

TIBET SPECIAL

Schooling unlocks great potential

For many young Tibetans, education is the key to improving their opportunities in life.

Tsering Samdrup born in a rural area of Lhasa, capital of the Tibet autonomous region, said his childhood memories have never escaped him.

"Besides routine farm work, my mum occasionally made handicrafts to increase the family's income. Dad, as a driver, was often hired to drive on business trips to earn a living," he recalled.

Tsering Samdrup said he never worried about whether he could go to school, as his tuition spanning from primary school to high school was exempt from fees.

In 2012, he was admitted to Tibet University, where he was voted chairman of the school's student union.

Due to his outstanding performance in school work and leadership, he earned himself a brilliant business career outside Tibet.

While the outside world is alluring, Tsering Samdrup said what he cherishes more is his home plateau where he grew up. But his parents' health is his biggest concern, he added.

As a result, taking what he had learned from outside Tibet, Tsering Samdrup returned to Lhasa and got a good job. He invited his parent to live with him in the urban area of Lhasa.

"I live a happy life as my family enjoys my company. We spend time together chatting, cooking and celebrating traditional festivals," he said. "My family gives me motivation to work harder."

Rigzin Khadro, a startup business owner, has never forgotten the hardship of her childhood at a village in Nagchu, Tibet.

"In the past, my family and I lived in a mud hut with shabby home furniture and basic items," she recalled. "After strong winds, the house was always covered with dust."

Her parents had been toiling away on a piece of land, aided by four cows, to support the entire family and afford her and her elder sister higher education, Rigzin Khadro said.

"My childhood dream was to leave the village and see what the outside world looked like," she said.

Such dark memories started to brighten when her family moved to a new house in 2017. Their neighborhood benefited from a housing program initiated by the local government.

I was after work, when I returned home and had a cup of butter tea made by my mother, all the stress and strain of the job and life vanished," she said.

Rigzin Khadro said she is grateful for the supportive policies and encouraging environment that have helped her live a different life from her parents.

Official data show that Tibet is home to nearly 3,000 schools, ranging from preschool to higher education, vocational to special education. Their combined enrollment of some 841,500 students, includes 88,530 who come from outside the autonomous region.

Kalsang Deyi is deputy head of a primary school in Metog county. As a delegate to the 2020 National People's Congress in May, he told the media that with the progress in Tibet's education a growing number of students have left mountainous regions and won opportunities to change their lives.

The veteran educator was a college graduate who decided to return to his hometown and work as a teacher, helping more local children realize their dreams.

"Nowadays, a growing number of local residents have come to realize the significance of education," he said.

In recent years, online education has become increasingly popular in Tibet because it helps teachers and students in remote regions access educational resources at a lower cost.

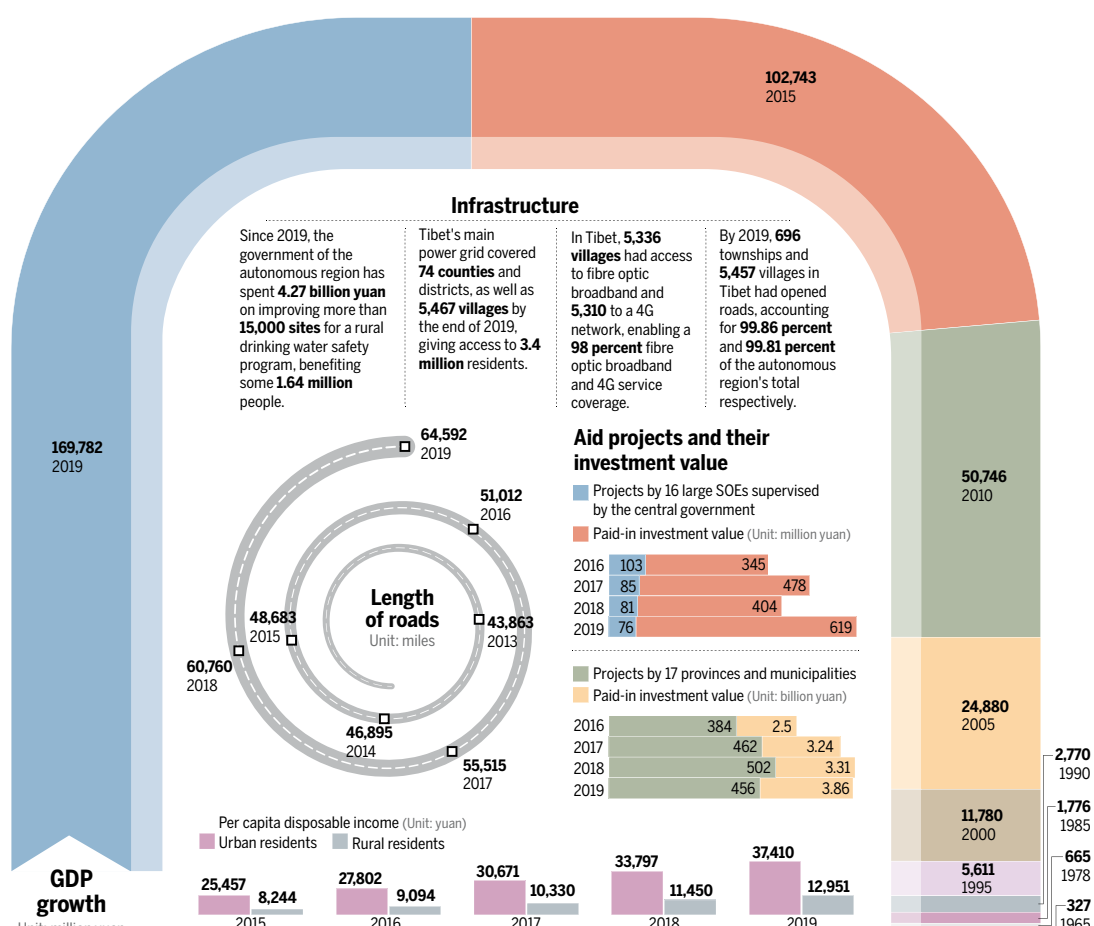
An online platform launched by the autonomous region's education department provides more than 120,000 textbooks, classroom videos and related resources for free. It has attracted nearly 600,000 registered users.

