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Mongolian Higher Education in Transition: Planning and Responding under Conditions of Rapid Change¹

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Abstract

This article provides an overview on higher education reform in Mongolia since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Drawing upon the main elements of the most recent World Bank higher education policy statement the authors present their analysis along the four dimensions of institutional and financial diversification, the redefinition of the role of government and the intended improvement of quality, access and equity. By contrasting the World Bank's policy recommendations with reform initiatives and results of the Mongolian government the article identifies the Mongolian experience as a successful case of adapting and modifying donor orientations according to the recipients' particular circumstances.

1 Introduction

This paper examines higher education reform in Mongolia, a nation undergoing the transition from a command to market economy, along four major dimensions advocated by the World Bank (1994): a) differentiating institutional missions, including developing non-university and private postsecondary institutions as well as consolidating and rationalizing national higher education systems; b) diversifying funding by shifting costs from the government to other sources (e.g., student fees, auxiliary enterprises, private contributions, etc.); c) redefining the role of government by developing a coherent policy framework and increasing both institutional autonomy and accountability; and d) improving quality, access and equity while also making institutions more responsive to the demands of the labor market.

The next section of the paper frames the social and economic context in which the ongoing reform of higher education in Mongolia is occurring and describes the general dimensions of the transition from a command economy and single party political system to a market economy built upon a democratic political system that have a particularly strong influence on the higher education system. The historical development and current status of the Mongolian higher education system are also discussed briefly.

Drawing upon the main elements of the World Bank's (1994) position paper on its priorities for higher education reform in developing countries, the current status of higher education reform in Mongolia is reviewed and important issues are identified. The paper concludes with a discussion of strategies that might address unresolved issues. Implications are drawn for reform of higher education in both developed and developing countries, with specific reference to the relevance for Mongolia of the policies advocated by both the World Bank and its critics (Buchert & King 1995).

2 The Economic and Political Context of Mongolia

The People's Government of Mongolia was declared in 1921 under a single-party government that held power until 1990. The Mongolian People's Republic was established in 1924 as the world's second communist country. Mongolia maintained close political and economic ties with the USSR, but was never one of its constituent republics. At the peak of this relationship, almost a third of Mongolia's GDP was provided by the Soviet Union. This included significant support (e.g., books, equipment, training of academics and researchers) for Mongolian higher education. Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the external financial support evaporated and a new, democratic political structure was established to guide the country's transition to a democratic government and a market rather than a command economy (Weidman, Bat-Erdene, Gerel & Badarch 1997).

Mongolia is a landlocked country of 2.4 million inhabitants living in an area of 1.6 million square kilometres. The country is sandwiched between Russia and China, each of which also has a Mongolian population (0.5 and 3.5 million, respectively). In 1989, more than 40% of the population was under the age of 14 (Mongolia human resource development and education reform project: sector review 1993: 1–12, Tables 1–4). About 25% of the population resides in the capital city, Ulaanbaatar, 25% resides in other urban areas, and a large segment of the remainder is nomadic.

Its estimated 1992 per capita gross national product (GNP) of 299 US\$ places Mongolia among the poorest countries in the world (Bray, Davaa, Spaulding & Weidman 1994). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 1992 was distributed as follows: 34.5% agriculture, 41.7% industry, and 23.8% services (Mongolia human resource development and education reform project: sector review 1993 Tables 1–5). Real GDP growth was about 2% in 1994, the first year since 1989 that there had been positive economic growth. In 1994, over 20% of the population was living below the official poverty level (Asian Development Bank 1995: 87).

The period since 1990 has been one of rapid political, economic, and social change. Politically, the country has moved from a single-party, Communist government modelled on the Soviet model, to a multiparty democracy. Economically, it is moving through a transition from a centrally planned, command economy, to a market economy. Socially, Mongolia is shifting from a collectivist to an individualist pattern of responsibility for the well-being of its citizens. These changes can be summarized as follows (Bat-Erdene, Davaa & Yeager 1999; Bat-Erdene, Costa & Yeager 1996):

Political Transitions

From:	To:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– strong ideological monitoring– single party rule– ultimate authority held by party– symbolic parliament– isolation– centralization– limitation of human rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– tolerance of pluralism– multiparty democracy– constitution-based authority– working parliament– open door policy– decentralization– freedom of human rights

