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Tajikistan country case study

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2008 Global Monitoring Report
Commissioned Paper: Country Case Study
Tajikistan
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Executive Summary

The report provides mapping of progress towards the achievement of the EFA goals since they were agreed at Dakar. It identifies where the challenges are greatest and examines the efforts of government, international agencies, donors, and civil society with regards to the achievement of the six goals. Further on, the report identifies the extent to which the EFA goals can be achieved by 2015 and elaborates on the strategies and actions required by all EFA stakeholders to accelerate progress. Tajikistan is one of the poorest countries in the world and ranks 113th among 175 countries according to the UNDP's Human Development Report 2003. Education has always been among top priorities in Tajikistan, and the country tries to continue that tradition in spite of dire economic circumstances. Substantial external resources, especially from the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank (ADB), US Agency for International Development (USAID) and Soros Foundations/Open Society Institute (OSI) were directed towards educational improvement. Among positive trends it should be mentioned that Tajikistan does not experience any HIV/AIDS related problems. However, in order to achieve the EFA goals by 2015, enormous efforts must be taken as the old Soviet educational system has nearly collapsed and the new one is in its earliest stages. According to the IMF and WB studies, nearly 80 percent of schools in the country need repair; new textbooks must be developed and many more of those which have been adopted, need to be published; teachers' qualifications must be improved as more than 40 percent of the working teachers do not have higher education. The government announced the plan to increase teacher salary and reduce teacher workforce; at the same time in 2006 the Ministry of Education reported a shortage of nine thousand teachers. Increased numbers in school age-population are accompanied by marked declines in enrolment in pre-higher education in Tajikistan. Those are related to the increased direct costs of education, reduced state subsidies for transport and food, and lower family incomes. Pre-school enrolment has declined catastrophically over the past decade, threatening the health, nutrition and school-preparedness of children who no longer have access to these services. The lack of pre-school education particularly increases the vulnerability of young girls, as early marriage and insufficient schooling combine to ensure a lifetime of subordination. School attendance is also declining, especially for the girls. According to conservative estimates of the Asian Development Bank and Poverty Reduction study more than 20 percent of 13-17 year olds do not attend school; eight percent more girls than boys. The main reasons are poverty, diseases, lack of motivation and distance to school. Child labor exists at significant scale in Tajikistan, especially in rural areas where school age children account for 20 to 40 percent of all collected cotton, in spite of the state law that strictly forbids children involvement in cotton picking. Children involved in cotton labor miss up to one third of their school year. Due to the fact that about 72 percent of all children reside in the rural area, the negative impact of cotton-picking on education is immense.

Limitations

Obtaining reliable information is a problem in Tajikistan. Different sources report conflicting data even on basic demographics, not to mention major educational issues. For example, some sources list country population at 7 million; others at 6.7 and even 6.4 million. The World Bank reported educational expenditures as 3.45 percent of country's GDP, USAID – as 2.7 percent, and Asian Development Bank as 2.9 percent.¹ If there were multiple numbers available, the author always used the number which would be repeated in unrelated sources or at least would be closer to the median.

Country information and context

According to 2006 data, the territory of Tajikistan is 143.1 thousand sq. km, estimated population – 6.7 million people with probably over a million individuals employed outside the country. Ethnic composition: Tajiks – 80 percent; Uzbeks – 15 percent; Russians, Kyrgyz and others - 5 percent. Age structure: *0-14 years*: 37.9 percent (male 1,396,349/female 1,375,168); *15-64 years*: 57.4 percent (male 2,091,476/female 2,108,889); *65 years and over*: 4.8 percent (male 154,162/female 194,771). Median age: *total*: 20 years; *male*: 19.7 years and *female*: 20.4 years; life expectancy is 65 years (62 for males and 68 for females). Population density – 46.4 people per sq. km.

Tajikistan became independent in 1991 following the breakup of the Soviet Union, and it is now in the painful process of strengthening its democracy and transitioning to a free market economy after 1992-1997 civil war. The civil war severely damaged the already weak economic infrastructure and caused a sharp decline in industrial and agricultural production. There have been no major security incidents since 1997, although the country remains the poorest among the former Soviet states. Attention by the international community in the wake of the war in Afghanistan has brought increased economic development assistance, which could create jobs and increase stability in the long term. Tajikistan is in the early stages of seeking World Trade Organization membership and has joined NATO's Partnership for Peace.² Tajikistan has one of the lowest per capita GDPs among the 15 former Soviet republics. Only 6 percent of the land area is arable; cotton is the most important crop. Mineral resources are limited and include silver, gold, uranium, and tungsten. Industry consists only of one large aluminum plant, hydropower facilities, and small obsolete factories mostly in light industry and food processing. Even though significant proportion of its people continue to live in abject poverty, Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth since 1997, but experienced a slight drop in its growth rate to 8 percent in 2005 from 10.6 percent in 2004. Continued privatization of medium and large state-owned enterprises would hopefully further increase productivity. Tajikistan's economic situation, however, remains fragile due to uneven implementation of structural reforms, weak governance, widespread unemployment, and the external debt burden. A debt restructuring agreement was reached with Russia in December 2002, including a \$250 million write-off of Tajikistan's

¹ National Strategy for Education Development of the Republic of Tajikistan (2006-2015), Dushanbe, August, 2005

² <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/ti.html>

\$300 million debt. Tajikistan ranks third in the world in terms of water resources per capita. A proposed investment to finish the hydropower dams Rogun and Sangtuda would substantially add to electricity production. In spite of insignificant economy, Tajikistan is characterized by inadequate sanitation facilities; increasing levels of soil salinity; industrial pollution and excessive pesticides.

