



PRIMARY EDUCATION PROJECT

Implemented by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco)

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Education has always enjoyed a significant place in Myanmar's Buddhist tradition, yet it remains a problem in many areas of the country. Only two out of three children enter primary school, and an average of 15% drop out each year: more than 40% fail to complete third grade. Plus, about one-fifth of all children fail to perform well enough for promotion to the next higher class, so must repeat the year; it takes an average of 10 years for each child to complete the full five years of primary education. Only one out of every four children completes primary school.

Many of the problems in education can be thought of as relating to access and quality. **Access** to schooling is a problem for poor families because of the cost of school fees, textbooks and uniforms, and because children (especially girls) are often needed for farm tasks and chores such as fetching water and fuelwood or looking after younger brothers and sisters. While on average nationally there is one school for every two villages, some villages in remoter areas still have no school nearby.

The **quality** of schooling also leaves much to be desired. The rapid expansion of primary schooling in the past has not been accompanied by sufficient investment in quality. Nearly 60% of Myanmar's 130,000 primary school teachers have not received training in teaching techniques. The bulk of the government's education budget goes on salaries (though teachers are still poorly paid), and little is left over for repairing school buildings or for such basics as textbooks and teaching supplies. Consequently, the communities are left to shoulder most of the costs of basic education (apart from teachers' salaries). Parent-teacher associations are key to this support: nationwide, such associations have built more than 35,000 village schools. Nevertheless, many school buildings have leaky, thatched roofs and mud floors, on which the children must sit because there are no desks or chairs.

The HDIE education project

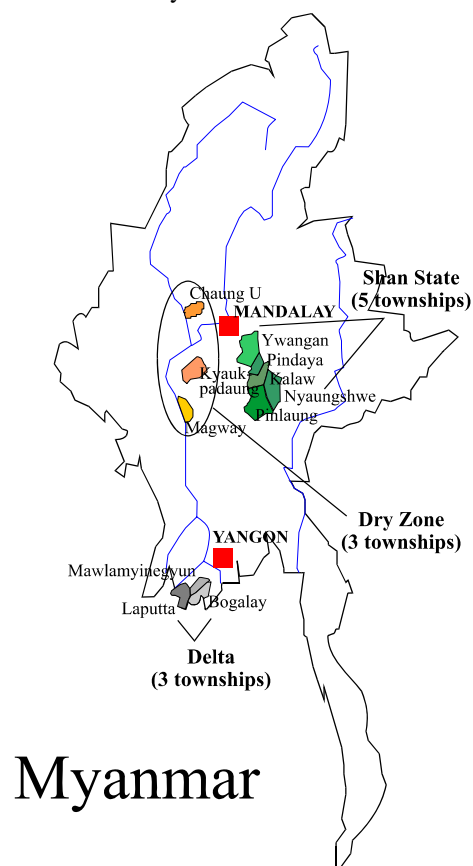
Improving Access of Children, Women and Men of Poorest Communities to Primary Education is one of 10 projects under the United Nations Development Programme's multisectoral Human Development Initiative Extension program in Myanmar. This project aims to widen the education and skill development opportunities for Myanmar's children, women and men in 11 of the country's poorest townships: three in the Delta (Ayeyarwady Division), five in Shan State, and three in the Dry Zone of central Myanmar.

The project includes four components:

- Increasing access to education.
- Improving quality.
- Promoting education for life.
- Strengthening community capacities.

Increasing access

In villages with no primary school nearby, the project helps local people construct new school buildings: it is planned to build 50–100 new schools during the project life. Where there are not enough children in a village to warrant a school of its own, the project can find transport to take children to and from the nearest school, or can build dormitories so they do not have to travel back and forth each day. It supports the poorest children by providing scholarships for the neediest. A textbook library programme lends books to children



during the year; they return the books to the library for use again in the following year. The project also supports the production and distribution of school textbooks.

Improving quality

The project improves the quality of education by repairing and renovating buildings: about 1000 schools will be assisted in this way. It also provides partitions and basic furniture, and supplies each school with a set of essential classroom materials. It trains teachers in teaching methods, introducing them to methods such as student-centred teaching that are more stimulating and effective than the traditional rote learning. Efforts to improve the curriculum include preparing teaching modules on various life skills, including health (malaria, malnutrition, vitamin and iodine deficiencies and HIV/AIDS). The project trains teachers in how to integrate these modules into their lessons.

In collaboration with other HDIE projects, the Education project introduces activities such as planting fruit trees, maintaining a school garden, keeping a fishpond, and building latrines for the teachers' and students' use. In some of the poorest villages, the project supports a school-lunch programme, using produce from such projects as school vegetable gardens, fishponds and other activities to generate money for the school. These programmes will be taken over by the community as the project withdraws from these villages.

Promoting education for life

Education does not end with formal schooling. The project supports the use of schools as centres for after-hours adult learning. It also establishes "community learning centres" in each township, a place for youths and adults to meet and study. In collaboration with other HDIE projects, the Education project offers short training courses for youths and adults in income-generating skills, and provides them with information materials to reinforce these courses.

Schoolchildren are an important conduit for information on such subjects and health and sanitation to their family members. Parents' and siblings' support for school activities also provides them with useful knowledge—such as in vegetable growing or fish raising. Poster exhibits, essay competitions and home projects educate and motivate not only the children, but also other people in the household.



Strengthening communities

Parent-teacher associations are key to the functioning of the primary-school system. The project strengthens these associations so they are better able to manage local education issues. It encourages the poor and disadvantaged to participate in the associations, making them more representative of the whole community, helps associations improve their internal rules and procedures, and trains leaders how to manage the organization. The project helps the associations develop businesses (such as hiring out draught animals for ploughing) that can generate money for the school. It also works with groups of head teachers and community leaders to compare methods and improve school management.