved public–sector funding to support foundation-assisted private secondary schools in providing quality education in underprivileged urban, suburban, and remote rural areas. It made possible the deployment of highly qualified subject specialists to low-tuition private schools, where they mentored the teachers and gave students high-quality instruction. Thus, the participating private schools got the benefit of highly qualified mentors that they could not afford on their own. Moreover, the principals and vice principals of participating schools received training to improve their managerial skills. This partnership led to positive results—better learning outcomes, fewer school dropouts, less teacher absenteeism, and reduced truancy among students.

The Private Junior Secondary Education Project in Indonesia provides another example. It demonstrates that government provision of full-time teachers to private schools, using government-funded contract teachers, can improve the quality of classroom learning and help boost student enrollment. Several other reports highlight the importance of effective partnerships in the provision of nonformal education services and in community-based routine and periodic maintenance of primary school infrastructure.¹⁴

But public–private partnerships present their own set of challenges. They require strengthening government capacity to (i) provide clear policy, legal, and regulatory frameworks; (ii) enter into contracts with the private sector; (iii) design, implement, and monitor suitable partnerships; and (iv) provide private schools access to capital and technical assistance to improve their educational and management practices. Public–private partnerships place new demands on the public sector. The institutional framework

The Private Junior Secondary Education Project in Indonesia demonstrates how government provision of full-time teachers to private schools, using government-funded contract teachers, can improve the quality of classroom learning and help boost student enrollment.



must create the conditions under which private firms can operate effectively. In countries unfriendly to private providers of education, introducing a policy that clearly defines the place of private provision of education in the national long-term education strategy is an option.¹⁵

Close interaction with development partners reduces the risk of poor positioning of development assistance.

Well-coordinated and focused assistance programs are crucial to the strategic use of resources and for achieving intended sector results. The Bangladesh education sector evaluation report, for example, indicated that many sector achievements resulted because development partners collectively decided to each focus on a particular subsector, creating synergies and a critical mass of beneficiaries.¹⁶ These partners, in collaboration with government, translated education strategies into well-designed assistance programs that provided long-term continuity of support. To mitigate the risks of poorly positioned assistance and duplication of efforts, close donor interaction and information sharing are essential.¹⁷

Organizational Risks

Planning

Fragmented sector planning and weak coordination among education sector institutions hamper responsiveness to sector needs. Seven reports highlight the importance of a systemic, holistic, and realistic approach to education planning. A comprehensive analysis of issues and directions for the education sector that links different subsectors in an integrated manner is vital, as are effective mechanisms for close coordination among concerned education ministries and institutions. For instance, the “Sector Synthesis of Evaluation Findings in the Education Sector” indicates that sustained efforts to improve educational access and quality takes time due to the generally large number of students, the sociocultural changes required, the many stakeholders involved, and the multifaceted nature of education. In this context, a realistic strategy for achieving development impact in education is to provide a long-term sector assistance program, guided by a hierarchy of objectives. As in the Bangladeshi case, a single intervention is insufficient for sustaining development impact. Instead, a series of

projects with consistent objectives, over 10 years or more, may be an appropriate planning approach.¹⁸

Inaccurate demand forecasts for school services lead to inefficient use of scarce resources.

In estimating enrollment demand, the use of static data without further analysis of the likely trend—which may be influenced by regional variations in population density and competition from other schools—can result in unrealistic estimates. This can lead to the under- or overutilization of school capacity. Without proper estimation analysis, consultation, and establishment of management and incentive schemes, hardware and software inputs, such as school facilities and training for teachers, may fail to improve the quality of educational outputs and efficiency.¹⁹

Sector Management

Informed approaches contribute to sound education sector management.

Education sector development efforts call for appropriate management. For example, centralized education sector management has been found ineffective and inefficient, particularly for sector efforts that require close supervision and coordination. It suffers

from lengthy decisionmaking, remoteness from clients, and resistance to change. In one country, for instance, excessive centralization of resource management severely limited local level responsibility and initiatives. Some governments have begun to decentralize responsibilities from the center to the provinces, districts, or communities. Local institutions, however, may not always have the capacity to manage, supervise, and implement education-related activities. Thus, capacity development is crucial for decentralization.

Yet, decentralization is no panacea. It requires careful planning and monitoring and takes time to implement. Decentralization may increase unequal development. School systems in remote or backward areas may stagnate or fall behind if decentralization is not carefully designed and efficiently implemented. When this happens, ongoing monitoring from a central oversight authority can help ensure that sector development is consistent across areas and centers. The governance of decentralized institutions is another possible pitfall. Principals of public sector institutions and those provided subsidies by the government may not be held accountable for performance and may be given restrictions in their autonomy to institute

During the 1990s in Mongolia, the government granted public universities more autonomy, shifted more management responsibility to each university, and expected each university to generate more of its own income.