The country is administratively divided into three regions (oblasts) – Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous Oblast, Sughd and Khatlon Oblasts. GDP per capita in 2006 was 358 USD³. According to the 2006 study, 42.5 percent of the population lived below poverty; the average salary for the working Tajiks was around 28 USD⁴. In education, the average salary in 2006 was about 13 USD. Public budget expenditures for education varied from 2.4 percent in 2003 to 2.7 percent in 2006.

Educational System Structure

1. Preschool education – between the ages of one and six where children get basic care and are expected to prepare for school, i.e., acquire some reading and writing skills.
2. General education which includes
 - Elementary education (primary school), grades 1-4 for 7-11 year olds;
 - Basic secondary education (middle school), grades 5-9 for 11-16 year olds (schooling from grade 1 to 9 is mandatory);
 - High school, grades 10 and 11, for 16-18 year olds.
3. Professional education which includes:
 - Primary professional (mostly vocational) education, 1 - 4 years of training;
 - Secondary professional education, 2 - 4 years of training;
 - Higher education, 4-6 years of training.
4. Post-higher or graduate education.
5. Additional or continuing education in grade schools, institutes of professional education and other educational institutions.

Approximately 86 percent of children attending schools go to so-called comprehensive schools which incorporate students from the first to eleventh grades.

The rest, mostly in rural areas, attend elementary and middle schools, and very few go to private schools (Table 1).

³ World Bank data for Tajikistan from 2006 (<http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/TAJIKISTANEXTN/0,,menuPK:287273~pagePK:141132~piPK:141109~theSitePK:258744,00.html?gclid=CILljqavjosCFQLxgAodJIDYQA>). CIA fact book gives an estimate of \$1,300 for 2006.

⁴ <http://www.vz.ru/economy/2006/2/14/22505.html>

Table 1: Student distribution by educational level⁵

Level	Number of Institutions	Number of Students (thousand)	Number of Instructors
Preschool	424	63.0	3,760
Comprehensive (1-11)	2,117	1659.9	103,174
Elementary (1-4)	667	32.2	n/a
Basic (1-9)	841	179.3	n/a
Private	120	47.3	n/a
Vocational	72	25.0	3,120
Specialized professional ('tekhnikums')	50	29.2	2,660
Higher education	38	108.0	6,056
Total	4,329	1,878.5	

Although school age population is distributed equally among male and female, only 46.4 percent of students are female.

Teaching in general schools is conducted in six languages:

- Tajik – 73.6 percent of total number of students;
- Uzbek – 23.1 percent;
- Russian – 2.1 percent;
- Kyrgyz – 0.9 percent;
- Turkmen – 0.2 percent; and,
- English – 0.03 percent.

Ratio of women teachers in the country is - 48.6 percent which is low compared to other countries of Central Asia.

The policy environment

The situation in Tajikistan is the most severe in terms of poverty, the weakness of the state and ministerial authority, and regional fragmentation. Tajikistan was the poorest republic in the Soviet Union and was completely dependent on federal subsidies, and ranked lowest in educational development, especially in secondary and tertiary education and research. The situation became even worse during the civil war of 1992-1997, and has remained unstable in part because of the ongoing violence and the drug trade flowing out of Afghanistan. Both domestic and international attention on the depths of this systemic crisis seemed to be focused by the preparation for the UN's Education for All in 1999, and by a belated recognition of the importance of trying to sustain the tenuous national reconciliation and reconstruction processes begun after 1997.⁶

⁵ Tajikistan Development Gateway. Dushanbe (<http://www.tajik-gateway.org/index.phtml?lang=ru&id=3651>)

⁶ Ministry of Education of the Republic of Tajikistan. (2000). *The EFA 2000 Assessment: Country Report for Tajikistan*. Dushanbe: <http://www2.unesco.org/wef/countryreports/tajikistan>

All of the same problems prevail in Tajikistan as throughout the region, only more severely so, such as deteriorating infrastructure; dismal teacher salaries and frequent arrears; rampant corruption; frequent absences and non-attendance, especially for girls; and chronically inadequate and disorganized financing⁷. More specifically, by 2006, attendance rates have declined to below 5 percent for early childhood education; to about 84 percent overall for primary education, which has arguably been sustained largely by infusions of international assistance; and from 40 percent for upper secondary education (age 15-18) in 1990 to about 23 percent in 2005.⁸ There has also been a massive out-migration of young people and skilled professionals, and the system has had great difficulty in hiring or retaining young teachers with sufficient qualifications. This probably reflects the weakness and irrelevance of secondary training, and the lack of adequate regulatory mechanisms to screen unqualified providers.

