PROJECT INFORMATION DOCUMENT (PID)
CONCEPT STAGE

Report No.: PIDC7851

Project Name	Higher Education Project (P148291)
Region	EUROPE AND CENTRAL ASIA
Country	Tajikistan
Sector(s)	Tertiary education (100%)
Theme(s)	Education for the knowledge economy (100%)
Lending Instrument	Investment Project Financing
Project ID	P148291
Borrower(s)	Republic of Tajikistan
Implementing Agency	Ministry of Education and Science
Environmental Category	B-Partial Assessment
Date PID Prepared/ Updated	04-Sep-2014
Date PID Approved/ Disclosd	07-Sep-2014
Estimated Date of Appraisal Completion	15-May-2015
Estimated Date of Board Approval	16-Jul-2015
Concept Review Decision	Track II - The review did authorize the preparation to continue

I. Introduction and Context

Country Context

Tajikistan has experienced steady economic growth since the beginning of 2000s. GDP per capita grew by 6 percent on average during 2000-2011, reaching USD 935 in 2013. Growth was accompanied by significant reduction in poverty and good performance in terms of shared prosperity. The absolute poverty rate dropped from 81 percent in 1999 to 47 percent in 2009, whereas the extreme poverty rate declined even faster from 73 percent to 14 percent. Despite these remarkable achievements, the growth was not accompanied by adequate job creation, reduced vulnerability, or reduced urban-rural poverty gap, with the middle class at risk of falling back into poverty.

Sectoral and Institutional Context

The higher education system in Tajikistan has rapidly expanded after the early 2000s. In 2012/13, there were 35 institutions enrolling 150,100 students, with 9,950 faculty members. The tertiary (university and college) enrollment rate of 22 percent is lower than most Europe and Central Asian

countries, but much higher than countries at a similar level of economic development. However, access to higher education is strikingly inequitable by gender, socio-economic status, and geographical location. While university and college-educated individuals are more likely to find a stable job in the formal sector, earn higher incomes, and are less likely to be unemployed or poor in Tajikistan, many employers are unsatisfied with university graduates' skills level. According to an enterprise survey (2008), one third (34 percent) of all firms in Tajikistan identifies an inadequately educated workforce as a major constraint.

In the National Strategy for Education Development Up To 2020, approved in July 2012, the government identified modernization and restructuring of the education system to ensure access to quality education for citizens as a priority goal. For higher and vocational education, the Strategy aims to modernize the existing contents towards more professionally-oriented skills to better meet labor market demand and to build Tajikistan's capacity. It also aims to reform educational standards based on a competency-based approach, with active participation of employers, thus modernizing curricula through modularization. With an aim to promote development of the higher education system and integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the government is currently geared towards joining the Bologna Declaration and to ensure more comparable, compatible and coherent systems. To do so, a major overhaul of the higher education system, especially, those related to the revision of approaches to higher education governance, quality assurance, teaching, learning and student assessment are still to be undertaken.

Relationship to CAS

The proposed Project is designed in alignment with the objectives of the recently approved Country Partnership Strategy's (CPS) FY15-18 that support three broad areas of engagement or pillars: (i) private sector-led growth; (ii) social inclusion; and (iii) regional connectivity. First, the proposed Project will support higher education institutions (HEIs) in engaging the private sector to improve the relevance of programs to the labor market demand. Second, it will support piloting programs and projects that aim ensuring under-represented students have access to and success in higher education. Third, it will support transformation of correspondence part-time programs into modern distance education and on-line courses that connect Tajik higher education students to world knowledge. To establish a strong institutional foundation to support all these reforms, the proposed Project will also support strengthening quality assurance mechanisms at system and institutional levels.

II. Proposed Development Objective(s)

Proposed Development Objective(s) (From PCN)

The overarching objective of the project is to strengthen the capacity of the higher education system and its education institutions to provide high quality and relevant education to its graduates. Specifically, the proposed Development Objective is:

To strengthen the higher education system through policy, program, and governance reforms that (i) provide more equitable access and retention, (ii) enhance internal and external quality assurance capacity, and (iii) enhance relevance of academic programs to better reflect labor market demand.

Key Results (From PCN)

Objectives / PDO indicators:

Governance

- A public consultation mechanism is established and becomes function for students, parents, employers, and CSOs to make suggestions to improve higher education.