Technical and vocational education and training systems should be governed by apex organizations such as national training authorities. The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority in the Philippines is a good example of this approach.

initiatives (such as charging of fees, replacing training courses, ensuring that students receive quality training, changing curricula, and involving the private sector in decision making). For example, during the 1990s in Mongolia, the government granted public universities more autonomy, shifted more management responsibility to each university, and expected them to generate their own income. Universities were allowed to charge fees to cover their expenses but government still regulated fee levels, leaving the institutions unable to raise fees at a pace that would cover the costs of instruction. Moreover, government continued to treat all university income and assets as state property, precluding the schools from disposing of outdated equipment (such as computers and laboratory equipment) and from upgrading to newer equipment without permission from the State Property Committee. These misalignments have since been reduced, but not before slowing reforms in the education sector.²⁰

Another approach to education sector development is inter-sectoral cooperation and management. In certain education

subsectors, such as early childhood and childhood education and technical and vocational education and training (TVET), several line ministries, such as education, labor, and health, have overlapping mandates. Clear responsibility is needed for policy making, implementation, and fund allocation and management. For TVET systems, in particular, getting the organizational structure right is the first step toward more effective management systems. Where possible, TVET systems should be governed by apex organizations, such as national training authorities. Apex organizations need executive authority to generate labor market information; develop policies; link training supply with demand; coordinate providers; set priorities, policies, and directions; and allocate resources. Such organizations should concentrate on policy and regulation and avoid direct administration of individual institutions and delivery of education and training. The National Technical Training Authority in Bhutan and the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority in the Philippines are good examples of this approach.²¹

Inability to disseminate and replicate successful local and international experiences in education limits improvements in sector practices.

Education systems in an increasing number of schools are achieving a high level of competence and maturity. There is much to learn from local experience honed by insight from local social context. An independent evaluation mission in Indonesia, for example, observed good management and innovative approaches in schools. However, no systematic process was in place to document and disseminate learning from these experiences and to replicate them. The dissemination of good and successful practices can support others.²²

Financial Management
Strong financial management and monitoring systems affect the quality and efficiency of education systems.

Quality and efficiency depends significantly on the management of school finances. Financial norms for project schools should be established at the design stage to maintain a minimum acceptable level of school recurrent expenditure per student as well as a proportion of school recurrent expenditure on non-salary items. This needs to be monitored during implementation to ensure that no school is underfinanced.²³

Limited resources for operation and maintenance of school equipment and facilities impair effective delivery of education services. Lack of funds for repair and maintenance of school equipment and buildings is mainly due to (i) government inability to provide sufficient operation and maintenance budgets, and (ii) ADB's general policy of not financing operations and maintenance. Government assurances on providing sufficient resources for school maintenance may be insufficient because governments may have competing uses for their budgetary resources. Examples of measures to establish a reliable funding source for school maintenance after project completion include (i) allotting a fixed

amount from government budgetary allocations or student fees to establish a maintenance fund, and developing regulations to ensure exclusive use of this fund for school maintenance; (ii) partnering with other educational institutions, organizations, and enterprises to improve the utilization of facilities and be a source of revenue to increase cost recovery; and (iii) encouraging schools to develop capacity for acquiring alternative means of funding.²⁴

Procurement
Procurement planning that is not demand-driven leads to underuse or non-use of procured educational facilities, equipment, and materials.

Promoting needs-based procurement should be encouraged during planning to avoid a mismatch between needs and procured facilities, equipment, and learning materials and to optimize the use of scarce resources. Yet, several reports cite cases of classroom construction in schools with declining enrollments, irrelevant textbooks and teacher guides, textbook supply not matching increased enrollments, and inappropriate equipment relative to training needs. Apart from carefully reviewing enrollment statistics and planning figures, order sheets and consultations with end-users can help prevent a mismatch. For example, the project completion report on the Basic Skills Development Project in Bhutan highlights the need to interact with teachers on procurement plans and to align equipment procurement with evolving curriculum requirements. Another completion report, on the Private Junior Secondary Education Project in Indonesia, underscores the importance of a demand-driven approach to reduce the risk of inappropriate procurement.²⁵

Poor enforcement by school administrators of contract provisions leads to the production of fewer items, higher unit cost, and/or low quality equipment and materials. Vigilance is necessary to make contractors comply with agreed specifications for equipment and materials. Penalties for delinquent contractors need to be strictly

The Basic Skills Development Project in Bhutan highlights the need to interact with teachers on procurement plans and to align equipment procurement with evolving curriculum requirements.



enforced to ensure both quality and timely completion. Some construction defects will not be evident until 1 or 2 years later. To ensure better quality, the warranty period should be long enough to guard against defects. The executing agency needs to monitor the soundness of completed civil works beyond project implementation and ensure that contractors address defects during the warranty period.²⁶

The timely distribution of quality textbooks and other learning materials encourages optimal use by intended users. It is fundamental to improving access to these materials and student learning. The Basic Education Textbook Project in Cambodia, for example, aimed to improve the quality of basic education by providing timely access to textbooks (Box 1). It demonstrated how textbook distribution problems could be overcome by strengthening the distribution network at the provincial level and establishing hub stations (bookshops) for distribution.²⁷

Inadequate knowledge of applicable guidelines and procedures impedes effective management of procurement. An executing agency's lack of familiarity with

ADB's procurement guidelines and procedures can make interpretation difficult.²⁸ To mitigate this risk, procurement advisors can be deployed to fill gaps in existing procurement expertise, and capacity development technical assistance can be provided to procurement staff in the client country.