Economic Transitions

From:	To:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– centrally-planned (command) economy– government controls on prices of goods and services– turnover taxes and profit taxes on state enterprises and co-operatives– state ownership of all property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– market-oriented economy– liberalization of pricing– taxation reform (personal income and private enterprises)– private ownership of property

Social Transitions

From:	To:
<ul style="list-style-type: none">– “classless” society, social equity, collective well-being– socialist/communist ideal– communist model of collective responsibility– government-provided health care and social “safety net”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">– class based on personal achievement, capitalism, individual well-being– personal value system/worldview– personal responsibility– individually paid health insurance program, limited government involvement

It has been argued that these types of transitions are fuelled by global pressures on developing countries toward “democratization”, that are brought to bear by bi-lateral development agencies, NGO’s, and multi-lateral development banks. Further, it is asserted that these political processes are inevitably linked to economic development that is characterized as “... self-sustaining growth, based on open, market-oriented economic structures” (Schmitz 1995: 60). This process has been criticized as being largely at the expense of the poor because “... what is more powerfully at stake is the effective extension of elite market interests through a global ‘democratic’ sphere of influence” (Schmitz 1995: 60).

One significant consequence of the pressure by donors on developing countries to change their economic situation has been the imposition of so-called “structural adjustment” policies as a condition of obtaining grants and loans. According to Carnoy (1995: 653), “structural adjustment is normally associated with the correction of imbalances in foreign accounts and domestic consumption (including government deficits) and the deregulation and privatization of the economy.” This tends to be “... identified with public sector austerity and as a consequence, in many countries, with growing poverty and an increasingly unequal distribution of income ...” (Carnoy 1995: 653). Mongolia is no ex-

ception as it continues to undergo a rapid shift in the distribution of income: the ratio of the income share of the highest 20% of the Mongolian population to the lowest 20% has risen from 1.6 in 1992 to 5.6 in 1995 (Human development report Mongolia 1997: 64).

The education sector is also influenced by structural adjustment policies. This tends to include an increasing emphasis on “cost recovery” as well as shifting the burden of payment from the sole responsibility of government to shared responsibility of students and their families. In Mongolia, among the most important responses to multilateral donor pressure are what Carnoy (1995: 661–663) terms “finance driven reforms:” shifting public funding from higher to lower levels of education, privatization of higher education, and reduction of cost per student at all school levels. The following chart (Weidman et al. 1997 adapted from Bat-Erdene et al. 1999 and 1996) summarizes the educational transitions which characterize nations like Mongolia that are moving not only from a command to a market economy but also from communist to democratic governments:

Educational Transitions

From:	To:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – rigid, standardized curriculum determined by government – strong ideological influence – fully funded by the state – centralized administration – based on societal and manpower needs – compulsory involvement in education – teacher-centred instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – diversified curriculum determined by local community needs – oriented toward common values of humanity and science – participatory financing, with cost recovery from students/parents – decentralization – based on personal demand – right to choose, voluntary involvement – student-centred instruction

These types of transitions represent major policy shifts for governments like those of Mongolia because they require a significant reduction in the control of government over education that includes decentralization and increasing the autonomy of institutions across the entire spectrum of education.

3 The Higher Education System of Mongolia

The first nationally funded institution for formal higher learning, the Mongolian State University, was established in 1942 in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar. Modelled after universities in Russia, it had three departments: pedagogy (for preparation of secondary school teachers), medicine, and veterinary medicine. The primary emphasis of this new institution was teaching in the departments represented. Most of the limited advanced research was done under the auspices of the National Committee of Science which was not directly affiliated with the university. Over the years, the Mongolian State University developed several faculties: physics and mathematics (including meteorology); natural science (chemistry, biology, and geology); social science (philosophy, history, and sociology); economics; law; and languages and literature (Mongolian, Russian, and English). In order to meet the country's increasing needs for secondary school teaching personnel, the State Pedagogical Institute was founded in 1951.

By the mid-1950's, there was a joint recognition by the governmentally supported agency for overseeing scientific research, the National Committee of Science, and researchers in the university of the need to establish research programs in several of the academic areas represented among the faculty teaching at the Mongolian State University. Thus, the first major reform of Mongolian higher education involved moving faculty at the Mongolian State University into partially autonomous research institutes where both teaching and research would take place but which would emphasise research. In 1958, the zoological-veterinary medicine faculty at the Mongolian State University was the first unit to be so transformed and renamed the Agricultural Institute.