Behind the boom in online education is the widespread use of computers and rapid expansion of digital infrastructure.

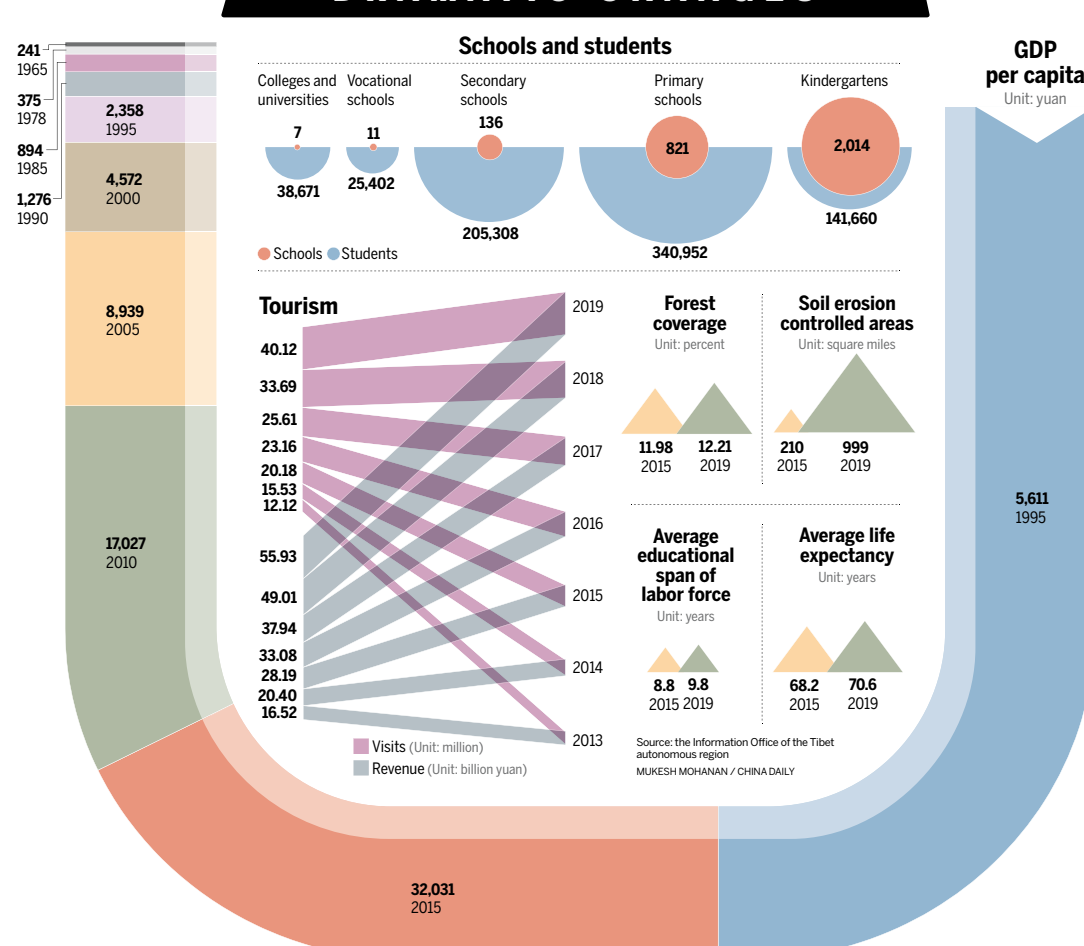
By the end of 2019, there were more than 9,480 multimedia classrooms and nearly 790 computer-equipped classrooms in primary and secondary schools in Tibet.