An inappropriate procurement strategy impedes implementation of education projects. Centralized or decentralized procurement of equipment, instructional materials, textbooks, and other related items must carefully consider specific situations to avoid implementation bottlenecks. Centralized procurement of equipment, instructional materials, textbooks, and other related items can be efficient if coordination and cooperation with the users is effective.²⁹ The executing agency needs to conduct a systematic follow-up of equipment procurement, delivery, and installation. In decentralized procurement, the central office allows lower level units to manage the procurement process, but may oversee the process and monitor compliance with procurement guidelines. Poor monitoring of procurement, inclusive of centralized or decentralized procurement modes, can lead to irregularities that impede project

Box 1: Overcoming Hurdles to Textbook Distribution in Cambodia

Previously, Cambodia's basic education system was of low quality, in part reflecting a lack of textbooks in primary and lower secondary schools. In partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund, the Asian Development Bank financed the Basic Education Textbook Project (Loan 1446-CAM) from 1996 to 2002 in an effort to improve the situation. It did so by building the institutional capacity of the country's textbook publishing and improving the aid management and monitoring system in the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports.

Under the project, the ministry replaced old textbooks with new, quality textbooks, although smooth delivery was difficult at first. Attracting private transporters and delivery agents to textbook distribution was difficult due to bad roads and the high risk of empty loads on the return trip to Phnom Penh. To overcome this obstacle, the ministry established hub stations for textbook distribution (bookshops) in 15 of 24 provinces. Moreover, the Publishing and Distribution House deployed two 3-ton, four-wheel drive vehicles and one 10-ton truck provided by the project for long-distance delivery. It also expanded its book wholesalers' distribution network by signing contracts with private booksellers in various provinces. As a result, more than 2.8 million primary and secondary students gained access to quality textbooks, and the textbook-student ratio for core subjects in basic education reached 1:1 nationally.

To meet growing enrollment in primary and secondary schools, it was crucial to strengthen the distribution network and the administrative capacity for accurate stock management and school information. The Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports reviewed the quality of enrollment statistics and of planning figures. It also introduced textbook order sheets to enable the Publishing and Distribution House to capture realistic demand and establish a feedback loop system with schools, a system not in place before the project, to guide demand-driven procurement.

Source: Asian Development Bank. 2003. *Project Completion Report on the Basic Textbook Education Project in Cambodia*. Manila.

implementation. To mitigate corruption risks, third-party monitoring of procurement and contract management procedures can be considered, including random quality checks throughout project implementation and post-completion audits of project components.³⁰

Information System

Weak information systems hamper opportunities for informed dialogue and decision making in the education sector.

Information systems are central to the education sector. With the increasing trend toward decentralized education, an education management information system (EMIS) serves as a keystone of informed decision making, transparent resource allocation, and improved accountability. EMIS supports data analysis, accessibility, and information sharing among a broad category of users, such as policymakers, planners, lawmakers, school

officials and staff members, development partners, civil society, and other groups. To be effective, EMIS requires clear links to policy and planning, commitment from sector officials and staff, appropriate software, and sufficient training. It is vital to make data analysis relevant, improve the tracking of results, and disseminate timely information to end-users. The experience of Tajikistan, for example, highlights the importance of EMIS for informed dialogue. This was made possible through the tools and training provided through technical assistance, which improved access to better collection, analysis, and monitoring of essential data on education. Nonetheless, building capacity to ensure that information is accurate, valid, timely, and utilized remains a challenge. The continuing use of EMIS will depend on the extent to which it becomes indispensable to decision making.³¹



Sector Operations

Student admissions

Rigid entry requirements to higher education hinder equitable admission of promising students from disadvantaged regions. Admission criteria need to be reviewed against the minimum standards expected from certain students, considering their test results and their foundation courses. Some promising students from poorer regions, for example, may be academically ready, but their entrance examination results may not be satisfactory. In such cases, a project completion report proposes revisiting requirements for entry to higher education.³²

Lowering general entrance requirements to higher education institutions may increase student admissions, but this may prove detrimental to student survival rates.

In many developing countries in Asia and the Pacific, higher education institutions have the

option to align their entrance requirements with students' prior level of learning, thereby increasing student admissions. However, given a curriculum that meets international and local labor market requirements, and without measures to elevate the students' level of learning, this can translate into higher dropout rates and poor student performance.³³

Teacher development and training

Lack of long-term and relevant professional development programs compromises the quality of education. The level of skills and knowledge of teachers and instructors is a key determinant of the quality of education and training. Evaluation results point to the need to institutionalize continuous professional development of teachers and to move away from one-time, individualized programs. The provision of large amounts of one-off training under projects may be ineffective without budgets for follow-up in-service training or refresher courses and for skills upgrading

The experience of Tajikistan highlights the importance of education management information systems for informed dialogue. This was made possible through the tools and training provided through technical assistance, which improved access to better collection, analysis, and monitoring of essential data on education.