This pattern of separating units from the Mongolian State University continued with the formation of an autonomous Medical Institute in 1961. The polytechnic faculty, originally established at the Mongolian State University in 1969, became the Polytechnic Institute in 1982. Various government ministries also established "technikums", specialized vocational secondary schools that were ultimately authorized to award a postsecondary credential, for training their future employees.

Even though the National Committee of Science was amalgamated into the Mongolian State University in 1959, this structure lasted only until 1961 when the Mongolian Academy of Sciences was founded, thereby perpetuating the pattern of concentrating advanced research in the Institutes of the Academy of Sciences rather than in the university. The Supreme Council for Academic Degrees and Titles, in conjunction with the Academy of Sciences, also controlled awarding of the highest scientific research titles, the Candidat of Science (roughly equivalent to a Ph.D. degree) and the Doctor of Science (roughly equivalent to a post-doctoral degree).

The present wave of reform of higher education in Mongolia was stimulated by the rapidly changing situation following the break-up of the Soviet Union. The first democratically elected Parliament took office in 1990 and passed legislation to reform higher education. As a result, in 1991 the three institutes that have been founded as units of the Mongolian State University (Pedagogy, Medicine, and Agriculture) were designated as universities and the State University was renamed the National University of Mongolia. A new public higher education institution was also created in 1991 by combining sixteen institutes from the Academy of Sciences in Ulaanbaatar into the Mongolian Institute of Technology. In addition to the National University which had been the only university authorized to award advanced scientific degrees, all of the newly designated universities and the Institute of Technology were authorized to begin developing postgraduate degree programs. Several of the ministry-run "technikums" became independent colleges

and the new government authorized the establishment of private higher education institutions.

Until 1992, the Supreme Council for Academic Degrees and Titles was under the Council of Ministers (the main governmental policy body) and controlled by the Ideological Secretary of the Central Committee of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party. Since 1992, the chairperson of the Supreme Council has been the Minister of Science and Education. Because scientific degrees are awarded by a non-university body and not necessarily tied to university-based program of study and research, it is also still possible for individuals to earn advanced degrees by presenting a completed research project/research report for consideration (Weidman et al. 1997).

Mongolia has historically had a very high literacy rate, largely because the communist government provided all schooling free of charge, including boarding schools for children of nomadic parents. The basic education system providing the foundation for admission to higher education has been ten years (4 years primary, 4 years intermediate, 2 years secondary or specialized vocational). About 10% of an age cohort attends higher education. Under the communist government, enrolment quotas for the various specializations in higher education were set by the government and allocated to the various provinces (aimags) on the basis of projected manpower needs. Each higher education institution conducted its own admissions examinations in Ulaanbaatar following regulations approved by the Ministry of Education. Examinations conducted in the provinces were organized and administered by the Ministry. These examinations covered the subject areas in which prospective students intended to study, as well as the Russian language. Higher education was also entirely free. The language of instruction throughout the entire educational system is Mongolian, but advanced scientific courses tended to use Russian language books. Since 1991, there has been an increasing emphasis on English language instruction.

A student fee structure was introduced in 1993, accompanied initially by relaxing of government admissions quotas with the ultimate goal of eliminating the quotas entirely as part of a continuing effort to be more responsive to the demands of a market economy for professionally trained workers. Unlike most other countries, student fees in Mongolia are expected to cover the full cost of teachers' salaries, laboratory expenses, and other expenses which depended on the number of students (Bray et al. 1994). Initially, the government was providing funds for building maintenance and upkeep, but since 1997, only heat, water, and electricity costs are covered by the government. Despite these shifts, the 1997 annual tuition cost has remained at the same relative level as when the fee structure was first introduced, about four months' salary of a university senior lecturer or senior government employee. There is a government loan scheme which makes funds available to those students scoring highest on the admissions exams of public higher education institutions, with priority given to those enrolling in fields still covered by the government quota system.

