RUSA: Quest For Access, Equity and Excellence

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ABSTRACT

Access, equity and excellence would continue to be the main thrust areas of xll plan with respect to higher education. It continues to maintain focus on higher education to make it more relevant to global needs and to remove the inequities in access to education amongst various social groups. In addition to very low access to higher education there are wide disparities between various social groups. The quality of infrastructure and teaching in state universities is far below the acceptable levels. There is a strong need for intervention for the improvement of access, equity and quality in Indian Higher Education that focuses on state universities and stare institutions through a centrally sponsored scheme which will be spread over two plan periods. We must strive to prepare an educated and productive workforce through a concerned effort to improve the quality and relevance of Higher Education. Now the time has come to create a wave of institution building and of excellence in the field of education, research and capability building.
Key words: Access, Higher Education, Inequities, disparities, excellence.

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We need an educational system that is modern, liberal and can adopt to the changing society, a changing economy and a Changing world. One university cannot make much difference. If the government welcomes more such initiatives, the future will be ours. We will be able to match and compete with other countries and the dream to be world's greatest economy would not be difficult to achive.
(Dr.Manmohan singh)

Abbreviations: IIT-Indian Institute of Technology; QS-Quacquarelli Symonds ; MHRD-Ministry of Human Resource and Development; RUSA-Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan; NAAC-National Assessment and Accreditation Council; GER-Gross Enrolment Ratio; EBD-Educationally Backward Districts; HEC-Higher Education councils ; NCHER-National Commission for Higher Education and Research

INTRODUCTİON

India's Higher Education system is the world's third largest in terms of students, next to China and the United States. Higher Education in India has gone through a phase of unprecedented expansion and a quantum jump in the level of public funding. The increase however has not been commensurate with the diverse needs of the population. At present in 2015, there are 736 governments recognized Universities in India out of them 46 are Central Universities, 126 are deemed universities in India and 15 are open universities and the rest are state universities. Some exceptional institutions like Jawahar Lal Nehru University, IIT's have been globally acclaimed for their standard of education. However, India has failed to produce world class universities like Havards and Cambridge so for. According to the Quacquarelli Symonds(QS) World University rankings, no Indian University features among the top 100.

Today the Higher Education system as a whole is faced with many challenges such as financing and management, access, equity, relevance and reorientation of policies and programmes for laying emphasis on values, ethics and quality of Higher Education together with the assessment of institutions. These are of vital importance for the country, since Higher Education is the most powerful tool to build a knowledge-based society. Today knowledge is power and more knowledge one has, the more empowered one is. According to the University Grants Commission, India needs 1500 more universities with adequate research facilities by the end of the year 2015 in order to compete in the global market. The over all scenario of Higher Education in India does not match with the global quality standards. Hence, there is an enough justification for an increased assessment of the quality of the country's educational institutions. Since the higher learning have to perform multiple roles like creating new knowledge, acquiring new capabilities and producing an intelligent human resource pool, the Indian Higher Education system has to

brace itself to address global challenges by channelizing teaching, research and expansion activities and maintaining the right balance between need and demand. At present the world class institutions in India are mainly limited. Most of Indian colleges and universities lack in high-end research facilities. Under-investment in libraries, Information Technology, laboratories and class rooms make it very difficult to provide top quality instruction. This gap has to be bridged, if we want to speed up our path to development. The emergence of a worldwide economic order has immense consequences for Higer Education more so under the changes that have taken palace in the recent past with regard to Globalization, Industrialization, Information Technology advancement and its impact on education aided to these are the policy changes that have taken place. Access, equity and excellence are the three objectives of the Higher Education policy of government of India. The government has taken many steps to increase student enrolment in Higher Education and quality improvement in Higher Education institutions.

The government has constituted a Knowledge Commission to suggest measures to alleviate the problems that Higher Education is afflicted with and make India a knowledge super power in the global economy, while there is a need for an expansion of the Higher Education sector, resources constraint for both the centre and the states poses challenge to ensure quality education. The quality of Higher Education rests on the quality of its facets, be it faculty, staff, students or infrastructure. As such, all policies, systems and processes should be directed towards attaining improvement in all the relevant facets for an overall rise in the quality of education. The xi plan laid renewed emphasis on Higher Education and the three targets of broadening access, makes Higher Education in cohesive and promoting improvements in quality. The xii plan cautions against single minded and narrow strategies for improving access and equity, as the trend to do so at the expense of quality.