The level of skills and knowledge of teachers and instructors is a key determinant of the quality of education and training.

after project completion. Governments play a crucial role after project completion as they are expected to allocate resources and provide additional support to sustain initial gains from one-off training activities.³⁴

Across the education sector, making education relevant calls for reviewing old training programs, introducing new ones to improve teacher quality, and providing further in-country and overseas training in new approaches to teaching methods, curriculum development, and identification of needed skills. An additional training area is labor market assessment, which is particularly crucial for TVET. In general, a policy is needed to monitor and strengthen teacher competency through systematic conduct of performance evaluation exercises and to ensure that teachers' remuneration is commensurate with qualifications and expertise. This will help drive the continual upgrading of teacher competency and keep qualified teachers in the education system, while attracting more qualified teachers and leading specialists.³⁵

In higher education, systematic and sustained capacity development of instructional staff and administrators should also be pursued, particularly in countries where enrollment has grown faster than qualified teachers and administrators can be trained and recruited. However, capacity development needs differ by country. They include quality assurance, administrative aptitude in information management, transparency in financial accounting, tracking and use of equipment and facilities, and personnel management systems. Many university instructors have expressed interest in systematically developing teaching skills, expanding the range of pedagogical strategies used in the classroom, developing skills in retrieving and using electronic information sources in their teaching, and improving methods to assess students.³⁶

Carefully prepared training program strategies and plans before the commencement of any teacher training boost the effective delivery of education services. Corresponding teacher training plans and strategies should be prepared before

teacher training commences. The plan should address not only training activities, but also the availability of replacement teachers, if required, while regular teachers are undergoing training. Proper incentive schemes are also essential to motivate teachers to use newly acquired skills. To minimize disruptions arising from the long absence of teachers and staff on training, a project completion report suggests that staff development or teacher training activities be implemented on the job and on a short-term or intermittent basis.³⁷

Clear policies governing return-to-work action plans, after completing fellowship and training programs, provide good return on investment in capacity strengthening. Expected benefits from investments in capacity strengthening must be ensured through appropriate policies. The return to work contract or agreement should bind the recipients of fellowship and training programs to apply and echo their newly acquired or upgraded skills to the concerned educational institutions for an agreed period of time.³⁸ An education development project in the Cook Islands, for example, indicated that written plans of action and activities could be included in return-to-work agreements.³⁹

Curriculum updating and learning materials

Updating curricula helps reduce the risk of education systems becoming nonresponsive to labor market needs.

New skills and knowledge arising from recent technologies and changing job markets require the updating of curricula to improve the competitiveness of the workforce. In TVET and higher education, aligning systems with changing labor market requirements and new technologies is a major challenge.⁴⁰ Indonesia's experience in TVET, for example, demonstrated that a curriculum could be made demand-responsive by introducing a competency-based curriculum to enhance the capacity of individuals to adapt to new job requirements and by providing instructional materials (Box 2).⁴¹

Formulation and evaluation of standards

Adopting an effective quality assurance framework helps reduce the risk of poor education standards. Quality standards are vital for the efficient use of education resources and for labor mobility. In TVET, for example, competency-based training and national vocational qualifications frameworks help set appropriate standards. By providing a



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clear hierarchical progression of qualifications from lower to higher skill levels, these offer a framework for quality assurance and ensure the quality of the processes of acquisition and assessment of competencies.⁴² In Sri Lanka, the national vocational qualifications framework has served as a unifying mechanism for bringing coherence to subsector activities and for formulating qualification standards. The preparation, distribution, and widespread use of occupational standards have harmonized the content and quality of training across various providers. The magnitude of work involved in establishing a national vocational qualification framework, however, can be considerable. A core team of dedicated professionals, political commitment, and well-functioning administrative systems are essential.⁴³

In higher education, there is agreement on the poor quality in many developing countries. Rapid increases in enrollment, financial challenges, and the growing prevalence of online courses undermine the quality of university education. This occurs when instructional staff and administrators are hired faster than they can be adequately trained, when new institutions lack clear procedures and systems for quality control, and when new modalities of delivering instruction (such as the Internet) lead to questions about how educators can be sure quality is being maintained. The convergence of these factors, for example, in countries such as the People's Republic of China, India, Indonesia, and Thailand impart new importance to the design and control of quality assurance procedures.⁴⁴

Box 2: Making the Curriculum Responsive to Industry Needs in Indonesia

Introducing a curriculum that reflects changes in work roles, sets international standards of competence, and applies contemporary vocational educational practices was a major challenge to Indonesia's technical and vocational education and training subsector. In response to the government's request, the Asian Development Bank financed the Vocational and Technical Education Development Project (Loan 1319-INO) from 1995 to 2001. The project aimed to improve the quality, relevance, and external efficiency of the subsector through (i) teaching and learning improvement, (ii) supporting industrial growth through human resource development, and (iii) improving management practices.

As part of the teaching and learning improvement component, the project introduced competency-based training to improve the adaptability of individuals to new job requirements. It also launched a pilot incentive program to encourage teachers to produce instructional materials locally. To encourage industry participation, the project deployed specialists to liaise with industry representatives and to obtain a deeper understanding of industry's skills requirements. The project also upgraded the skills of teaching staff to ensure their understanding of competency-based training and new instructional materials.

Nationwide links had been established with the private and public sectors through the appointment of private sector representatives to school councils, school advisory committees, and the placement of students in industry. The main representatives came from (i) the national training and education board, (ii) chambers of commerce and industries, and (iii) major industries.

The provision of competency-based training and instructional materials helped improve the teaching and learning process. The curricula and syllabi the project introduced became increasingly aligned with the skills requirements of industry and helped boost the preparedness of individuals for new job requirements.

Source: Asian Development Bank. 2002. *Project Completion Report on the Vocational and Technical Education Project in Indonesia*. Manila.



Limited monitoring and evaluation of education standards impairs the delivery of education services.