The war of 1992-1997 led to a substantial cut in educational expenditures; subsequently, this cut has negatively impacted student attendance. Most of the teaching materials have been used since old Soviet times. Teachers' salaries are well below consumer basket minimum; that is why many teachers try to find different employment. Thanks to the World Bank grant, 20 schools have been repaired, 1,000 teachers received in-service training and 18 names of textbooks were published.⁹

International Support

In response to crisis in education, there has been a significant level of international support, including the usual programs from UNICEF, Open Society Institute (Soros Foundations), and USAID, the latter especially through its PEAKS (*participation, education and knowledge improvement for schools*) program. The Asian Development Bank has committed a loan (\$7.5 million for 2003-2008) and a related grant (\$2 million for 2004-2008, funded by Japan) for its Education Sector Reform Project focused on helping the Ministry of Education (MOE) to develop a national reform strategy, improve donor coordination, and support schools in five pilot rural districts (ADB, 2003). Additional elements of the ADB support scheme focus on the development of a new EMIS, the creation of new tools for assessment and monitoring, and a competition for school improvement grants. The World Bank has also maintained leadership role in Tajikistan through the provision of a grant (\$7 million) and a combined loan (\$13 million for 2003-2008) in support of its own Education Modernization Project. This project offers grants to local administrations and schools to bolster attendance and rehabilitate

⁷ Mark S. Johnson (2005). Trends in Secular Educational Development in Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Report submitted to Eurasia Policy Studies Program, National Bureau of Asian Research.

⁸ UNICEF. (2003). Social Monitor 2003. *Innocenti Social Monitor*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre; also <http://www.unicef-icdc.org>

⁹ <http://digitalmedia.worldbank.org/tenthings/eca/tajikistan/6-taji-lang.html>

infrastructure; the purchase of school equipment and educational materials; and capacity building within the MOE.

For all of these many problems, significant contributions have also been made to educational development in Tajikistan by the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) and the related Aga Khan Education Services (AKES), which have trained university faculty in economics and English, founded model schools in Khorog and supported the innovative AKHP (Aga Khan Humanities Program). The AKHP created teaching guides and classroom materials that sought to bridge Western and Islamic cultures in the arts and humanities, and to foster cross-cultural dialogue.¹⁰ The AKDN has sponsored the creation of an entirely new network of institutions, the University of Central Asia (UCA, with an initial endowment of \$15 million), with a main campus in Khorog, Tajikistan, and branch campuses in Naryn in eastern Kyrgyzstan, and in Tekeli in southeast Kazakhstan. UCA is focused specifically on the problems and poverty of the mountainous regions of the three nations, will be secular and co-educational, and will an undergraduate liberal arts college; a master's degree in mountain development; and an extensive program in adult and continuing education. This is an extraordinarily important and innovative effort, essentially an attempt to drive social and economic development in the most underdeveloped regions of these struggling states through innovative, world-class higher education, research and training. Uniquely, while drawing on international expertise, the university is being built through the training of young faculty from the region, rather than relying on expatriate instructors.

Finally, in 2005-2006, Tajikistan received an additional grant from the World Bank to expedite implementation of the Education for All goals in the amount of \$18.4 million. Of the first transfer of \$9.2 million, \$3.6 million was designated for rehabilitation of school infrastructure; 3.8 million – for textbooks, learning materials and equipment; \$870,000 – for education system capacity building; \$650,000 – for strengthening of the education system management and \$250,000 -- for the assistance to the Ministry of Education in implementation of the grant.

As vitally important and necessary as all of these international efforts are, it is hard to say whether Tajikistan will be able to politically survive the hard choices required, especially in the ADB and World Bank programs, such as the reductions of staff and the consolidation of institutions. Furthermore, will the gains in educational efficiency and quality, necessarily slow and incremental, offset the burden and economic distortions of constantly increasing external debt? In other words, does the new National Education Concept (NEC) of 2002 as developed by the MOE represent a true movement for comprehensive reform from within the Tajik state and society, or is it essentially an artificial process driven by the disproportionate influence of major donors relative to the poverty and incapacity of the Tajik authorities? If the latter is true, then its prospects for enduring success are minimal, and the systemic failure of education in Tajikistan becomes increasingly likely.

