Project Information Document (PID)

Concept Stage | Date Prepared/Updated: 03-Jan-2022 | Report No: PIDC32984

BASIC INFORMATION

A. Basic Project Data

Country	Project ID	Parent Project ID (if any)	Project Name
India	P177917		Multidisciplinary Education and Research Improvement in Technical Education (P177917)
Region	**Estimated Appraisal Date**	**Estimated Board Date**	**Practice Area (Lead)**
SOUTH ASIA	Apr 07, 2022	Aug 31, 2022	Education
Financing Instrument	**Borrower(s)**	**Implementing Agency**	
Investment Project Financing	Republic of India	Ministry of Education	

Proposed Development Objective(s)

To transform student learning and research in technical education in India with a focus on equity, resilience and governance in select states.

PROJECT FINANCING DATA (US$, Millions)

SUMMARY

Total Project Cost	560.00
Total Financing	280.00
of which IBRD/IDA	280.00
Financing Gap	280.00

DETAILS

World Bank Group Financing

International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD)	280.00

Environmental and Social Risk Classification	Concept Review Decision
Moderate	Track II-The review did authorize the preparation to continue

B. Introduction and Context

Country Context

1. **India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth was already slowing when the COVID-19 outbreak unfolded.** Real GDP growth moderated from an average of 7.4 percent during FY15/16-FY18/19 to an estimated 4.0 percent in FY19/20[1]. The growth deceleration was mostly due to (i) shocks to the financial sector, and (ii) decline in private consumption growth. Against this backdrop of pre-existing weaknesses, the outbreak of COVID-19 had a significant impact, with real GDP contracting by 7.3 percent in FY20/21. On the fiscal side, the general government deficit widened significantly in FY20/21, owing to higher spending and low revenues.[2] With the easing of Covid-19 restrictions, GST collections for July, August and September 2021 have crossed INR 1 trillion mark. The robust Goods and Services Tax (GST) revenues are expected to continue as the economic recovery gathers momentum. Given the significant uncertainty pertaining to epidemiological developments, real GDP growth for FY21/22 is likely to be in the range of 7.5 to 12.5 percent.[3]

2. **Although India has made remarkable progress in reducing absolute poverty in recent years, the COVID-19 outbreak has delayed the course of poverty reduction.**[4] Between 2011-12 and 2017, India's poverty rate is estimated to have declined from 22.5 percent[5] to values ranging from 8.1 to 11.3 percent.[6] However, recent projections of GDP per capita growth, taking into account the impact of the pandemic, suggest that poverty rates in 2020 have likely reverted to estimated levels in 2016.[7] Labor market indicators from high frequency surveys, including from the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), suggest that vulnerability has increased, particularly for urban households. Overall, the pandemic and its economic impacts are estimated to have raised urban poverty, creating a set of "new poor" that are relatively more likely to be engaged in the non-farm sector and to have received at least secondary education.

3. **Addressing these challenges for sustainable, inclusive and green growth will require focused human capital investments, particularly in technical tertiary education.** Post-crisis, growth is expected to be driven by innovation, including in engineering intensive sectors contributing to an increasingly green economy. Manufacturing, construction, retail and services are expected to accelerate growth over the next decade.[8] While India battles the impact of climate change, it needs to develop and implement green policies, create green jobs and advance green technologies, and tertiary education is at the heart of this forward-looking agenda. Technological innovation as well as adaption requires highly skilled individuals. Training graduates for a future innovation-driven labor market are human capital investments delivered via technical tertiary education. However, the low quality of skills among tertiary – including technical[9] - education graduates is a serious constraint to green growth. Addressing this, and the underlying constraints, will be central to India's growth agenda.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

4. **India has one of the largest and fastest growing tertiary education[10] systems in the world, and technical/engineering education has received much emphasis**, given its potential to drive growth and produce advanced

[1] National Accounts Data, National Statistical Office, Ministry of Statistics and Program Implementation (MOSPI).
[2] Union budget 2021, 2022, Ministry of Finance.
[3] World Bank Global Economic Prospects, July 2021.
[4] World Bank projections. The Government of India has deployed significant resources for social assistance, including towards urban poor households and migrants.
[5] Consumption Expenditure Survey 2011-12, National Sample Survey Office (NSSO), Government of India.
[6] World Bank estimates. Source: Poverty and Shared Prosperity Report, 2020.
[7] World Bank estimates. Source: Macro Poverty Outlook, 2020.
[8] McKinsey Global Institute (2020). India's Turning Point: https://www.mckinsey.com/~/media/McKinsey/Featured%20Insights/India/Indias%20turning%20point%20An%20economic%20agenda%20to%20spur%20growth%20and%20jobs/MGI-Indias-turning-point-Executive-summary-August-2020-vFinal.pdf
[9] Technical education in India includes programs in Engineering and Technology, Architecture, Management, Town Planning, Pharmacy and Applied Arts and Crafts. Engineering and

