



Human Development in Myanmar: A Case Study of Education

P. ROLLEN

PhD Research Scholar

*Department of Political Science, NEHU
East Khasi Hills, Shillong, Meghalaya.*

Date of Submission: 01-06-2024

Date of Acceptance: 10-06-2024

ABSTRACT

Education is vital for personal, social, and economic development. Poor education largely and badly impacts on the national development. Even though education is highly valued and regarded as one important factor of human development in Myanmar, the state-run education system has long been in decline, suffering from a critical lack of resources and skills. In the past, Myanmar was admired for the widespread literacy of its people and high-quality education standards. However, despite its good track record, Myanmar education system is now in an abysmal state. Today Myanmar is facing an education crisis in both rural and urban areas. Much remains to be done to restore Myanmar education to its former high standards.

Keywords: *Burma, Myanmar, Human Development, Education, Government.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of human development lies in the very notion that people are the real wealth of a nation. Human Development aims to shift the focus of development back to the well being of the people. Human development is not just another dimension of development; it is altogether a new perspective, 'a revolutionary way to recast our conventional approach to development'. What is 'new' in this approach is to develop the focus on 'human beings' and not just on the economy. The realization has, therefore, dawned upon the planner and policy-makers that human development should be the prime focus of all development.

Education has a long history in Myanmar and has always been highly regarded. In Buddhist Burma, before the displacement of the Burmese monarchy by the British, the Buddhist monastery served as the centre of education. With the advent of the colonial era under the British from the First Anglo-Burmese War 1824–1826, until the fall of independent Royalist Burma in 1885; secularization of education gathered pace during

the full colonial administration from 1886 until independence on 4 Jan 1948. After Independent, as a result of over 50 years of military rule, Myanmar is now one of the world's poorest countries, and its education system is in weak state. Prior to the imposition of military rule, Myanmar (then known as Burma) had one of the better education systems in Southeast Asia. Now it's education system must undergo a prolonged process of recovery that will present challenges. 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 that is currently estimated to lie somewhere between US\$800 and US\$1,000.

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. With the aim of developing human resources, Myanmar's education reform began in 2011 when the country's government system changed from a military government to a democracy. Now, the new government of Myanmar has also Made education reform a national priority.

II. The Current State of Education System in Myanmar

The fundamental law of Myanmar is the Constitution, which serves as the foundation for the nation's transition towards democracy and the reform of its education sector. The Constitution of 2008 describes the obligations and duties of the Union with regard to education, and the right of all Myanmar citizens to education. Article 366 stipulates that: "Every citizen shall, in accordance with the educational policy laid down by the Union: (a) have the right to education; (b) be given basic education which the Union prescribes by law as compulsory; and (c) have the right to conduct scientific research, explore science, work with creativity and write, to develop the arts, and conduct research freely with other branches of culture."



In 2001, the Myanmar government set up the 30-Year Long-Term Basic Education Plan (FY 2001-02 to FY 2030-2031) to be implemented in six phases each of five years duration. The 30-Year Long-Term Education Development Plan contains 10 programs for basic education with the purpose of promoting greater access to, and quality of, basic education, and 36 programs for the higher education sector which focus on six areas that will generate qualitative development of higher education and contribute to national development endeavours and the preservation of national identity and culture.

Since July 2012, the government, in collaboration with development partners, has embarked on a Comprehensive Education Sector Review (CESR). Significant achievements of the major education reforms until now include an increase in the budget for education, the publication of a new education law and the removal of public school fees. Starting from the school year 2015-2016, education enrolment is free for high school students. Enrolment in primary schools was made free in 2010-2011 and middle schools followed in 2013-2014. In addition, policies and laws have been laid down as part of the process of the education system reform. The most recently enacted laws are the National Education Law in 2014 and the Amendment of the National Education Law in 2015. Education policy was laid down in 2011 according to the guidelines of the former president.

In 2015, government of Myanmar launched a 100-day plan for every ministry, and the Ministry of Education laid down eight main processes such as upgrading schools, more efficient programs for school enrolment, and assessment programs for teachers in giving lectures in order to promote the education sector. During this period, to accomplish the eight main processes, the MoE has upgraded schools and carried out programs for school enrolment, sanitation, health and development. In AY 2016-2017, 3312 schools were upgraded. The ministry also instituted Alternative Education to give a second chance to learn for children who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to finish their formal education. Assessment programs for teachers giving lectures in the education and training sectors were also created, and the ministry worked with 18 other ministries and 14 regional governments to open short-term vocational training schools in Nay Pyi Taw, Yangon and Mandalay.

The significant changes made by the current government can also be seen in the changes

made to the curriculum and teaching methodology in the basic education sector, and the university entrance system in the higher education sector. The fact that teachers are now allowed to teach in ethnic languages in remote and hilly regions. The National Education Commission formed the independent National Education Standards and Quality Assurance Committee to carry out the following sub-articles mentioned in section 54 of National Education Laws as follows: (a) At every level of education there shall be a program of quality assurance; (b) In the assessment of education quality and standards there shall be program of internal and external quality assessment; and (c) The Commission shall establish the standards and methods of evaluation in order to ensure quality. The policies of the current government have shown stability because they have not completely changed the previous policy overall, and they maintain the momentum of the reform process up to its target date of 2030.