¹⁰ Keshavjee, R. (2004). Trials in the Humanities. In S. P. Heyneman and A. De Young (Eds.) *The Challenges of Education in Central Asia* (pp. 327-356). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Partially, some issues are being addressed, for example, the decree “On Implementing Educational Reform” signed by the President of Tajikistan calls for 25 percent increase in teacher salaries and simultaneous cut in the number of teachers by 5 percent.¹¹ The salary increase though is accompanied by increase in workload, so the teachers will not gain much. Cutting teaching force by five percent also seems like a poor solution to educational problems. According to the Tajik Ministry of Education, about 50 percent of 6,000 annually graduated teachers do not go to work as teachers; that is why schools, especially in the rural areas experience math, science and foreign language teacher shortage.

Administrative Reforms

Outdated approaches to governance and planning issues in education. At present the education sector faces three main problems with regard to planning and governance: (1) lack of experience in decision making due to the lack of reliable information on the situation in education sector; (2) lack of capability in policy-making, administration and management; and (3) inability to measure and evaluate students’ learning outcomes and overall effectiveness of education institutions. The existing shortcomings lead to ineffective governance of physical, human, financial and social resources in education. The 2003 PRS noted the old soviet command and control methods employed by the Government of Tajikistan and the lack of progress in this area. This state of affairs persisted throughout 2004. Rather than focus on policy-making consistent with national developmental priorities, ministries continued to micromanage their respective sectors. Their unreformed structures retained large networks of sub-agencies with poorly defined and often duplicative functions. Pilot institutional reforms supported by foreign partners generally failed to introduce sustainable changes.

Tajik government understands that the current pace of administrative reforms is out of step with the changing economic landscape and remains committed to undertaking radical reforms designed to modernize public administration in Tajikistan. These reforms will be introduced across the entire government system in a manner consistent a Common Public Administration Reform Strategy.

The SEDP2015 (Social Economic Development Program) is a multi-year investment program. It was designed to have strong linkages to the state budget and the PIP, but it does not account for macroeconomic planning considerations, particularly concerning foreign debt management. Budget development takes place separately from decision-making related to the PRS (Poverty Reduction Strategy) and PIP (Public Investment Program). It is not clear whether PIP’s primary linkage is with the PRSP or with SEDP2015.

Shortages of qualified staff, low salaries, and corruption remained key challenges to achieving sustainable improvements in the quality of public services, particularly in areas related to the poor. To address these challenges the GOT adopted a Register of Public Functions, a Code of Ethics for Public Servants, and a procedure for competition-based

¹¹ The “On Implementing Educational Reform in 2004-2009”. The Decree of the Government of Republic of Tajikistan No. 291. Dushanbe, 30 June 2004.

public appointments. The Register defines the scope of public service and serves as a career management tool for public officials. It will be introduced in the first half of 2005. The salaries of public servants continued falling short of the living wage while many GOT structures remained overstaffed. To address this issue and improve the overall effectiveness of budget allocations the GOT adopted a three-stage plan of staff reductions. The implementation of this plan began in 2004. The GOT is committed to take further steps to separate political and administrative functions in the public service and introduce changes in the structure of the public payroll.¹²

Poverty Reduction Strategy (in education)

Poor learning conditions. Report “Investment into Sustainable Development: Needs Assessment for Achieving MDG” developed by UNDP experts together with the working groups in 2005 showed that according to the IMF and WB surveys in Tajikistan, about 20 percent of schools were ruined during the civil war, more than 130 school buildings need rehabilitation and full sets of equipment. According to the WB Survey, there are no heating systems in 26 percent of schools, no tapped water in 24 percent of schools, and no toilets in 35 percent of schools. According to the joint survey of IFC, ACTED and NGO “Maniza”, there are no adequate sanitary facilities in 87 percent of schools in Soughd and Khatlon Oblasts. According to International NGO “ACTED”, 50 percent of schools in Khatlon Oblast had no access to water in 2002. According to the Ministry of Education, there is the need of 93,700 sets of school furniture. There is no inventory of schools requiring rehabilitation or new construction.

Insufficient funding: According to the government sources, the state expenditures on education in 2006 were 3.45 percent of GDP or 16.7 percent of the public budget. Estimates show that in order to meet the minimal requirements for maintenance and development of the education system the annual share of budget expenditures for education should reach the level of 6-7 percent of the GDP.

Tajik Government has initiated a number of reforms to improve the current state of things in education as a part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy. The Government’s main objective in this sector is to ensure access to basic education for everyone and to balance student ratios in secondary education. The Government also believes to be of high priority raising the quality of education, which has suffered since 1992.¹³

Reversing the decline in enrolment ratios in primary and secondary education, particularly by increasing attendance by children from poor families and by girls, and raising the quality of education are the Government’s top priorities in the education sector in support of the poverty reduction strategy.¹⁴

¹² Republic of Tajikistan: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Second Progress Report. IMF Country Report No. 06/1, p. 14-15.

¹³ The Government of the Republic Of Tajikistan. *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Dushanbe, June 2002. p.14

¹⁴ The Government of the Republic Of Tajikistan. *Poverty Reduction Strategy*. Dushanbe, June 2002. p. 21-22.