skills for innovation. The sector has grown rapidly; enrolling 29 million students in 2011/12 to 39 million students across 40,000 institutions in 2019-20,[11] and is expected to continue growing over the next decade. Although the sector is among the largest in the world, the current gross enrollment ratio (GER) of 27 percent lags several advanced and comparator countries and is behind the world average of 40 percent (USA and Russia > 85 percent; China and Brazil > 50 percent). Enrollment in engineering programs has also grown, going from 8 percent to 16 percent between 2008/09 and 2015/16.[12] Close to a million students graduate from engineering and technology programs annually. The enrollment rate in undergraduate (UG) engineering in India (12 percent) is comparable to some advanced countries like the USA (11 percent) but lower than that of China (34 percent). Enrollment at the postgraduate (PG) level however (4 percent) is significantly behind comparators (USA – 13 percent; China – 38 percent).

5. **Despite the emphasis placed on technical/engineering education, the system has faced continuous challenges of quality, equitable access, governance, and financing**; with the quality of inputs and outputs not keeping pace with the expansion of the sector. Since the much-cited NASSCOM[13] study in 2009 on low employability of engineering graduates, subsequent reports, published annually, have highlighted similar findings.[14] The latest India Skills Report (2021) further notes gaps in non-technical employability skills – numerical and logical reasoning, English language and inter-personal communication, adaptability, and conflict resolution – among graduates.

6. **There are five main reasons underlying these challenges.** First, insufficient and underqualified faculty has been a persistent problem in the sector, with vacancies ranging from 30 to 50 percent in state universities. This partly stems from low supply of doctoral degrees leading to underqualified candidates serving as faculty, which has serious implications for quality of delivery. Second, outdated teaching-learning practices and curricula, weak industry linkages and low preparedness of students prior to entering technical education leads to low graduate skills and employability. The experience from COVID-19 further points to a lack of experience with modern teaching and learning technologies and low motivation to adopt new instructional methods. Third, postgraduate programs are underdeveloped, research capability is low, and this, together with weak incentives, limits skills development and innovation. With poor research-qualified academic teachers, students tend not to get involved in research activities. Fourth, the issue of inequitable access to technical education, which has gender, social, economic, and regional dimensions, requires addressing low educational achievement and opportunity, and information asymmetries. Scheduled Caste (SC) and Scheduled Tribe (ST) students make up 11 and 3 percent of undergraduate engineering students, respectively, which is significantly lower than their population proportions. Girls constitute about 30 percent of undergraduate engineering students, compared to 50 percent in other disciplines. Finally, effective sector steering requires strong capacity at the state and institutional level, as well as suitable governance and quality assurance (QA) arrangements while these features are still under development.

7. **The National Education Policy[15] (NEP 2020) underscores these systemic constraints and offers a suitable framework for investments aiming to modernize tertiary education in India.** The NEP proposals, if implemented adequately and timely, can transform the sector over the next two to three decades to produce skilled graduates and to spearhead the production of research, development, and innovation towards competitive economic growth.

Technology programs make up the majority in terms of provision and enrollment and the concept note uses the term 'technical education' synonymously with engineering education. The MERITE project will focus on Engineering and Technology programs.

[10] The terms 'higher education' and 'tertiary education' are often used interchangeably. 'Tertiary education' refers to all formal postsecondary education, including advanced vocational education, professional education and short-cycle programs while 'higher education' is primarily used for tertiary education leading to an academic degree. In keeping with the NEP proposal of an integrated system for India that includes university, vocational and professional education, the term 'tertiary education' has been mainly used in this note.

[11] All India Survey of Higher Education (AISHE), 2019-20.

[12] Tilak, J. B. G. (2021). Paradoxes and contradictions in the growth of engineering education in India. https://csdindia.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Working-Papers-Paradoxes-and-Contradictions-in-the-Growth-of-Engineering-Education-in-India-Challenges-and-Prospects.pdf

13 National Association of Software and Service Companies (NASSCOM) is an Indian non-governmental trade association and advocacy group focused mainly on the technology industry of India.