Because all higher education institutions, both public and private, are now highly dependent upon enrolment revenue to cover their operating expenses, admissions have been based increasingly on student demand. Despite the high fees, there has been a rapid increase in enrolments, to more than 36,000 full-time students in 1996–97 (Table 1). The largest enrolment increase since 1993–94 has been in the private sector, which more than doubled in size, but the public sector also grew by 46%. In addition, full-time graduate student enrolment tripled over this period, in large part due to reduced opportunity for studying in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Unlike other countries in Asia, female students far outnumber males in Mongolian higher education, constituting 68% of the enrolment in public institutions and 71% of the enrolment in private institutions (Weidman et al. 1997). However, despite the large proportion of highly educated females in Mongolia, the proportion of women holding administrative and managerial jobs has remained at 19% since 1989, and currently only 10% of the seats in Parliament are held by women (Human development report Mongolia 1997: 65).

The serious economic crisis due to the country's shift from a command economy closely aligned with the Soviet Union to a market economy oriented toward the larger international community has had serious consequences for higher education in Mongolia. Not surprisingly, facilities and equipment present major problems across all levels of education in Mongolia. Buildings and other facilities are in poor repair due to lack of funds for maintenance. Heating costs have increased so rapidly that many educational institutions are forced to spend about a third of their budgets simply to keep buildings warm in winter. In higher education, scientific equipment tends to be outdated (much of it received from Russia a decade or more ago) and computers are in short supply. It is not unusual to have computer labs in which three or four students share a single computer.

Another significant effect of the loss of the patronage of the Soviet Union and the shift to having to acquire materials at international market prices was a substantial decrease in the number of books and periodicals that could be imported from abroad, including textbooks. The allocation for the National Library in Ulaanbaatar was reduced by 50% between 1989 and 1993. After adjusting for inflation and devaluation of the local currency based on international markets, the net library allocation in 1993 was less than 25% of what it had been in 1989. In the universities, most textbooks are in Russian and are not the most recent editions. A majority of the volumes in university libraries are textbooks (30% of the 240,000 library books at the National University; 2/3 of the 150,000 books in the Technical University library; and 60% of the 54,000 books in the library of the Foreign Language Institute of the Pedagogical University). Resources to translate books into the Mongolian language are limited, and only recently have a few of the leading higher education institutions been able to establish their own printing facilities.

Consequently, students in higher education must rely heavily on rote learning and careful note-taking as opposed to studying material in current textbooks or using library resources for independent study and research. There is a continuing expectation by most students that they will be supplied with all needed information and learning materials by the higher education institutions rather than having to purchase any textual materials themselves. Hence, virtually all student learning appears to take place in the classroom where material is delivered by teachers in lectures and seminar discussion. There appears to be only very limited supplementary work expected in the library. Even so, access to books tends to be strictly controlled, so there is little opportunity for students to explore materials in their fields of study.

Current scientific publications are very scarce, *except* in some of the institutes of the Academy of Sciences which, until the early 1990's, had its own special budget for such materials. Academy of Sciences research institutes tended also to have better laboratory facilities than the universities. There are also virtually no funds to support the acquisition of materials on electronic data bases. In short, access to current research findings through periodicals or electronic data bases continues to be limited. There are a number of on-going donor projects to improve curriculum, upgrade facilities, and provide access to electronic resources and the Internet. The largest of these projects are focused on system-

level improvement (e.g., the Education Sector Development Programme funded by the Asian Development Bank), but there are others which concentrate on particular disciplines or academic units (e.g., TACIS, Soros, etc.).

Given the limitations on facilities and equipment, the higher education system manages to be remarkably effective. Instruction is delivered, students have been reasonably successful at finding employment after graduation, and some faculty even manage to conduct programs of research. There does, of course, appear to be considerable variation in quality across programs within institutions as well as across institutions. In the absence of any real evidence on quality of the curriculum, it is very difficult to judge the level of preparation in Mongolia in comparison with bachelors degree study, either in other Asian countries or in Europe and the United States. A recent revision of the Education Law has mandated the establishment of a national accreditation agency for higher education that will conduct, for the first time, systematic reviews of all institutions of higher education in Mongolia. Funding has been provided by the Asian Development Bank for this activity and the new agency is expected to be operational by the end of 1998.

In order to put the Mongolian experience into a broader development context, the next section of the paper describes the World Bank's position on higher education reform. It provides a description of the current status of higher education reform in Mongolia for each of the recommendations provided by the World Bank.