Monitoring and evaluation must be integrated into the regular activities of educational institutions. Baseline data for specific outcome indicators, such as pass and graduation rates and length of job-search period, for example, should be established and continuously updated in an easily accessible database.⁴⁵ Real-time assessments or post-evaluation studies on education standards will need time-series trends of key education indicators, which can help identify needed improvements in curriculum and staff development, access to education, and industry-institution links for effective delivery of education services.⁴⁶

School administration and supervision Inadequate capacity of educational institution leaders and managers in supervisory and control systems compromises the efficiency and effectiveness of school administration.

The operation of educational institutions depends

heavily on the leadership of institute heads/supervisors, school principals, head teachers, and the chairpersons of school management committees. Their effective school leadership brings significant changes to school management and performance. Special attention and resources should therefore be directed to enhancing their leadership roles and capabilities. Likewise, recruitment of school principals/institute heads should be competitive and performance-based.⁴⁷

Strong links with employer associations help improve the administration of technical schools and of institutions for higher learning.

Forging links with employer and industry associations is valuable. Institute management committees in Pakistan, for example, involve members from chambers of commerce and industry. They help provide feedback on labor-market demand, suggest ways of improving teaching practices, offer internships and job placement for students, and improve academic planning and direction setting. Similar councils and advisory boards

In Sri Lanka, the national vocational qualifications framework has served as a unifying mechanism for bringing coherence to subsector activities and formulating qualification standards.

in Indonesia and Viet Nam help monitor the relevance of key operations, including TVET program administration and job placement promotion. In Sri Lanka, networking by certain universities and research and development institutes with industry led to industry inputs into curricula revision, provided opportunities for student visits to companies, and hastened job placement.⁴⁸

Operation and maintenance of facilities Inadequate school-based training and support for newly purchased facilities and equipment hampers their utilization and effectiveness. Establishing new facilities and equipment in schools requires significant school-based training and support. New equipment is often not used because teachers are unfamiliar with it. New facilities are often not used because teachers lack knowledge and experience. Project effectiveness could be increased by more technical assistance support for the use of the new equipment and facilities in combination with upgraded libraries, science, and other relevant laboratories.⁴⁹

Inattention to operation and maintenance leads to the deterioration of equipment and facilities and inefficient use of scarce resources. Poor operation and maintenance

of equipment and facilities is a risk across the education sector—basic and secondary education, TVET, and higher education. Government assurances in providing sufficient resources for school maintenance is necessary but insufficient. Clear guidelines and concrete operation and maintenance plans are required, along with efforts to regularly check the extent of use and the condition of equipment and facilities. The Higher Education Project in Indonesia, for example, underscored the preparation and implementation of annual preventive operation and maintenance plans to keep facilities and equipment in good condition.⁵⁰

Program and Project Level-Risks

Planning and Design

Realistic and appropriate project designs facilitate smooth implementation and achievement of expected project results.

Project success begins with sound design. Sound design is the by-product of rigorous project preparatory analyses or exercises. Sound design guides implementation, facilitates monitoring and evaluation, and ultimately determines the success of programs and projects. The design of education sector

Establishing new facilities and equipment in schools requires significant school-based training and support.



initiatives should not be limited to one-shot projects. It should look at the long-term involvement of ADB and development partners to boost continuity of assistance to the education sector.⁵¹

ADB's experiences in the design of education projects have been well documented in completion and evaluation reports. Most of these characterized sound project designs as simple and straightforward, with clearly defined or highly relevant objectives and targets, strategies, and indicators. They have realistic implementation schedules and, yet, built-in flexibility to anticipate technological changes that affect the education sector. These designs were supported with (i) timely inputs from project preparatory technical assistance that analyzed and assessed the condition of the education sector, its institutional and investment needs, and ADB's past assistance to the sector; (ii) economic and financial analyses based on accurate and realistic estimates of required project costs such as textbook production and teacher training costs; and (iii) realistic assessment of uncertainties, risks, and constraints affecting education strategies and implementation. Crafting sound project designs also requires the active participation of executing agencies, the educational institutions benefiting, and other stakeholders. This participation should be nurtured and sustained by adequate horizontal and vertical communication lines and the involvement of various key stakeholders at central, district, and local levels.⁵²

Tentative commitments for parallel cofinancing hamper project implementation. Parallel cofinancing—that is, financing complementary projects with other development partners—without a firm commitment from the concerned donor often creates problems in project implementation. Where cofinancing is involved, preparatory activities should be undertaken and finalized as early as possible to avoid any implementation delays. Otherwise, ADB may take a conservative approach to project

design and exclude cofinancing for project scoping and costing. A possible safeguard in the event of a cofinancier's withdrawal from a project is for ADB or the government to make funding available to cover related components to preserve the integrity of project design.⁵³

Poor participation of key stakeholders during project preparation and onwards imperils the success of education projects.