[14] Goyal, S. (2021). Employability of Tertiary Education Graduates in India. Draft report prepared under the India Tertiary Education ASA.

[15] https://www.mhrd.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf

Implementation of the NEP reforms will require a plan that unpacks its various provisions, and the establishment of accountable, transparent mechanisms at the central and the state levels. Beginning this process in the technical education sector can bring to the fore lessons and examples required for further scale up of reforms across the tertiary system. Working with reform-minded states will help advance technically demanding reforms and share good practice across the country and institutions.

8. **Previous reform efforts in technical education provide lessons for future investments.** Government initiatives, supported by World Bank financing, have helped initiate a challenging reform agenda focusing on institutional excellence and thereby influencing quality improvements in technical/engineering education. Reforms introduced under the Technical Education Quality Improvement Project (TEQIP) series (3 phases from 2003 to 2021) offer several lessons for the design and implementation of a new phase of engagement -- i) the need for strong ownership for reforms at the Central as well as state level owing to the role of states in the regulation and financing of the tertiary education sectors; ii) focused support and technical assistance to states in challenging areas such as faculty reform; iii) the role of institutional autonomy in driving qualitative improvements and the need for institutional capacity building to effectively exercise autonomy; iv) the benefits of building and leveraging institutional networks and collaborations between institutions to initiate improvements; v) performance funding to incentivize change at the institutional level; and vi) the value of sustaining support over a long period with capacity building when the aim is to bring about changes in institutional culture.. The experience offers a roadmap for building institutional capacity and excellence and suggests an approach that leverages strong central and state ownership for systemic change.

9. **Global trends for engineering education also attest to the reforms highlighted in the NEP.** The global state of the art in engineering education[16] emphasizes preparing students for the challenges of the future (including climate and demographic change and the move towards more resilient and inclusive societies) as well as future scenarios of work that will involve working with complex approaches and systems that are highly networked. This calls for socially relevant and outward-facing engineering curricula, coupled with a breadth of student experience outside the classroom, outside traditional engineering disciplines and across the world. Current challenges and future trends are explored under different thematic tranches of the India Tertiary Education NEP Dialogue ASA (e.g., digitalization, governance reforms, etc.) and the results of this work will feed into MERITE preparation with the aim of informing the roadmap towards NEP implementation.

Relationship to CPF

10. **The proposed MERITE Project is fully aligned with the CPF FY18-22 which identifies maintaining the World Bank's longstanding focus on improving India's human capital as a critical long-term investment required to eliminate extreme poverty and to foster India's middle class.** The CPF focuses on issues of public service quality and efficiency as well as promoting innovative practices in states.[17] Further, it highlights the need for reforms of the college sector, in terms of equitable access, quality enhancement and improvements in governance and QA.[18] The NEP will provide a strong

16 Graham (2018). The global state of the art in engineering education. Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
[17] India CPF FY18-22, p. 18.
[18] India CPF FY18-22, p. 18-19.

framework for advancing the tertiary education reform agenda across India with states and institutions comparing, showcasing, and developing related practice through MERITE.

C. Proposed Development Objective(s)

11. To transform student learning and research in technical education in India with a focus on equity, resilience and governance in select states.

Key Results (From PCN)

12. The results areas and specific indicators will be determined during preparation in discussion with the Ministry of Education (MoE) and states, and will consider states' reform plans (see Project Description below). Results indicators could include: i) improvement in quality of undergraduate and postgraduate programs (NBA accreditation); ii) improvement in research output; iii) increased share of women, and disadvantaged students in undergraduate and postgraduate engineering programs; iv) fully operational internal quality assurance units of technical institutions; v) roadmaps toward multidisciplinarity and phasing out affiliation.

D. Concept Description

13. **MERITE sets out to initiate a long-term agenda of systemic change in the technical education sector that envisions transforming the paradigm of tertiary education delivery in India. In accordance with global trends and the NEP, the vision is to develop a tertiary education system which effectively prepares students to become active citizens and specialists who address the key challenges of the future and develop the foundations of resilient, green and inclusive societies.** This vision requires short to medium-term actions focused on the structural, regulatory and technical changes required for creating a tertiary education ecosystem that enables institutional excellence. The project approach, therefore, will focus on (i) content and process items (i.e., *what* is delivered and *how* it is delivered), that if done well, will leapfrog modernization of the sector; and (ii) the building blocks required to address longer-term agenda items of sector diversification, fragmentation and regulation. The former will include shifting from outdated and rigid programs to increased flexibility with multidisciplinary course and program options, building digital capabilities across the system, enabling more and cutting-edge research and innovation, and strengthening accountability. The latter will include unpacking and laying out a roadmap for structural reforms through feasibility studies, convening discussions with the main stakeholders (tertiary education regulators, central and state governments) and lessons from large-scale reforms in other countries. This approach for the MERITE project will require:

(a) **Engaging at Central level for regulations, procedures and guidance required for new reform areas** (multidisciplinary education, flexible pathways, digitalization, governance, and quality assurance) – the operationalization of these policies is required for implementing reforms in centrally-managed institutions, as well as for states to take this forward. Operationalization at the Central level will be supported through technical assistance to the MoE and higher/technical education regulatory bodies.