4 Higher Education Reform: The World Bank Position

The World Bank periodically publishes policy statements that define its position with respect to one of the sectors in which it provides significant funding. For higher education, the current policy statement is contained in the publication *Higher education: the lessons of experience* (World Bank 1994), part of its "Development in Practice Series, which reviews progress that is being made and policies and practices that hold the most promise of success in reducing poverty in the developing world." This book takes into consideration a variety of primarily economic considerations, including the capacity of national governments to finance competing needs across all sectors of their economies.

The fundamental assumption underlying most of the policy recommendations is that developing countries have limited capacity to increase revenues and associated expenditures under current economic conditions. Hence, governments are pressured to adapt "structural adjustment policies" (SAP's) to re-allocate scarce resources across the entire spectrum of national needs and, where possible, to shift the burden of payment from an exclusively government responsibility to those individuals (e.g., graduates from higher education) or corporate entities who either stand to benefit the most or who can afford to pay. With respect to education, the World Bank has emphasised investment in primary education which it claims makes the greatest contribution to economic development, as opposed to continuing large subsidies to higher education whose graduates tend to be among most countries' more affluent citizens. In the following discussion, current higher education reforms in Mongolia are viewed through the lens of the policy recommendations that characterize the current World Bank (1994) position and guide its approach to funding.

4.1 Differentiating Public Institutions and Encouraging Development of the Private Sector

Governments are advised not to expand university-level enrolments unnecessarily because these institutions are the most expensive. Rather, they are encouraged to develop 1- to 3-year postsecondary programs that are flexible enough to respond to demands of the emerging labor markets for skilled technical workers and those prepared for mid-level positions in business. In a model similar to the American community college, programs that will enable students to move into university-level studies are also encouraged. A second strategy for expanding higher education without increasing government expenditures is to encourage the development of private institutions whose funding is dependent almost solely on student fees (World Bank 1994: 5–6).

Mongolia's higher education reform process reflects several of the World Bank recommendations. The Mongolian postsecondary education system was relatively well-differentiated before 1989 when the Soviet Union began crumbling, largely because under its communist regime, government ministries established and controlled postsecondary institutions for the training of specialists in their respective areas of responsibility. Some steps being taken to "consolidate and rationalize" higher education in Mongolia include (a) bringing the many specialized higher education institutions formerly controlled by various ministries under a unified policy umbrella of the Ministry of Science and Education, and (b) placing several regional specialized vocational secondary and postsecondary colleges ("technikums") located in the aimags under the administrative oversight of the existing university-level institutions. However, while the 1994 *Master Plan* recommended consolidating the specialized university-level institutions located in the capital city of Ulaanbaatar under a single administrative structure, as a comprehensive, multi-faculty institution, this is one of the few recommendations that was rejected by the government.

Since the authorization of the first private higher education institutions in 1991, the private sector in Mongolia has been growing at a rapid pace. Both the number of private higher education institutions (now more than 60) and the national share of higher education enrolments (now 29%) have been increasing dramatically (Table 1). There are, however, concerns that most of the private higher education institutions have very limited offerings, in many instances, only one or two specialized programs that are of questionable quality. The private higher education sector continues, however, to grow much more rapidly than the public sector.

4.2 Diversifying Funding of Public Institutions and Providing Performance Incentives

The primary World Bank recommendation is to require students to pay an increasing share of costs. In order to make certain that students from poor families are able to attend, loan programs are also advocated. The other most common World Bank recommendation is that institutions be encouraged to pursue income-generating activities. Governments are encouraged, however, to provide incentives in the forms of matching funds or, at the very least, to allow institutions to keep a large share of their revenue rather than requiring that it be returned or used to reduce subsequent allocations (World Bank 1994: 6–8).

Diversification of funding is proceeding in Mongolia. The burden of payment for higher education has already been shifted in the public sector institutions of higher education from the government to the students. Public higher education institutions are charging student fees and a government loan program is in place, though few students meet all of the restrictions that have been imposed. In fact, the government is now funding only electricity, heat, and water in public higher education institutions, just over 10% of their total budgets. Student fees must cover all other costs, including faculty salaries.