Equitable access
  - Increased share of poor students (bottom 40 percent) in the overall higher education enrollments.
  - Increased share of female students in the overall higher education enrollments.
  - Increased share of rural (outside Dushanbe) students in the overall higher education enrollments.

Enhanced quality assurance capacity
  - The newly developed national quality assurance standards and guidelines are piloted for accreditation of two institutions.

Enhanced relevance of academic programs
  - xx percentage of HEIs trace graduates and conduct employers' surveys.

Intermediate outcome indicators:

Governance
  - A new governance and regulatory framework for higher education is developed and submitted for parliamentary approval.

Equitable access
  - Policies and regulations for distance education programs, incl. accreditation standards, are developed and implemented.

Enhanced quality assurance capacity
  - National quality assurance standards and guidelines are developed in alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines.

Enhanced relevance of academic programs
  - xx percentage of HEIs periodically review curriculum with employers and revise them.

III. Preliminary Description

Concept Description

The project consists of four components: (i) enhancing access, equity and relevance of higher education; (ii) improving higher education governance; (iii) establishing quality assurance mechanisms; and (iv) project management and monitoring and evaluation.

Component 1: Enhancing Access, Equity, Quality and Relevance of Higher Education (USD 8 million)

This component supports various access, equity, quality and relevance enhancement activities at central and institutional levels. For activities at institutional level, this component (and only this component) may support minor civil works on campus.

Sub-component 1.1: Enhancing Equity within Higher Education

This component would finance a pilot program to strengthen programs and projects aimed ensuring under-represented students have access to the resources (financial support, university-related information, academic preparation, motivation, academic support services, etc.) that will help them succeed in higher education. Activities to be supported include:

Sub-component 1.2: Enhancing Quality and Relevance through Curriculum Redesign

This sub-component supports the development of funding programs to provide grants for HEIs to enhance their quality and relevance through the introduction of new programs/degrees, and revision of the existing program in collaboration with the private sector.

Sub-component 1.3: Enhancing Access through Innovative Delivery Modes

This sub-component supports the transformation of part-time correspondence programs—in which 30 percent of the students currently enrolled come from more disadvantaged background—to modernized distance education programs to improve access to good quality higher education among disadvantaged students in rural areas. HEIs are strongly encouraged to collaborate closely with the private sector to take advantage of their skills and technologies to develop effective delivery modes, and to take into account their demand for graduates.

Component 2: Improving Higher Education Governance (USD 2 million)

This component supports strengthening the capacities of the MOES in improving the higher education legal and governance framework to create an enabling environment for HEIs.

Component 3: Establishing Quality Assurance Mechanisms (USD 4 million)

This component supports the establishment of quality assurance mechanism for the higher education sector.

Sub-component 3.1: Improving Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms

This sub-component supports HEIs in developing internal quality assurance mechanisms in accordance with the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG).

Sub-component 3.2: Enhancing the External Quality Assurance Mechanisms

This sub-component supports transforming the existing State Agency for Supervision in the Sphere of Education (SASSE) into a national quality assurance (QA) agency in accordance with the ESG that will exercise the independent decision-making authority for quality assurance for higher education.

Component 4: Project Management and Monitoring and Evaluation (USD 1 million)

The MOES will ensure efficient and effective implementation of the project to achieve project objectives, including monitoring and evaluation of the impact of the investment.

IV. Safeguard Policies that might apply

Safeguard Policies Triggered by the Project	Yes	No	TBD
Environmental Assessment OP/BP 4.01	✘		
Natural Habitats OP/BP 4.04		✘	
Forests OP/BP 4.36		✘	
Pest Management OP 4.09		✘	
Physical Cultural Resources OP/BP 4.11		✘	
Indigenous Peoples OP/BP 4.10		✘	
Involuntary Resettlement OP/BP 4.12		✘	
Safety of Dams OP/BP 4.37		✘	
Projects on International Waterways OP/BP 7.50		✘	
Projects in Disputed Areas OP/BP 7.60		✘	

V. Financing (in USD Million)

Total Project Cost:	15.00	Total Bank Financing:	15.00
Financing Gap:	0.00		

Financing Source	Amount
BORROWER/RECIPIENT	0.00
International Development Association (IDA)	7.50
IDA Grant	7.50
Total	15.00

VI. Contact point

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