EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND EDUCATIONAL EQUALITY IN MONGOLIA

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Abstract - Recent reforms to the Mongolian school systemhave been driven by two competing goals: educational equality and modernization. Equality, a basic principle in the reform movement, is crucially important to residents of pastoral and nomadic areas, a historically underserved population. Educational equality must be weighed against a second goal, the need to modernize the school system and bring it into compliance with international norms. The modernization effort has taken place along several fronts. Between 2004 and 2017, compulsory schooling expanded from 10 to 12 years. The Second Educational Master Plan (SEMP) rebuilt equipment and infrastructure and raised teaching standards. The 2012 Mongolia-Cambridge Education Initiative (MCEI 2012) established a network of elite schools to promote the sciences and English language proficiency, thereby making Mongolian education globally competitive. On the other hand, equality and modernization present tradeoffs. Because of long-standing structural problems, such as the geographic isolation of the Mongolian countryside, poverty, and extreme weather conditions, there is a risk that the benefits of initiatives like SEMP and MCIE 2012 will accrue disproportionately to urban residents. This paper presents a 2014 survey assessing perspectives on the ECP educational reforms among 1,901 Mongolians, including 1,218 city dwellers and 683 residents of the countryside. We compare the responses of the city and country residents on seven dimensions: the physical adequacy of the learning environment, the school system's ability to serve special needs students; the modernization of classroom teaching and administration; the implementation of major projects by the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Science; the ethics of teachers and administrators; the availability of textbooks; and the overall performance of the government in education. Implications for the future of the ECP reforms are discussed.

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