Some performance incentives are available to institutions in Mongolia that are making money through auxiliary enterprises, the most common of which is a herd of animals. A more open and flexible structure for management is developing, with higher education institutions expected to generate their own revenue sources through student fees, enterprises, training, research, and consulting services (Weidman 1995). In effect, the combination of financial diversification and shifting the burden of payment almost entirely to students represents a “de facto” privatization of the public higher education sector!

Mongolia is moving in the general directions recommended by both the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank, in large part because its transition is both economic and political. It could even be said that Mongolia is in the forefront among countries shifting the burden of payment for higher education from government to students. Amendments to the Education Law passed last year, have imposed a somewhat complicated scheme for determining eligibility of students for academic loans. A consequence of this for the National University, in particular (as well as other institutions, more generally), was that only a third of students admitted under Government quotas actually received loans in the 1997–98 academic year. This proportion has increased to just over 50% for 1998–99. Individual institutions are also seeking corporate sponsorship for high achieving and low income students. Independent of financial situation, opportunity for females to attend higher education is not a serious problem in Mongolia except at the advanced degree level.

4.3 Redefining the Role of Government

The primary thrust in this area is to find ways to reduce the level of government control over higher education institutions. It requires a “coherent policy framework” that covers the needs of a diversified higher education system without being overly regulatory. This includes allowing more autonomy in decision-making with respect to both programs and funding as well as in the appointment of academic and administrative staff, autonomy tempered by institutional accountability. It includes reducing the dominance of government-determined enrolment quotas in favor of labor market and student demand. Independent oversight agencies rather than government ministries are advocated to monitor higher education systems (World Bank 1994: 8–10).

The entire Mongolian educational system has been shifting from a government-driven, highly centralized policy and administrative structure that was fully government funded to one that is much more decentralized with increasing responsibility shifting to the provincial (aimag) level. In fact, enrolment in public higher education institutions located in aimag centres (virtually all of which are now considered to be branches of public universities in Ulaanbaatar) has increased by 67% since 1993–94 (Table 1), but the vast majority (88%) of public sector students still attend institutions located in Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolian higher education enrolments are increasingly driven by student demand because institutions are now highly dependent upon student tuition. The government continues to exercise some centralized control over the number of places in each field of study for students in higher education through the National Planning Board, but institutions are now able to admit large numbers of other students who are able to pay their own way. Plans and programs for training of students will be determined increasingly on the basis of diversified demand considerations of individuals (according to ability and interests), private enterprises, and co-operatives with government taking a shrinking role.

Business-oriented course/programs are being introduced for part-time students. This reflects both diversification of programs and a market orientation (i.e., taking advantage of student demand for particular courses and their willingness to pay handsomely for them).

Conditions are being created to enable more individualized academic programs in which students are expected to read and study independently rather than relying solely on didactic instruction and copious note-taking. There will be more comprehensive preparation of teachers with greater emphasis upon enhancing subject area competence and encouragement of independent work.

4.4 Focusing on Quality, Responsiveness, and Equity

Underlying each of the previous policy areas for the reform of higher education in developing countries is a focus on improving quality, responsiveness to labor market demands, and equity (both socio-economic and gender). Improvement in the training and qualifications of academic and administrative staff as well as in libraries, laboratories, and other teaching resources is required. Procedures for evaluating and monitoring quality are also necessary. Forging linkages with business and industry is suggested as a way of making institutions more responsive to their needs (World Bank 1994: 10–12).

Mongolian graduates now must seek jobs in the emerging, market-driven economy rather than being assigned to jobs by the government so it is necessary for curriculum to be modified to prepare students for employment under new economic conditions. This includes changing emphasis, reducing the number of narrow specialties, and introducing more flexible patterns of attendance. Curriculum reforms are underway to move from a lock-step pattern with six to eight hours of instruction each day of the week to one that is based on credit hours and in which there is much more flexibility of scheduling for both students and teachers.

Quality improvement is a major objective, driven by the desire for graduates to have an education that is up to international standards for bachelor's and advanced degree recipients. This includes (a) changing to non-government mechanisms for monitoring and licensing higher education institutions (e.g., establishing an accreditation system), (b) finding ways to improve the qualifications of teachers and the quality of libraries and laboratories, and (c) improving access to books and instructional materials so that rote learning from lectures is no longer so prevalent.