(b) **Engaging with a few select states to support their technical education sector reform plans. These states will be selected based on eligibility criteria** that will prioritize states that demonstrate high ownership of and commitment to reforms. The project will provide selected states with technical assistance to refine and operationalize their reform agenda, support pilots and implementation of reforms in the sector and build state capacity for regulation and governance. Progress will be measured through frequent monitoring and evaluation vis-à-vis agreed indicators.

(c) **Engaging at the institutional level** to support implementation of academic and non-academic reforms and build institutional capacity for sustainability of reforms.

14. **Reforms supported under the project will include a core set in areas that require urgent intervention for sector modernization** (see Component description below) **and additional areas of support based on selected states' own reform agendas** and state capacity.[19] Dialogue with states during preparation will discuss a menu of reform options based on these principles, considering path dependencies across reform areas. The state's capacity will determine the scope and complexity of reforms under each core area. The project will support states in the development of key NEP-related policies and regulations, based on agreed milestones and outcomes, i.e., engagement on the state-level will primarily happen through TA and knowledge sharing while further-reaching support e.g., for program development, research infrastructure and capacity building will go to institutions. Engagement with states will be differentiated, though, based on their capacity with the project focusing on advanced reforms (like piloting multidisciplinarity and advance digitalization) in "lighthouse states" whereas in catching-up states, the emphasis will be on system-level capacity building.

15. **Considering the timeline for NEP implementation (up to 20 years), MERITE could be conceived as part of a Multiphase Programmatic Approach (MPA).** This would allow the Project to be structured in a comprehensive engagement with a series of shorter and inter-linked operations. MERITE preparation will feature further discussions on this potential approach as well as the appropriate lending instrument.

16. **An alternate approach for MERITE could consider a national approach across all/more states.** However, this may raise issues of effectiveness and efficiency of project investments given the importance of state ownership and capacity to the reform process. Furthermore, several policy proposals require detailed articulation and a testing ground for implementation before they can be scaled up. Working with a few select states helps to develop the know-how required for more efficient scaleup of reforms across the country.

17. **Core areas for reform in all states are structured around 3 components.** All components will feature system-level reforms as well as institutional activities and innovations and be composed of a results-based component and a technical assistance component.

Component 1: Strengthen equitable access and improving teaching, learning and multidisciplinary education;
Component 2: Improving research for better skills and innovation;
Component 3: Sector steering, including governance and (HEI-)internal and external quality assurance.

- **Component 1 - Strengthen equitable access and improving teaching, learning and multidisciplinary education**

18. **An important aim of this component will be the development of new and modernization of existing engineering programs**. Partnerships with employers, the measurement of employability skills and embedding skills development (including on socio-emotional skills) in the curriculum will play an important role along with systems that map industry requirements and student skills and talent. Together with measures focusing on women, SC and ST students, this will help expand access and increase equity. Supported programs will focus squarely on the quality and employability of graduates and will be promoted vis-à-vis potential female and SC/ST students, including via outreach in pre-tertiary education that can help address information gaps. Further, institutions will be encouraged to develop bridging programs[20] to ease the transition from secondary to tertiary (technical) education and develop a multitude of mechanisms to support students throughout their studies, e.g., via guidance and counselling, behavioral intervention pilots and dedicated internship and apprenticeship programs in partnership with industry. The project will also work with the center and states to strengthen existing mechanisms for affirmative action to minimize exclusion errors.

19. **MERITE will put a strong emphasis on digital skills and digitalization more broadly** at the program and institutional level. Areas of support will include equipping institutions with digital infrastructure and connectivity

[19] The Theory of Change of the project will be elaborated following the preparation mission in early 2022 and before the QER.
[20] For an international example, see: https://www.olin.edu/news-events/2021/student-led-orientation-program-debuts-class-2025/?utm_source=HomepageSlide&utm_medium=Digital&utm_campaign=Olin_News2021

(including via NRENs);[21] development of digital capabilities among teachers and students (following an assessment of digital skills) as well as pedagogical capabilities for content creation and integration of digital content and tools in a modern teaching and learning environment; the use of hybrid modalities, adaptive learning systems, leveraging digital tools for assessments and; development and adoption of digital transformation strategy for institutes/states.

