The State of Higher Education in Myanmar

Challenges and Recommendations

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Introduction

1. The effect of the political climate on higher education in Myanmar
2. Challenges in higher education in Myanmar
3. Project-Capacity building-Teaching and Learning resources for two colleges
4. Recommendations for improving higher education in Myanmar
Political climate

- Myanmar transitioning into a democratization and internationalization
- Still highly politicized - international organizations forced to “take sides” in order to engage in Myanmar
- Some opposing parties remain fighting for a “voice” and power
- Former exiles returning to Myanmar
Ties of the US and Myanmar since 2011

Economic sanctions suspended in 2013 with Obama’s visit

Aung San Suu Kyi elected as (de-facto) President of Myanmar in 2016 with U Htin Kyaw as ‘puppet’ President.
Lack of Social Capital

- Myanmar multi-ethnic country, still facing ethnic conflict (Rakhine)
- Still little trust in universities—rely too much on a centralized direction by government
Lack of capacity to build international ties

- Universities lack of independent administrative units to manage international research exchanges-created repository
- Poor infrastructure to support international academic partnerships
- Foreign exchange professor program
- American University of Yangon
Centralization/Decentralization of bureaucracy and higher education

- Thirteen different ministries oversee higher education
- Ministry of Education (MoE) largest overseer-split into Northern unit (MDY) and Southern unit (YGN)
- Students, faculty and universities lack autonomy and choice
Centralization/Decentralization of bureaucracy and higher education (cont.)

- Example: student wants to become a dentist but performance on national achievement test dictates where student ends up.
- Universities have limited budget - government education budget is less than 10%
Centralization/Decentralization of bureaucracy and higher education (cont.)

- A number of private universities have been established, some with MOU’s with international universities in the UK, US and Australia
- New Basic Education Law and Higher Education Laws are being rewritten and will be implemented soon
Centralization/Decentralization of bureaucracy and higher education (cont.)

- Infrastructure remains a big problem:
  - Frequent power cuts during hot and wet season
  - Internet access-majority of citizens access the Internet using a smartphone
  - Foreign investment by international telecoms Telenor, and Ooredoo have expanded coverage. MPT remains dominant provider
Educational Context

- Myanmar people value education highly, but are often disappointed with lack of qualified programs and shortage of educators
- Poor physical buildings, inadequate computer labs, libraries, labs
- Teaching style is slowly moving from rote learning to interactive teaching and learning
Since many citizens cannot go to college due to financial or academic performance, they often resort to obtaining informal training.

A few schools are accredited by international accreditation bodies such as WASC, Swiss and UK accreditation.
Due to emphasis on testing, class attendance and participation is poor.

Students often don’t come to class if there is no graded assignment/activity.
Importance of Leadership and Entrepreneurship

- There is an interest for educational reform in part driven by competition from other Southeast Asian countries.
- Desire to work with international organizations to reclaim status as top educational system pre-1962 (coup d'état).
Challenges in Higher Education

- Major overhaul is needed to either renovate or erect new physical infrastructure as well as the academic curriculum (MDC&NMDC)
- Modernization is underway with aid from NGO’s (NMDC&MDC renovating NMDC and tech in classrooms)
- No magic formula, may take a generation
Challenges in Higher Education (cont.)

- Strong leadership is needed for higher education reform
- ASSK promised to overhaul education; lack of competent leadership
- Lack of competent leadership to handle policy and legislation that is needed for reform
Understanding that competent human talent is needed especially in scientific, engineering and managerial resources that currently constrains Myanmar’s economic growth and technological development.

Talent issue is the result of universities not fulfilling this void.
Challenges in Higher Education (cont.)

- Physical Infrastructure

- Outdated building; Project-renovations under way

- Public universities have dormitories often in state of disrepair, no adequate utilities, Internet access, computer labs lack sufficient computers for students, outdated equipment, software (Win98), no technical support staff

- Project: Schools got wired with fibre optics and WiFi access points. WiFi throughout entire campus.
Challenges in Higher Education (cont.)

- Teaching and Learning Resources:
  - Lack of teaching and learning resources
  - Properly trained support staff
    - Ex. librarians do not have MLS-lack technical expertise
    - Ex: chemists lack practical experience due to insufficient lab work
Challenges in Higher Education (cont.)

- Curriculum

- Faculty lack up-to-date textbooks (Project: open textbook resources)

- Rote learning (Project: Lesson plans - adding interactivity, project-based learning - challenging)

- English language is still lacking for some teachers and student (Project: teacher training)
Challenges in Higher Education (cont.)

- Faculty
  - Often do not have postgraduate degrees, or often do not teach what they went to school for
    - Ex: Masters in Zoology teaching HTM
  - Little to no teacher training and faculty development
Information technology

- Poor state of Internet access and overall IT and telecommunications (Project - foreign investment from Telenor and Ooredoo improving greatly)

- Technology in the classroom lacking (Project - edX platform, mobile learning, micro-learning; college information system, repository for research - Bern)
Recommendations

- Stronger leadership needed for policy and legislative changes to place in higher education
- Further develop physical and technological infrastructure
- Enhance English language capacity
- Leverage Resources-open source teaching and learning resources
Questions?