Limited government funds are available for advanced (primarily masters and doctoral) degree study outside of Mongolia and short-term training funds are also available under the Asian Development Bank Education Sector Development Programme for upgrading skills of current academic staff in selected areas. Gender equity is not a problem in Mongolian higher education with respect to undergraduate student enrollment, but both graduate students and academic staff tend to be primarily male. There is also concern that undergraduate students from poor families will be increasingly excluded from higher education because of the high cost and restrictions on availability of loans.

Mongolia is in the process of establishing a national accreditation agency for higher education to monitor and improve quality. While initially established by MOSTEC, the enabling Parliamentary law mandates that this agency should be non-governmental. In the Mongolian legal context, this is very difficult to implement but there is ongoing discussion of how to structure the national higher education accreditation agency so that it will have non-governmental status and can function independently of government (including charging fees that would make it self-financing).

Based on current patterns, it would seem that Mongolian higher education reform is moving very much in the directions advocated by the World Bank. Mongolia continues, however, to struggle in its implementation of the shift from a totally government-driven economic system to a more autonomous, market driven economy.

5 Higher Education Reform Efforts in Mongolia: Problems and Prospects

World Bank funding priorities emphasise planning and financial management as well as implementation of reform, which leads to preferences for funding projects concentrating on such things as: a) establishing or strengthening oversight bodies with a capacity to analyse policy, evaluate funding requests, monitor institutions' performance, and make information about institutions' performance available to students; b) introducing transparent mechanisms for the allocation of public higher education budgets; and c) assisting countries to set up or restructure their student loan and financial assistance systems (World Bank 1994: 13–14).

Strategic planning was encouraged by development banks and other donors as early as 1993 when the Asian Development Bank funded the human and fiscal resources necessary for conducting a comprehensive education and human resources sector review that carefully delineated the educational needs of the country. This study was used as the foundation for the development of a Master Plan which, with only a few exceptions, has guided subsequent policy development, including passage in the 1995 Education Law of a mandate for all institutions of higher education to develop their own strategic plans. This legislation also grants higher education institutions greater autonomy, including assuming greater responsibility for their own financial well-being and management as the Government share of funding continues to decrease.

During 1996–97, under a project sponsored by the United National Development Programme (UNDP), all government ministries undertook major restructuring in order to be able to respond more effectively to new legislative mandates and, presumably, function more effectively and efficiently. Using guidelines developed by UNDP consultants, each ministry developed business plans linked to implementation of new organizational structures.

At the same time, both the National University of Mongolia and the Mongolian Technical University undertook the initial strategic planning processes in order to articulate their future institutional development. These processes were supported by a grant from the Asian Development Bank intended to begin the development of necessary higher education policies and strengthening of the internal capacity of leading staff in both the Ministry and the higher education institutions. Although this is currently a work in progress, a number of results have been achieved. They include: the offering of a series of workshops ranging from strategic planning to information systems management; policy formulation concerning credit hour production; guidelines for the development and management of technical vocational education; and the drafting of a national higher education institutional accreditation policy. Subsequently, the Asian Development Bank developed a loan program that will provide funding to accelerate the implementation of these policies and continue to expand training opportunities. This includes funding for both establishing and training personnel for the national higher education accreditation agency. Through these continued efforts it is anticipated that strategic planning activities will become wide spread and a more coherent and effective Mongolian higher education system will develop and evolve.

Most of the higher education reforms to date have been accomplished primarily by governmental law and regulation rather than through a systematic planning and design process. Consequently, there are serious questions about the extent to which the rapid changes in Mongolia have actually resulted in desired system simplification and improvement as opposed to making it more complex and fragmented. In effect, decentralization appears to have been accompanied by increased competition among institutions and diminished inclination among colleges and universities, both public and private, to co-operate (let alone share resources) with each other.

Institutions are, however, becoming increasingly autonomous. They have gained the right to recruit faculty, to supplement government-regulated salaries, and to enter into agreements with foreign higher education institutions. The 1998 amendments to the Mongolian Education Law also authorize the establishment of institutional governing boards.