To increase project ownership, the prospects for success, and sustainability, education projects should be designed with the active involvement of the executing/implementing agencies, the educational institutions and communities benefiting from the projects, and other stakeholders. For education projects involving many stakeholders, at least one participatory workshop with stakeholders should be held during the project preparation stage or early stage of project processing to secure their continued support and involvement.⁵⁴

Management and Implementation Strong leadership capacity contributes to the effective execution of education projects. Differences in perceived image and enthusiasm and the quantity and quality of the outputs of institutions can be traced to the effectiveness of leaders. Among the notable traits of effective leaders are (i) a clear vision manifested in long-term development plans; (ii) openness to new ideas; (iii) willingness to take risks, perseverance, and flexibility in achieving results; (iv) concern and care for the staff and providing the training and logistical support to enable the staff to perform better; and (v) constant recognition of good performance through verbal appreciation or financial incentives. In-house seminars and workshops should therefore be conducted to improve the leadership capacity of project managers at central and local levels.⁵⁵

A flexible approach to dealing with changed project conditions boosts the delivery of project results. Conditions that affect project implementation vary from preparation to completion. A flexible

In Indonesia, the Second Junior Secondary Education Project emphasized the adoption of a flexible, open approach to implementation to foster a more holistic view of education development and change the strong public-sector focus of district and provincial officials by insisting on the inclusion of private schools and *madrasahs*.



approach to implementation enables a project to adapt to varying conditions, eventually impacting the delivery of expected results. In Indonesia, the Second Junior Secondary Education Project emphasized the adoption of a flexible, open approach to implementation to foster a more holistic view of education development and change the strong public-sector focus of district and provincial officials by insisting on the inclusion of private schools and *madrasahs* (community-based Muslim schools). It attained great success in private schools as most districts gave them financial support.⁵⁶ Aside from adopting a flexible approach to implementation, two projects pointed out that technical assistance and project designs should likewise be flexible to adapt priorities, approaches, and arrangements to the needs of recipient agencies/schools and to issues emerging during implementation.⁵⁷

Weak implementation capacity of project implementing units jeopardizes the success of education projects. An adequate project management structure—sufficiently financed and ideally staffed by both technical and academic experts—should be in place before the project starts, and could be a condition

for loan effectiveness or disbursement. If needed, capacity development of key implementing staff should be provided prior to the commencement of a project or during its early phase to avoid unnecessary delays and ensure smooth implementation. This would be useful particularly in the areas of project supervision and coordination and ADB's operational procedures and guidelines, as well as government regulations. The release of a small advance could likewise be considered from loan proceeds to finance startup project management activities.⁵⁸

In addition to formal training, routine operational contacts with short-term consultants or experts that are long enough to allow the learning process to occur, play an important role in developing staff capabilities. Capacity development, however, can be hampered by a high turnover of counterpart and project implementing staff, including frequent changes of project manager. This highlights the importance of staff continuity to ensure sustainable capacity development.⁵⁹

The number of consultants should match the availability of counterpart staff and the country's absorptive capacity. A large number

of short-term consultants imposes a heavy administrative, logistical, and counterpart staff burden on an inexperienced project implementing unit. Long-term consultants are better placed to provide continuity in ideas and assistance to counterpart staff, who would then be required in smaller and more manageable numbers and be available for a longer period to help digest reports.⁶⁰

For projects that involve more than one agency, the administrative structure of the executing agency and other project stakeholders should be studied during project preparation to avoid duplication and implementation delays and ensure effective coordination and management. In this regard, the executing agency may institute a steering or coordination committee early in the project. Particular care is required to ensure relevant and inclusive representation in the committee.⁶¹

Monitoring and Evaluation

Weak project performance monitoring and evaluation systems hamper project implementation and assessments. Better quality monitoring and evaluation processes and systems need to be incorporated into projects during their preparation or, at the latest, during appraisal. To provide clearer guidance during project implementation and completion and impact assessments, the desired outcome/impact for each project objective should be quantified or qualified using indicators. During implementation, data pertaining to these indicators should be vigorously monitored and collected to assess project benefits. To be meaningful, these data can be integrated into an existing national monitoring system such as a national statistics office.

Three factors are important to achieving and maintaining quality monitoring and evaluation systems. First, sufficiently skilled staff must be allocated to allow more attention to the use of data for educational and developmental purposes. Second, monitoring and evaluation must begin at project start-up by establishing

systems and methods to collect essential baseline data and to monitor early project activity properly. Third, greater attention is needed to the collection and use of data for feedback and maintenance of what is working well. To inform future development, the impact of positive contributions should be analyzed and understood. Thus, future monitoring and evaluation systems should record not only what was achieved, but also how it was done, and should capture not only inputs and outputs, but also impacts and their sustainability.⁶²

Sustainability

A strong commitment from key stakeholders reinforces the sustainability of education sector programs and projects.

Key stakeholders have a crucial role in sufficiently maintaining the outcomes and impacts programs and projects achieve. The special evaluation study on post-completion sustainability of ADB projects emphasized that strong government ownership and commitment, as seen in continued financial and institutional support, are important to improve the sustainability of project impacts. This support can be reflected in the government's commitment to finance major recurrent costs, for example. To enhance the government's commitment and ownership of projects, necessary policy changes can be introduced during the project processing stage through dialogue with the government and appropriate loan covenants. To boost project sustainability, mainstreaming projects into the education system is vital, as shown by two education development projects in the Philippines. Mainstreaming may involve, among other things, the integration of the project budget in the national education budget as well as the assimilation of projects in a country's regular programs, plans, and strategies. It can also be an arrangement where regular government staff members become involved in project implementation.⁶³