In 2004, the government of Tajikistan initiated a five-year plan of education reforms and adopted the Law on Education. These documents provided for an increase of academic pay by up to 25 percent and allowed the introduction of per capita financing schemes in a limited number of pilot secondary schools. Communities were encouraged to increase their role in education administration. Until recently, the role of parents in school management was limited to fundraising. The newly-established PTAs had expanded this role to include such areas as developing small-scale educational infrastructure projects and policing children's rights in schools. PTAs are generally successful but their coverage is limited to a number of pilot projects supported by the WB, ADB, OSI, UNICEF, and Care International in Dushanbe, Khujand, and a few *rayons*.

The overall condition of the educational infrastructure remained weak, but the needs of the schools were also poorly understood and quantified. The MOE estimated the total furniture needs of secondary schools to be of 153.7 thousand sets of school desks and chairs, 66.8 thousand chairs, 9.9 thousand teacher desks, 29.7 thousand cabinets, and 9.9 thousand class boards. However, these estimates were not based on any meaningful inventory of the existing equipment or commonly accepted benchmark of what should constitute a standard set of classroom furniture. As in previous years, the status of textbook provisions was problematic. Despite the donor sponsored acquisition of 1.5 million copies, many schools continued to be short of textbooks. The development of new textbooks was delayed. Minority Russian and Uzbek schools continued using either old Soviet-era textbooks or textbooks published in other countries. Many schools introduced payments for the use of textbooks.

Uneven progress was achieved in the area of in-service teacher training. The institutes in Dushanbe and Khorog, supported by the Soros Foundation and AKDN were in considerably better condition than the institutes in Khujand, Kulyab, and Kourgan-Tyube, which are relying entirely on public funding.¹⁵

Additional challenges to Tajik education system

- High rate of population growth compared to other Central Asian countries. The average annual population growth has been about 2 percent in the last ten years.¹⁶ In 2006 the median age of the population was 20.4 years with 47 percent of young people under 16 years old that is schools age (compared to 26 percent in Russian Federation and close to 30 percent in Kyrgyzstan). Over the last decade, the average family size has increased from 5.7 to 7.1 people. The average number of children in a family is 4.2. By 2015 the number of children who need school education will increase by approximately 850 thousand. The number of students in general secondary education system in the next 12 years (2003-2015) might increase by 40 percent, that is from 1.8 million to 2.3 million. Taking into consideration the

¹⁵ Republic of Tajikistan: Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Second Progress Report. IMF Country Report No. 06/1, p. 17-18.

¹⁶ <http://devdata.worldbank.org/genderstats/genderRpt.asp?rpt=basic&cty=TJK,Tajikistan&hm=home2>

forecasts, the school system in the nearest future might turn out to be under the huge demographic pressure, which will aggravate the existing problems related to limited resources and worsening of infrastructure of the education system and will require considerable financial investments.

- Disproportionately high rural population. One of the complicated tasks of the education sector is to provide education services to the rural population (more than 74 percent). There were 4,329 schools in Tajikistan in 2004. Rural schools form more than 85 percent out of the total number of schools; more than 77 percent of teachers work in those schools with 72 percent of students. The issues of qualified specialists, improvement of their skills and knowledge, provision of rural students with the textbooks are the most crucial along with strengthening of infrastructure and material and technical base, heating, light, provision of the appropriate sanitary and hygienic facilities (separate toilets) pure drinking water.
- Lack of school buildings and structures. According to the data for 2003-2004 academic year 75 percent of schools work in two shifts due to the lack of more than 600 thousand places for children. In some Dushanbe schools there are 35-55 students sitting in one class, three at one desk.
- Decrease in school attendance. In addition to the problem of overload there is a problem of decline of school attendance rate and the problem of education coverage. Thus, according to Tajikistan Living Standard Survey (TLSS) conducted in 2003 the level of schools attendance at the secondary school level was 88 percent.¹⁷ The Survey shows that gender gap in school attendance has increased and in 2003 the number of girls who dropped out of school two times outnumbered the number of boys in rural areas; and in urban areas this indicator increased by three times. Gender misbalance appears mainly in the upper school level of secondary school (9-11 grades) where girls' attendance rate decreased from 49 percent in 1991 to 36 percent in 2005.
- Lack of textbooks and modern teaching materials and teaching. According to the World Bank study, only 30 percent of school students obtain the full set of textbooks, and 10 percent of students have textbooks on several subjects. There is shortage of textbooks in Tajik, Russian, Uzbek and Turkmen languages. According to the Ministry of Education there is need of 86 new titles of textbooks at present, besides the urgent need of revision and reviewing of old textbooks, development of new teaching and learning materials and their publishing. In addition, the improvement of the overloaded curricula has not been achieved yet.

¹⁷ Falkingham, Jane and Klytchnikova, Irina (2006) *The Profile of Poverty in Tajikistan: an update 1999 to 2003*. Southampton, UK, Southampton Statistical Sciences Research Institute.