And 92% of the schools in the region had access to broadband. By the end of this year, online educational services are planned to cover all of Tibet's primary and secondary schools, according to local authorities.

— YUAN SHENGGAO



DRAMATIC CHANGES



In addition to improved living conditions, Rigzin Khadro said his family has since found a way to increase their income, making a foray into tourism-related services.

She has earned more than 40,000 yuan (\$5,860) selling barbecued food and Tibetan tea to visitors to the Nagchu

Horse Racing Festival, a major traditional summer event in northern Tibet. "That was the first big paycheck I had earned. It was used to pay schooling fees for me and my younger brother," she said.

After her graduation from college in June 2018, local incentive policies to encourage

startup businesses prompted Rigzin Khadro to found her own company.

It launched a series of beauty products, including shampoo, hand cream and facial masks, generating 5 million yuan in annual business revenue, according to Rigzin Khadro. "No matter how exhausted

Improved transport transforms Tibet autonomous region

Construction of the Lhasa-Nyingchi railway, which is part of the line that will link the Tibet autonomous region and Sichuan province, has progressed smoothly. The main structures of 16 railway viaducts and the Nyingchi station have been taking shape this year.

The Lhasa-Nyingchi section is the first electrified railway project in Tibet. It is designed to span 270 miles. Once complete, it will signal the end of a southeastern Tibet without railways and provide the region with easy access to the Sichuan-Chongqing economic circle and the Yangtze River Economic Belt.

The new railway project is the epitome of Tibet's robust expansion in transport infrastructure since the autonomous region was founded 55 years ago.

Currently, the region has a comprehensive transport network featuring road, railway and flight services. With a series of major transport infrastructure projects completed, the expanded network plays a crucial role in the region's economic growth, improving life quality, tourism development and poverty alleviation.

In the past, there were no paved roads in Tibet. The construction of modern roads didn't start in the region until the 1950s. Despite financial difficulties at that time, roads



Workers install an overhead catenary system for the Lhasa-Nyingchi electrified railway in mid-August in Sangri county, Lhokha city, Tibet.

REN FUYANG / XINHUA

linking neighboring Qinghai and Sichuan provinces, as well as other regions, were built. It was the beginning of Tibet's modern transport network.

Government data show that by the end of 2019, the total length of roads in Tibet surpassed 64,560 miles, including 410 miles rated as high-level.

"Our goal is that by the end of this year, 65% of the roads

across the autonomous region will reach the standard of highways at third level and above," said Yanggyal, deputy head of Tibet's Department of Transport.

"And all the townships and villages will be connected with roads — 95% of the townships and 75% of the villages linked with hard-surfaced roads," the official said.

Maintenance and rescue services are helping to keep the roads through the plateau in good condition.

In June, heavy rains caused flash floods and mudslides, which damaged multiple sections of key roads. They resulted in more than 260 traffic interruptions on 32 highways in Tibet.

Local rescue teams raced against time to repair the damaged roads.

For instance, close to a destroyed section of Highway 318 that links Lhasa and Nyingchi, teams spent a week building a nearly 220-yard-long and 4-yard-wide makeshift road to resume travel while working to repair the damaged section.

Tibetan authorities have shifted their focus on the transport network from construction to comprehensive development that covers management, operation and maintenance, from quantity to quality, local media reported.

"It takes just four hours to drive to Lhasa," said Tharlung, a resident in Drache village on the outskirts of Nyingchi. The 76-year-old villager recalled that the travel time was 16 days during his first visit to Lhasa when he was 11.

"Our generation didn't dare to dream such a high speed in road service," he said.

A highway runs through the village, so villagers started to

run travel businesses in the 1980s, earning Drache the reputation of a "village on wheels".

The Nyingchi-Lhasa highway, spanning 254 miles, was put into service in April 2019, delivering a further increase to local villagers' income.

"The high-level highway helps to accelerate the construction of a logistics park and a wholesale market in Nyingchi," said another villager, Kelsang Wangchug. "The convenient transportation facilitates the flows of visitors to a scenic site at our village, which features 1,000-year-old cypresses."

With roads improved in recent years, villagers have found more ways to increase their income, he added.

Major roads in Tibet created 29,000 jobs and helped rural residents in the autonomous region earn a combined 545 million yuan (\$79.76 million) in 2019, local media reported.

Also, the expanded road network aids the flows of goods and visitors to Tibet.

In the first half of this year, 12.77 million metric tons of goods were shipped throughout Tibet.

The autonomous region received more than 8.33 million visits from home and abroad during the same period, generating 7.54 billion yuan in tourism revenue.

— YUAN SHENGGAO