20. **NEP 2020 encourages multidisciplinary education with the aim of developing "well-rounded individuals that possess critical 21st century capacities"[22] across fields.** Accordingly, MERITE could i) cover technical assistance for the development of suitable concepts for multidisciplinary programs and possibly also institutions; ii) support multidisciplinary pilot programs; and iii) help develop related tools (modularization; credit transfer and recognition and balancing mandatory learning-units with those that students can choose within a certain framework – i.e., with a more flexible approach to teaching and learning).

21. **This component will also provide technical assistance at the Central level to develop overall guidance on implementation of multidisciplinary education and digitalization.** At the state level, the project will support (i) operationalization of the policy guidance; (ii) carrying out pilot studies prior to scaling up reforms; (iii) digitalization, coordination with employers; and (iv) a framework for working with the pre-tertiary sector on transition from secondary to tertiary education – especially with a view to equity considerations. Institutions will implement these policies and approaches by developing new or modernizing existing programs; advancing digitalization including the delivery of digital skills, work with employers through boards and curriculum advisory panels, implement bridging programs and, in some cases, pilot multidisciplinary education.

- **Component 2: Improving research for better skills and innovation**

22. **Given that research is an area in urgent need of improvement in Indian tertiary – including technical education**, this component will support better research outcomes via competitive funding for research, training students for innovation and entrepreneurship and support for the reform of academic careers with a greater emphasis on the combination of teaching and research. This will require support for suitable research infrastructure and mechanisms to support incubation at the institutional level, as well as alignment with and support to the new National Research Foundation (NRF). It will build on the activities already started under the TEQIP series, leveraging established Centers of Excellence, to support research and technologies required to address climate change, reduce GHG emissions and promote adaptation. These investments will strengthen the capacity of the central and state governments to mainstream climate change activities within key economic sectors through skills and technology development. This component will also focus on addressing barriers faced by women faculty in pursuing research and leadership opportunities.

23. **A central aspect of well-performing academic career systems is the development of a strong pipeline via PG and particularly Ph.D. students**. To address the massive problems with this pipeline in India which are related to quality (of PG programs and research) and quantity (insufficient number of Masters' and Ph.D. students in technical fields) MERITE can help modernize PG education by working with center and states on developing suitable career frameworks or pathways – including for Ph.D. students – as well as by providing related support to institutions to strengthen PG programs. The former needs to include transparent recruitment processes and transparent rules for advancement – with dedicated support, especially for young academics newly entering the system and a "user-friendly" system attracting and retaining high performers into the tertiary education system at every step.[23] Further analytical work and technical assistance will be needed in this area.

24. **In coordination with the Central level, including AICTE[24], states will play a crucial role by providing competitive funding for R&D, guidelines for innovation and entrepreneurship training, setting up incubation centers in select**

[21] https://ernet.in/content/welcome-ernet
[22] NEP 2020, p. 207.
[23] World Bank, Academic Careers in Indian Tertiary Education: Trends, Challenges and International Experiences, 2021 (draft, n.p.).
[24] All India Council for Technical Education: https://www.aicte-india.org/schemes/research-innovations-development-schemes

institutions, as well as support for PhD training and guidelines for the reform of academic career schemes. The work at the state level will be aligned with the National Research Foundation at the center, established as the apex body for facilitating and catalyzing research and innovation. State level policies will be implemented by institutions via execution of R&D grants, training of students for innovation and entrepreneurship and dedicated support for PhD training (e.g. via skills training focusing on options within and outside academia, etc.).

- **Component 3: Sector steering, including governance and (HEI-)internal and external quality assurance**

25. **MERITE is intended to pilot NEP reforms in the technical tertiary education sector, including some crucial reforms on governance and QA**.[25] The move towards institutional autonomy of affiliated colleges will require the strengthening of institutional governance, internal quality assurance (IQA) and overall capacity. This component will support the states and institutions to build this capacity through peer exchange and training measures on a large scale through dedicated grant schemes. It will also help revise institutional structures, by supporting the establishment of boards and curricula consultation mechanisms, bringing in employers and other key stakeholders and providing strategic directions for institutions. Addressing the governance and accountability challenges in the sector will require a phased medium-term approach that (i) supports the development and strengthening of IQA, governance mechanisms and accountability as well as overall capacity building towards academic, administrative, financial autonomy ii) provides clear guidance for institutional development by QA agencies (especially by the National Board of Accreditation - NBA); iii) ensures improvement-oriented evaluation and subsequent accreditation via external quality assurance (EQA) providers.