- Need in education content renovation. In 1991 – 2005 school curriculum underwent certain changes. According to the old curriculum education institutions needed up to 167 titles of textbooks. In 2004 schools were provided with 100 “new” titles of textbooks, as for the other textbooks, the students used old soviet textbooks or did not have textbooks at all. According to the new curriculum (2004), 17 subjects were integrated into four interdisciplinary courses. Overall, the curricula for the 1-11th grades were reduced by 122 hours per week. With the decrease of teaching hours in the curriculum and the number of teaching subjects as well as changes in the content the number of the textbooks will decrease to 153 titles; but this will require substantial review of those textbooks that have already been published. Curriculum as well as textbook publishing does not always go through appropriate scrutiny and approval. Until present not a single handbook, manual or guidebook for teachers or for students has been developed in addition to the textbooks published for secondary school. There is also a general problem of the content of textbooks. Just superficial study of the textbook content showed that they were not directed towards critical thinking, debate or any analytical work. Most of the textbooks are a compilation of the course related facts. It is necessary to introduce competitive methods of identifying and publishing textbooks in order to create motivation for content update, the way of presenting material and effective publishing. The authors of the textbooks also need to be trained in child development theories, critical thinking and modern teaching methodologies so that they can assume a more active child-centered approach.
- Teaching quality decline. The results of the nationwide Monitoring Learning Achievement Survey of 180 primary schools show that knowledge of the majority of school students does not meet the required standards and the level of literacy, even at state education standards.¹⁸
- Lack of qualified teaching and administrative staff. In 2003-2004 academic year, 101,500 teachers including school principals worked in general secondary schools. According to the official data of the Ministry of Education there is a shortage of more than nine thousand teachers. In rural areas some teachers have double or triple workload. Out of total number of teachers, only 61.9 percent have higher education, 4,8 percent of teachers have incomplete higher education, 22,3 percent have special secondary education and 11 percent have got only general secondary education. Low salary is the main reason for qualified pedagogical staff drop out of the education system. According to the State Statistic Agency of the Republic of Tajikistan the average monthly salary in the education sector for January- August 2005 was 76,4 somoni, which corresponds to USD 24,4.
- Pre-service and in-service training of specialists (Personnel professional training and skill maintenance). There are five Institutes for In-Service Training in the country where teachers improve their qualification every year. Analysis shows that during the last five years approximately 30 percent of specialists from general school have

¹⁸ <http://www.unesco.kz/?lang=&newsid=913&menu=&keyword=>

improved their qualifications. This is by all means not enough and it affects the quality of students' knowledge. On the 1st of November, 2004 the Government of Tajikistan approved (decree # 425) the State Program on Teachers' Pre-Service and In-Service training for the period of 2005-2010, the implementation of which is not up to the mark due to the limited financial resources. In view of the modernization of curriculum (2004, 2005) and decrease (reduction) in the number of learning hours it is necessary to at least publish the description of all proposed reforms in education in order to share those with educators. Tajikistan does not have its own methodological and teaching philosophy, as all pre- and in-service training programs came from the outside without any adaptation (excluding the Tajik Language and Literature courses). Thus it is necessary to develop the mechanisms of simultaneous improvement of the institutional and human potential; to create the basis for methodological and learning basics of the system of improving educators' qualifications with further introduction of variable decentralization approaches.

Child Labor

In spite of the fact that there is a public concern about the issue, there are no reliable data on child labor in Tajikistan. Everybody knows that the problem of child labor is a very acute one, and nobody tries to get sufficient information to give a clear picture of the extent of that problem. Children work at the open markets delivering produce in the pushcarts; in car washing business; sales and various services; however most frequently child labor is used in agriculture. Children work on cotton fields, collect fruit and vegetables, take care of cattle and fulfill other numerous types of jobs. Child labor is not just something that prevents children from normal education; it has become the reason for limited children's access to medical services; it contributed to frequent cases of child disability and widespread child abuse and juvenile delinquency.

Recent limited research conducted by the Dushanbe Institute of Labor and Social Protection showed that 86 percent of those involved in child labor constitute children from 12 to 17 years of age, and 84 percent of those working are boys.¹⁹

From the beginning of the academic year, according to the document from the Ministry of Education of Tajikistan, it is prohibited to recruit students for cotton-picking. In addition, Minister of Education sent a special letter to all the departments of national education and hukumats (local governments), which rigorously demanded not to recruit students for cotton-picking. At the Government meeting on the 12th of September, 2006 the president of the country ordered to strictly observe the Law, which banned the use of students' labor for cotton-picking. It is also banned by the Article 26 of the Law "On Education". The Law says that: "...recruitment of students for all kinds of agricultural works is prohibited".