III. Challenges of the Current System of Education in Myanmar

Despite a traditionally high rate of literacy and importance of learning in Myanmar, its educational system is in a state of underdevelopment and uncertainty. Although enrolment in primary schools is very high, the completion rate lags behind. Reports indicate that only one third of all primary school children finish the first five years. Many students drop out due to poverty, lack of support, and poor health. While school attendance is high in urban areas and among male students, village schools in a vastly rural-agrarian country are handicapped by poor attendance, especially among the female students. According to Arohana, Myanmar education system has been decline due to lack of resources and skills. Education, particularly higher education, is often perceived as a potential threat by the authorities who exercise strict control over education institution. Investment in this sector is accorded a low priority by the government.

Due to lack of investment, school often charge student a range of unofficial fees. Many families, particularly those in poorer rural areas, cannot afford to pay these fees and so are forced to withdraw their children from education. According to UNESCO figures, the average adult in Myanmar has received only 2.8 years of schooling, and only 36.5 percent of eligible students enrol in secondary education. Today two-thirds to three-quarters of children drops out of elementary school before fifth grade. 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% .

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%. These patterns are consistent by other survey data (see, for example, UNDP, 2011). Corruption is common throughout the education system. Most curricula and learning materials in the Myanmar state education system are desperately out of date and have little practical application to the current context. Graduates lack the necessary practical and analytical skills to tackle Myanmar's humanitarian crisis. Myanmar lags far behind the developed world in terms of educational standards. Once at its zenith in the region, Myanmar today has unqualified teachers, very little resources and ageing materials. Many universities have been built and scattered throughout cities to prevent students from potential unrest. One exile Burmese editor told Newsweek, "Knowledge is paralyzes". The most highly educated young people are the children of the military elite.

Aung San Suu Kyi said, "The education system event at the school level is so terrible because the teachers are so badly paid. There is no proper equipment in the schools. They will put up a show room of computers while there are children who cannot even afford textbooks and there are inadequate textbooks for all the school in Burma." According to U Tin Latt, the executive director of Chindwin College, execution of policy is a major concern. "The government has initiated important steps to bring education to international levels, but there is still a lot to do in terms of infrastructure and access to resources, such as libraries in rural communities," he told OBG." Education is moving in the right direction. However, there is a major delay in implementing rules and regulations due to the concerns or actions of certain parties, such as the student union." Various sector studies and collaborative efforts have been made in the last 25 years to identify key issues and implementation programmes. Challenges in the management and application of curriculum reform are largely due to the complex nature of a diverse population, which

is spread among 330 townships and uses more than 100 languages.

IV. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Since 2011, Myanmar became a democracy, the government has been implementing pragmatic reforms to create a better education system that can match those of other countries in the region. For instance, the enrolment rate has increased as the government has eliminated entrance fees for every level of students. Because of the reform, the budget for education has risen higher than it was before. As a result of the increasing budget, the numbers of schools, students and teachers have also risen. Some policies and laws have also been enacted to improve the standard of education. Although the government is maintaining a focus on the education sector and trying to upgrade it so that it does not fall behind those of other countries in the region, but there are still many challenges and barriers to overcome in the process of education reform in Myanmar. Even though government expenditure on education has noticeably increased, more is required to improve the education expenditure to meet the needs of the education reform.

Poor infrastructure, teaching methodology, and limited teaching aids must be addressed in order to have an effective education system. 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.

Myanmar 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. To be able to overcome the above mentioned challenges, the government needs to keep focusing on its ongoing process of education reform in cooperation with local experts and international development partners.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bhagowati Surajit Kumar (Apr 2013 - October 2016) , "Human Development in India's North Eastern States: A Study", Journal of North- East India: Council of Social Science Research, Vol 37-40, No. 1 & 2.
- [2]. Commission, N. E.(2017). forming the National Education Standard and Quality Assurance



- [3]. Committee. In: Education, M. O. (ed.). Yangon.
- [4]. Education in Myanmar. Available at: http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5f/entry-3117.html.
- [5]. Constitution of the Republic of the Union of Myanmar (2008).
- [6]. http://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Myanmar/sub5_5f/entry-3117.html#chapter-3.
- [7]. Hayden Martin and Richard Martin (2013), Recovery of the Education System in Myanmar, Journal of International and Comparative Education, Vol.2, Issues 2.
- [8]. <http://www.myanmar-education.edu.mm/dhel/education-system-inmyanmar/education-development-plans/>.
- [9]. MOI. Four Ministries clarify undertakings in the first 100 days. Available at: <http://www.moi.gov.mm/moi:eng/?q=news/24/08/2016/id-8240>.
- [10]. Kaung U (1963), A Survey of the History of Education in Burma before the British Conquest and After, Journal of the Burma Research Society, Vol. 46, No. 2.
- [11]. Soe Min Zaw , Aye Mya Swe, Nan Khin Moe Aye & Nan Htet Mon (2017), Reform of the Education System: Case Study of Myanmar, Regional Research Paper, Parliamentary Institute of Cambodia.
- [12]. Tin U Han (2000), Myanmar Education: Status, Issues and Challenges, Journal of Southeast Asian Education, 1(1).
- [13]. UNESCO, Education for All 2015 National Review Report: Myanmar. Available at:
- [14]. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002297/229723E.pdf>.
- [15]. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2011a). World data on education: Myanmar. Available at: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publications/WDE/2010/pdf-versions/Myanmar.pdf.
- [16]. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). (2011b). International standard classification of education. Available at http://www.uis.unesco.org/Education/Documents/UNESCO_GC_36C-19_ISCED_EN.pdf.
- [17]. United Nation Development Programme (UNDP), (2013). International human development indicators. Available at: <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MMR.html>.
- [18]. United Nation Development Programme (1990), Human Development Report 1990, New York: Oxford University Press.
- [19]. World Bank (2013), Myanmar Overview. Available at: <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/myanmar/overview>.