26. **For Component 3, the Central level action will be key, particularly for the guidance on the reform of the affiliation system for colleges, related network considerations, and revisions to the central QA framework.** This needs to be further specified through state-level guidance and supporting schemes for a medium-term reform of the affiliation system which could include grant schemes to support measures towards institutional autonomy and roadmaps for the phasing-out of affiliation. At the institutional level, Component 3 will support governance reforms such as the establishment and strengthening of Boards of Governors, including employers, the strengthening of internal QA, activities leading to an increased institutional autonomy and possibly the piloting of roadmaps towards graded autonomy for affiliated institutions.

Legal Operational Policies	Triggered?
Projects on International Waterways OP 7.50	No
Projects in Disputed Areas OP 7.60	No

Summary of Screening of Environmental and Social Risks and Impacts

Environmental and Social Risk Impacts: Limited environment and social risks/impacts may arise from upgradation/ refurbishment of existing buildings, establishment and renovation of research facilities and augmentation of digital infrastructure, required to support activities proposed under Components 1 and 2. However, proposed interventions under Component 3 offer an opportunity to strengthen systems that promote improved teaching and learning environment in the institutions. While most interventions are likely to be small scale and within land owned by an institution, client capacity to manage risks, including those related to inclusion, labor, health and safety, environment

[25] For the role of governance and QA in sector steering, see for example "Steering Tertiary Education. Toward Resilient Systems that Deliver for All", World Bank. 2021.https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/d55b6be748e5e2849e28fbe74fe5e362-0200022021/original/Steering-02-3-web.pdf

management and stakeholder engagement raises the risk rating to 'moderate'. The ratings will be reviewed during preparation, considering additional information and analysis.

Environment Risks/Impacts: The preliminary assessment considers several aspects in an integrated manner. This includes the project scope (multiple states and institutions), capabilities, risks pertaining to inappropriate design of buildings and infrastructure, including inadequate provisions for 'universal access' and for fire, electrical and safety in laboratories and hostels, potential impacts related to construction/ renovation works, issues associated with operation and maintenance, including waste management; emergency preparedness and evacuation, menstrual hygiene management and inadequate coordination and monitoring mechanisms on environment management aspects.

Social Risks/Impacts: The Program is expected to positively impact inclusionary outcomes, especially amongst students from vulnerable groups such as SC, ST, and SEDGs. MERITE needs to deal with certain key social risks: (i) enrollment challenge; (ii) insufficient and lack of gender-disaggregated facilities; (iii) inadequate resources and management practices; (iv) exclusion of certain disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in project activities;[26] and (v) inadequate resources for effective implementation of ESF systems under the project.

Management of Environment and Social Risks/Issues: The Bank's preliminary assessment found that ESS 1, ESS 2, ESS 3, ESS 4, ESS 7 and ESS 10 are currently relevant to the Project. Management of E&S risks will be undertaken by adopting the principle of 'mitigation hierarchy' in consonance with Bank's ESF. The project's focus on strengthening governance and QA systems at different levels will include support for managing E&S issues/risks and improving physical/ learning environment on campus. Environmental and Social Management Framework (ESMF), Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) and Environmental and Social Commitment Plan (ESCP) will be prepared to guide preparation of assessments and mitigation plans for investments (if needed). Citizen Engagement: Various measures will be undertaken to ensure strong citizen engagement. A comprehensive Stakeholder Engagement Plan (SEP) as required under ESS 10 will be prepared, along with a communication and outreach strategy to guide the project's engagement with multiple stakeholders, including vulnerable groups. In addition, specific actions to engage with project beneficiaries/stakeholders will be explored, including beneficiary satisfaction surveys with students, faculty, non-teaching staff, and employers at the start, mid-point, and closure of the project. Intermediate-level indicators will be included in the Results Framework to track beneficiary feedback periodically, ensuring integration with the project objectives.

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[26] Particularly in the conflict/ LWE areas and due to geographical isolation, difficult terrain, poor connectivity, lack of trained full-time staff, lack of adequate infrastructure, and lack of local level employment opportunities may result in the exclusion of a specific group.

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APPROVAL

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