Similarly, encouraging the participation of other key stakeholders during project design and implementation can increase

project commitment and ownership which, in turn, can enhance the prospects of sustaining project gains. In Viet Nam, for example, the Lower Secondary Education Development Project stimulated and created an environment that encouraged community participation in building and maintaining more classrooms and school facilities. In the Development of the Madrasah Aliyahs Project in Indonesia, during implementation, communities began to participate in monetary and nonmonetary terms when they felt that their contribution was adequately accepted and recognized.⁶⁴

A sector-wide approach (SWAp) boosts the sustainability of education sector programs and projects. SWAp is a systematic approach that allows development partners to work together with a government by pooling resources to support the development of a sector or subsector in an integrated manner under the government's common policy framework. SWAps are valuable not only in linking sector plans, policies, and fragmented initiatives in a holistic manner, but also in catalyzing support beyond the program implementation phase. SWAps can help direct funding agencies toward strategic areas of development assistance, but they require close coordination among stakeholders, including government, civil society, the private sector, and development partners.⁶⁵ Box 3 illustrates the experiences of Bangladesh and Cambodia in the implementation of this approach.

Built-in measures that address risks to sustainability help maintain project outcomes and impacts. Sustaining project outcomes and impacts is challenging as it depends not only on ADB's continued support and government commitment to implement appropriate interventions, but also on built-in measures to mitigate risks to sustainability. These can be human, financial, institutional, technical, and/or economic. Such risks should be linked to design and monitoring frameworks and monitored properly. In the education sector, built-in measures to address risks include securing government commitment to fund recurrent costs, preparing and implementing regular operation and maintenance plans, retaining staff trained by projects, and involving local stakeholders. These can be embodied in a carefully thought out sustainability plan prepared and adopted before project completion.⁶⁶ In Bangladesh, for example, two project completion reports suggest that formal requirements for the transfer of project staff expenditures to the government's recurrent budget can be established prior to project completion to reduce employment uncertainties for staff.⁶⁷ Another report called attention to the need for a smooth transfer and maintenance of project facilities.⁶⁸

Box 3: Inroads towards Effective Education Sector Development in Bangladesh and Cambodia through a Sector-Wide Approach

Bangladesh's weak institutional management system in the education sector contributed to low education quality and inefficient service delivery, particularly at the basic education level. Its education strategy subsequently focused on increasing quality through improving community participation, delivery, management, finance, and assessment systems.

In Cambodia, significant gains in education sector development expanded access to education, but the education sector still struggled with the complex challenges of quality and equity. Rapid expansion of education facilities, for example, resulted in inadequately trained teachers, a shortage of trained teachers, inadequate teacher salaries, and continued use of informal payments, all of which had hurt enrollment, repetition, and dropout rates, and contributed to low education quality.

In response, ADB promoted government-led and managed education sector development in both countries. In collaboration with other development partners, it adopted a sector-wide approach (SWAp) to foster harmonization and integration of sector/subsector-wide development in these two countries. The SWAp aimed to:

- (i) improve assistance through the consolidation and optimization of resources;
- (ii) avoid duplicate and piecemeal efforts to improve synergies in achieving outcomes;
- (iii) increase harmonization of development partner and government implementation procedures, such as procurement, accounting, reporting, and a common project management unit integrated into the executing agency's normal operations rather than having separate project implementation units; and
- (iv) encourage the government and development partners to coordinate closely through special mechanisms for policy dialogue and fiduciary risk management led by the government to trim program monitoring and transaction costs.

Experiences in some countries have shown that SWAps tend to have high transaction costs in the early stages and cause implementation delays because of challenges in harmonizing the different procedures, roles, and expectations of development partners. But considerable benefits can be expected when they are designed and implemented properly.

In Bangladesh, the education sector assistance program evaluation highlighted that the SWAp (i) helped improve the sustainability of subsector outcomes because of long-term partner commitments to the provision of financial and policy support, (ii) increased the synergies of assistance, and (iii) integrated the program management unit into the executing agency's normal operations system.

In Cambodia, the institutionalization of the SWAp in the education sector resulted in the formulation and implementation of long-term, comprehensive, and well-integrated programs. The SWAp systematically linked sector policy, strategy, and resources and effectively engaged relevant stakeholders, which boosted the development of the education sector.

Sources: Independent Evaluation Department (IED). 2008. *Sector Assistance Program Evaluation on the Education Sector in Bangladesh: What Worked Well and Why under the Sector-Wide Approach?* Manila: Asian Development Bank (ADB); IED. 2009a. *Country Assistance Program Evaluation for Cambodia: Growth and Sector Reform.* Manila: ADB; IED. 2009b. *Country Assistance Program Evaluation for Bangladesh.* Manila: ADB.



Conclusion

Multiple risks threaten development effectiveness in the education sector. These arise from (i) inadequate understanding of the policy environment by governments and development partners, (ii) weaknesses in regulation, (iii) fragmented and unrealistic sector planning, (iv) limited capacity for generating financial resources, (v) weak procurement systems and expertise, and (vi) lack of continuing staff development programs that compromise the delivery of quality education services. At the project level, risks from inadequate stakeholder consultations, weak capacity of project implementation units, and poor monitoring and evaluation compromise intended outcomes. Thus, weak links in the overall chain of policy and regulation, planning, financial management, procurement, subsector operations, and project management can hamper the effectiveness and sustainability of education sector investments. A systemic, holistic, and realistic approach is fundamental. Moreover, support for the processes

and structures required for long-term development and sustainable improvement is valuable. Policy dialogue, sector planning, project implementation, and sustainable delivery of education services need to be strategized in the context of longer-term goals.