In spite of Tajikistan's laws against child labor, 40 percent of cotton is picked by school-age children. About 70 percent of parents report that cotton harvesting has a bad effect on their children's health. Working in the fields also has detrimental effects on their

¹⁹ <http://www.tajik-gateway.org/index.phtml?id=4986&lang=ru>

education. According to Frédéric Chenais, IOM's chief in Tajikistan, children miss up to a third of their classes for miserable wages. Speaking at a press conference in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe he said that "for four or five months of work the kids are paid less than 20 US dollars."²⁰

In reality all the rules prohibiting children's cotton picking are violated everywhere in Tajikistan. The government does not seem to be interested in enforcing any of prohibitions, and the main reason is an economic one: Tajikistan will lose millions of dollars, if it stops practicing the Soviet methods of recruitment of cotton-pickers. Who else is going to pick the cotton if not the students? Students are considered as the main labor force in picking this strategically important agricultural product, although there is not to be a solution to that problem in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan either.

Teacher Shortage

Teachers in Tajik secondary schools will see their monthly salary rise by 15 per cent from April 1, according to the president's press service. But at the same time, all their existing allowances will be abolished, bar the bonus teachers can pick up for supervising classes and marking written work. Among the perks that will go are the allowances for books, periodicals and health care which are added onto teachers' monthly salaries.

The average monthly salary for teachers in Tajikistan is around 60 somoni, or less than 20 US dollars. The 15 per cent pay rise has been welcomed by trade unions, who note that this is the 12th salary increase teachers have received since independence in 1991.

"It is certainly not as big as we would like it to be, but we are glad that even in such difficult economic conditions, the country's leadership have raised the funds to increase teachers' pay," said a representative of the teachers' trade union.

According to the former principal of a school in Dushanbe, the allowances which have now been axed were open to abuse, as head teachers and other education officials would distribute them at their own discretion. But even if more money comes direct into their pay packets, teachers are not celebrating. "A 15 per cent raise is not enough to attract new teachers into schools. It will have virtually no effect on their purchasing power... Nor will it be an incentive for teachers who are already working," said the former head.

According to official figures, Tajikistan is short of around 6,000 teachers, in various subjects. The former principal also said inflation in Tajikistan is rising so fast that this salary increase will not keep pace with the escalating cost of living. NBCentralAsia economic expert Hojimuhammad Umarov agreed, saying inflation would wipe out the effect of the pay rise now that allowances have been cut. He believes that taking current prices into account, teachers should be paid no less than 400 somoni, or 110 dollars, a month. A teacher from one secondary school who wishes to remain anonymous told NBCentralAsia that a hefty 30 per cent rise was promised only a month ago. "Now we

²⁰ <http://tajikistan.neweurasia.net/?p=107>

have been told that this increase will be at the expense of allowances.... This is at the very least a dishonest way of dealing with teaching staff," he said.²¹

Corruption

According to Transparency International, Tajikistan occupies 142 place out of 163 on the most corrupted country list. A university student in Tajikistan describes how she bought herself a good grade in one of her weaker subjects.

Student: "To be honest I don't know that subject well. You have to bribe, so I worked for a while, put some money together and went to talk to the professor. He said 'OK, if you can't write your course work yourself, bring me some money and I'll do it for you.' I paid, he wrote it out for me and I took it, then I had it all prepared. I paid 120 somoni (about \$40) to the teacher. Altogether with other fees for materials, paper, it came to 160-170 somoni."

Reporter: "And what grade did you get?"

Student: "I got a '4' (a 'B')."²²

Corruption has penetrated all parts of Tajik education, starting from the 'gifts' parents give pre-school teachers to look better after their kids and ending into multi-thousand dollar bribes from senior university administrators to government officials to get extra benefits for their schools.

The major reasons for corruption in education are the following²³:

- the weakness of existing monitoring systems in checking the accuracy of the criteria used for the allocation of funds, as well as how these funds are distributed from one administrative level to the other;
- the lack of transparency in the allocation of bonuses to teachers – based on teacher qualification, their involvement in private tutoring – using private fees collected from students, grants received by the university; etc.;
- the collection of illegal fees at pre-university level and the absence of clear rules in the selection of students granted scholarships for university;
- the centralization of the process of administration and exam organization, which encourages corrupt practices; and
- distortions in the implementation of procurement mechanisms for producing school textbooks, which involved huge amounts of international aid.

Implementing Education for All Goals

1. *Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.* In the past fifteen years, the number of pre-school institutions in Tajikistan has changed from 944 to 424 and

²¹ NBCentralAsia: http://www.iwpr.net/?apc_state=henbbtj334414&l=ru&s=b&p=btj&o=334414

²² <http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2004/07/7a4c4452-4ce5-44ee-a0e8-cbc94cb81d8a.html>

²³ www.svietimas.lt/tyrimai/Corruption_Central%20Asia_engl.doc

number of students in these institutions has decreased from 142,000 to 60,000.²⁴ Those few functioning pre-school institutions lack necessary equipment, need capital repairs, and are short on qualified staff. In most cases, pre-school institutions are operating like a primitive baby-sitting facilities without any educational component embedded in their operation. There are no institutions designated for children with special needs.

2. Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality. Demographic expansion and financial difficulties continued to exert pressure on children's access to education. Secondary school attendance rates fell consistently across all five *oblasts* to a national average of 88 percent in 2004. Some disparities existed between urban and rural rates as well as between genders. On the average 6 percent of boys and 18 percent of girls in urban areas and 4 percent of boys and 7 percent of girls in rural areas failed to attend school beyond the 3rd grade. The situation was most serious in Dushanbe where 21 percent of girls and 4 percent of boys failed to attend school beyond the 3rd grade. Despite this, literacy rates remained relatively high at 95 percent, although by comparison with 1991 they had fallen by 4 percent. Poverty was the most frequently-cited barrier to continuing education. The families of 65 percent of children, who failed to attend school regularly, were experiencing financial difficulties.

3. Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programs. This goal is far from being reached at this stage of educational development in Tajikistan for a few reasons. First, poverty which makes more than 42 percent of the population struggle for survival rather than acquiring new skills. I witnessed hundreds of children in Dushanbe selling cigarettes, chewing gum and trinkets during the school hours, and when I asked their parents why those children were not attending school, the answer was because they had to bring money in the family or starve. Second, outdated school curriculum and lack of textbooks accompanied by the shortage of qualified teachers (only 58 percent have higher education) make school process a means to eliminate basic illiteracy rather than the way to acquire appropriate learning. Third, shortage of school facilities when schools are so overcrowded that children have to study in two and sometimes three shifts.

4. Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults. In 2004, the level of adult literacy in Tajikistan was estimated at very high 99 percent.²⁵ Thus increasing that number by 50 percent seems unnecessary. However, if poverty is not stopped, the access to education will become increasingly difficult for the poorest population and will lead to eventual drop in adult literacy.

5. Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and

²⁴ <http://www.tajik-gateway.org/index.phtml?lang=en&id=1187>

²⁵ http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/Tajikistan_statistics.html

equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality. As it was mentioned earlier, educational statistics in Tajikistan is not very reliable; thus it is not possible to define with certainty what percentage of school age girls attend school. Official statistics says that 90 percent of boys and 75 percent of girls complete mandatory nine grades. Tajikistan has ratified the Convention on Rights of the Child and The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women. At September 2006 Conference on gender Inequality in Education in Tajikistan, the decision was made to improve the worsening equity situation by implementing a few steps at different levels:²⁶

(a) At Government and Ministry of Education level:

- Introduce mandatory 11-year education;
- Provide equal access to different levels of education irrespective of the residency and level of income of the child.
- Identify children outside educational system, especially 6-15 year old girls and adopt special measures on preventing and limiting the cases of drop-out.
- Implement special measures on supporting the children living in the rural areas.
- In order to cut down the early marriage and improve the level of education of females child consider the changes in national legislation on early marriages.
- Coordinate state, social and religious institutions' activities on involving girls into educational process;
- Improve legal education at school by introducing it into curriculum.
- Improve health education and family planning education.
- Implement school psychologists' institute. Introduce psychological services in the educational system and educational institutions for the children having problems with education, behavior and social adaptation.
- Create a data base and publish annual reports on situation of children in Tajikistan based on government and departmental statistic monitoring and research work of NGOs.
- Monitor educational institutions in order to prevent cases of child abuse.
- Provide medical and psychological service to the children with special needs, especially for girls.

6. Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills. The notion of learning outcomes is very new and practically non-existent in Tajikistan. There is no valid system of measurable educational indicators, as Tajikistan is still practicing old Soviet system when teacher monitors student success by simply verifying whether certain facts have been memorized; and the state conducting exams at certain points in schooling. Schools are not accountable to parents or community in the results of teaching.

²⁶ Tajikistan Wunrn-Modar Conference "Gender Inequality In Education", Dushanbe, September 13-14, 2006.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education is critically important for Tajikistan's future because not only it affects all aspects of life but it is a significant contributor to country's sustainability. At this point in Tajikistan's history, there is need for orchestrated efforts of the government, international donors and community to change the situation. The government on its own will not be able to make any positive changes without the assistance of international institutions and visa versa.

The possible next steps to improve the current situation would include:

- Restructure educational system administration and governance to make those as applicable to Tajik as possible and not replicate old Soviet system.
- Teacher salaries must be increased to at least Central Asia's average, otherwise teaching profession will remain unattractive and education will experience teacher shortages.
- Combine economic and law enforcement means to decrease corruption in education. Learn from the experience of Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan and Russia to use standardized exams for university admissions.
- Organize teams of international and local experts to revise curricula instead of publishing more and more unrelated textbooks.
- Revise the current cotton-picking practices in order not to involve students in cotton picking at the expense of schooling.
- Introduce family and sex education at early stages in order to increase number of girls in high school and cut on early marriages.
- Build a centralized computer system for educational data collection and analysis (learn from the bad experience of ADB in Kyrgyzstan).
- Conduct a comprehensive needs assessment of school condition, textbook availability, teacher availability and training across the country.

Additional Sources

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