Because of the serious shortages of instructional materials, the deterioration of physical plant, and the need for re-training of academic staff, it is questionable whether Mongolia has the capacity to prepare students whose training is competitive with world standards. The scientific research establishment in Mongolia is suffering as well because it, too, is increasingly not competitive with world standards. Steps continue to be taken to bring the research enterprise, formerly housed primarily in independent institutes of the Mongolian Academy of Sciences, directly under the umbrella of the universities, thereby integrating more fully the teaching and research functions within universities. There are also new government regulations under consideration that would bring all academic degree granting authority under the universities. The Government has allocated funds to support preparation of research scientists abroad: over the past two years, more than 100 Mongolians have been sent out of the country to earn advanced degrees and/or qualifications.

If graduates of Mongolian higher education institutions are to be prepared adequately for the demands of a world economy and for the future development needs of the country, efforts will have to continue to: a) improve scientific communication through the use of computer networking and machine-readable data-bases, and b) develop more effective co-ordinating mechanisms (including institutional consolidation and co-operation) to improve efficiency and reduce duplication of programs among institutions. This will entail: c) effectively establishing the capacity for quality assessment and periodic accreditation of institutions, and d) integration of the research and teaching functions in higher education. Fortunately, both human and material resources to support reform and development of the Mongolian higher education system into the Twenty-first Century have been committed through the Education Sector Development Programme funded by the Asian Development Bank as well as through other agencies (e.g., the European Union, Soros Foundation, UNESCO, UNICEF, etc.).

Mongolia has, however, resisted implementing recommendations perceived not to be in the country's best interests. The government has even rejected offers for assistance in instances where the associated projects were perceived as adding too much to the national debt burden. Reducing government control and increasing institutional autonomy under transitional economic conditions continues to be problematic because of severe strains on current fund balances resulting in periodic failures by the government to make timely payments to ministries. There is also a growing political crisis in the country due to the instability of the Government. At the beginning of November 1998, the Parliament was trying to appoint its third set of cabinet ministers for the year!

Consequently, a fundamental caveat with respect to the acceptance of the World Bank recommendations is that there are no universally valid, culture free approaches to higher education reform (Buchert & King 1995). Any reform efforts must take into consideration the unique social, economic, cultural, and political conditions in the particular country of implementation. While the World Bank policy framework will certainly guide their approach to the funding of higher education reform, recipient countries will need to follow the lead of Mongolia and insist that they be able to adapt and modify donor orientations according to their particular circumstances. All countries will, however, have to establish the necessary political and economic stability to continue to attract the support of external donors for moving through often difficult and painful transitions.

Table 1: Enrolment Change in Mongolian Higher Education Institutions, 1994–1997

	Full-Time Undergraduate Students		Change (In %)	Full-Time Graduate Students		Change (In %)
	1993–94	1996–97		1993–94	1996–97	
Public University Campuses						
In Ulaanbaatar:						
National University of Mongolia (NUM)	3,158	4,777	51.3	116	534	360.3
Technical University (TU)	3,055	5,264	72.3	66	125	89.4
Agricultural University (AU)	1,157	2,052	77.4	89	93	4.5
Medical University (MU)	2,416	2,039	-15.6	75	109	45.3
State Pedagogical University (SPU)	1,805	2,604	44.3	37	172	364.9
Foreign Language Institute	742	702	-5.4	0	72	
Culture and Art University (CAU)	342	358	4.7	0	57	
Total: Public Universities in Ulaanbaatar	12,675	17,796	40.4	383	1162	203.4
All Other Public Higher Education Institutions (Including Univ. Branches):						
In Ulaanbaatar	2,974	4,627	55.6			
In Aimag Centers	1,886	3,148	66.9	0	39	
Total: Public Higher Education Institutions	17,535	25,571	45.8	383	1201	213.6
Total: Private Higher Education Institutions	3,875	10,456	169.8			
Total: Mongolian Higher Education System	21,410	36,027	68.3			
% of System Total in Private Institutions	18.1	29.0				

Source: Ministry of Science, Education, Technology, and Culture, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia.

Note

1. Revised version of a paper presented at the 1998 Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. A significant amount of the information for this chapter is drawn from Asian Development Bank documents as well ongoing project work in Mongolia. However, the opinions presented are those of the authors and do not represent official policy of the Asian Development Bank or the Government of Mongolia. A acknowledgement is accorded to Rolland Paulston and Jamil Salmi for their helpful comments on drafts of the manuscript.

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