Various lessons call attention not only to the positive experiences and good practices that can be shared with others, but also to the need for risk mitigation where risks exist. In the latter, it is essential to carefully take stock of such risks and to understand the risk environment, considering the specific contexts in which they occur, the arrangements that trigger and sustain them, and the extent to which stakeholders can affect policy, planning, and management processes. Risk mitigation based on experience can provide valuable entry points. But care is needed in tailoring practical risk mitigation measures to specific situations.



The Way Forward

Education has undergone rapid change. Many countries in Asia and the Pacific have achieved universal primary education, but the high average enrollment rate (90%) has masked deficiencies in the quality of education, student retention, and knowledge gained. The rapid growth of information and communication technology, moreover, has revolutionized the content and delivery of education. This changing context has driven the shift in ADB's education sector assistance from increasing access to education toward strengthening the quality, inclusiveness, and relevance of skills at all levels of education. Based on ADB's *Education by 2020: A Sector Operations Plan*, sector assistance will address the broad challenges of inclusiveness, innovation, and integration.⁶⁹

In light of the lessons drawn from ADB's experience in the education sector in the last 10 years and given the direction established in the sector operational plan, future ADB operations can benefit from the sharing of contextual lessons and knowledge products. In particular, lessons that remain relevant pertain to the importance of enabling policy and regulatory frameworks, supportive partnerships and networks, improvements in systems and processes, and the need for continuing capacity development (such as teaching methods, curriculum development, quality assurance, information management, transparent financial management, accountable procurement systems, and effective administration of training institutions, among others). Sector-wide, new challenges lie in aligning education reforms and practices with equitable access to quality education in support of inclusiveness, complemented by

sustainable financing and innovative service delivery improvements. Strategic partnerships will increasingly become important in this regard. Overall, ADB can help catalyze support for inclusive and sustainable education sector development in developing countries in Asia and the Pacific through sustained policy dialogue, well-positioned sector assistance, and effective orchestration, if not harmonization, of sector assistance with other development partners to optimize the use of scarce resources.

In basic and secondary education, subsector assistance from ADB has shifted from the construction of new schools and upgrading of existing schools toward improving the quality, completion, and inclusiveness of basic and secondary education services. Based on ADB's education sector operational plan, this trend is likely to continue in the coming years. In line with this trend, support from ADB for decentralized approaches and for piloting innovative community partnerships in education will be essential. ADB's role will also be valuable in promoting knowledge sharing among countries about models of community partnerships and in scaling up partnership models that help improve quality and equity in basic and secondary education.

In TVET, raising education quality will be a continuing challenge. Strategic to this effort are implementing appropriate quality standards and aligning skills development with changing labor market requirements. ADB's role can be valuable in helping countries develop their capacity to provide appropriate policies and regulation, enforce vocational qualification frameworks, strengthen TVET

systems, and increasingly involve the private sector and industry in the provision of training. Apart from strengthening links between TVET and industry, engaging the private sector will help align TVET provision with evolving labor market requirements and promote cost-sharing arrangements. In turn, such efforts will help mitigate the risks of irrelevant skills development, unsustainable TVET financing, and inefficient use of scarce training resources. Further, ADB assistance will be crucial in setting up labor market information systems and feedback mechanisms, including tracer studies that track the job destination of TVET graduates and look into the relevance of the training they received from their schools. Careful monitoring through these studies can help verify where the graduates are applying their acquired skills and provide new insight into areas for further skills improvement.

In higher education, improving quality and equity will continue to be a major challenge, along with strengthening the focus on science and technology and promoting partnerships for faculty development, research, and innovation. Regional cooperation and cross-border collaboration in higher education will be a strategic area of support to enable countries to share their experience in education sector reform and financing and to coordinate activities efficiently. ADB, through

appropriate components in its projects and technical assistance, can deepen stakeholder participation in regional networks and collaboration programs. ADB assistance, moreover, will be valuable in helping countries rationalize public financing of higher education and strengthen the capacity of public higher education institutions in resource planning and financing to cover operating costs. These are pivotal to reducing the risk of unsustainable operations in higher education.

The changing context and increasing complexity of work in various education subsectors will call for focused dialogue and stronger multi-level collaboration, not only with stakeholders in the relevant countries, but also with development partners. Due to variations in the stages of development of countries in Asia and the Pacific, differing approaches will be needed to achieve a balance across education subsectors. Analytical and sector work, supportive networks, effective monitoring and evaluation, and interactive venues for sharing experiences and innovative arrangements will also be crucial to anchor sector work on a sound knowledge base and to advance the pursuit of strategic sector interventions.

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Learning Lessons: Education Sector

This online edition of Learning Lessons reviews and analyzes lessons drawn from evaluation of ADB support to the education sector over the last 10 years. It provides an expanded perspective of the risks that can reduce development effectiveness at the sector, program, and project levels. Lessons presented in this synthesis are not prescriptive. When viewed properly from a contextual perspective, they can help deepen understanding of ADB's sector experience and provide inputs into the design and delivery of future country partnership strategies, programs, and projects.

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Asian Development Bank
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1550 Metro Manila, Philippines
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