PROVISIONS OF RUSA

❖ Certainly, RUSA can prove to be a boon for the states which are unable to implement the updated modern infrastructure and other mandatories for upgradation of higher education systems due to shortage of funds.

❖ RUSA will have a completely new approach towards funding higher education in state universities and colleges. RUSA is based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivizing well performing institutions and decision making through clearly difined norms,which will establish and rely upon a management information system to gather the essential information from institutions.

   ❖ Higher Education needs to be viewed as a longterm social investement for the promotion of economic growth, cultural development, social cohesion, equity and justice. The globalization era has necessitated inculcation of competitive spirit at all levels.This can be achieved only by bringing quality of higher standards to every sphere of work. Therefore the quality of Higher Education has become a concern today.

   ❖ An important element in ensuring quality and excellence in Higher Education is the need for adequate number of good faculty in institutions of Higher Education.Faculty shortage creates serious hurdles in the proper functioning of a college or a university. All activities from the basic functions of teaching and research to curriculum development are compromised. The Supreme Court in its land mark judgement in T.M.A pai matter, had severely castigated institutions which do not employ full time qualified faculty. It is said that, "teachers are like foster parents to the students; can we afford to place the future of the country in hands of these hired teachers."

   ❖ RUSA gives emphasis to ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment.It is one of prime goals of RUSA. Faculty planning is one of its strategic focus of RUSA and recruitment and capacity building of facaultyis one of its 15 primary
   Components.

PREREQUISITES FOR ACCESS, EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE (RUSA)

"Filling faculty positions" is one of the prerequisites for the states to obtain fund under RUSA in order to achieve access,equity and excellence in Higher Education.Not more than 15% of the faculty positions can remain vacant at any time in the state. If any state has more than 15% faculty positions remaining vacant by the end of the first year of RUSA, such states may lose the entitlements for any further grants. The appointments made as well as the faculty already appointed must be remunerated according to UGC regulations and latest pay scales as prescribed. Furthermore the procedural bottlenecks in the recruitment processes must be actively eliminated. Assessment and accreditation in the Higher Education,

through transparent and informed external review process, are the effective means of quality assurance in higher education. Accredition will be carried out by a recognized agency like NAAC. RUSA will be the only ray of hope for a poor state like Jammu and Kashmir for growing up our human resources as per with the global changes in rapid pace. Otherwise,our future will always be dim.

Strategic Budge

Access, equity and excellence would continue to be the main thrust areas of xii plan with respect to Higher Education. However, considering the inter-linkages between them and taking into consideration the current realities of higher education, these objectives need to be pursued differently. A strategic shift in thinking is needed in several critical areas ranging from issues of access and equity to teaching learning process, research, governance, funding and monitoring. These shifts are:-

1) Siginificantly increase funds for higher education and use funds strategically.This investment has to came from both public and private sources and both from central and state exchequer.
2) Connect various funding streams to specific outcomes and desired impact.This would need reforms in governance arrangements at all levels (national/state and institutional) with suitable implementation frame works and monitoring arrangements.
3) Foster institutional autonomy and link meaningfull autonomy and managerial flexibility with effective monitoring and overall accountability through competitiveness.
4) Targeted, integrated and effective equity related schemes, instead of the existing maze of multiple, diffused and low-value schemes, so as to give effect to the constitutional ideal of Equality of opportunity. Mechanisms for connecting rational and state equity programmes are needed.
5) Instittutional differentiation and distinctiveness should be encouraged. The spectrum of higher education institutions must include multidisciplinary research universities as well as short cycle vocational educational institutios.
6) Shift from a input centric and credential focused approach to learn centric approach.
7) Consolidate rather than expand the number of institutions to ensure that the capacity expansion is done at lower capital costs and quality is maintained while expansion is done at lower capital costs and quality is maintained while expanding the system. Now institutions can still be set up in areas uncovered so for.
8) A move towards internationalization of higher education is imperative.

GUIDING OBJECTIVES FOR CENTRAL AND STATE INSTITUTIONS

1. Higher education in India to be brought in line with and at the frontiers of global trends in higher education and knowledge development.
2. Improvement in the over all quality of teaching learning in an average higher educational institutions in the country.
3. Arresting and reversing the trend of group inequalities in access to quality higher education.
4. Creation of additional capacity for ten million more students from eligible age cohort to have access to higher education in a demand driven manner.
5. Understanding governance and regulatory reforms that focus on institutional autonomy with a frame work of accountability and build adaptive capacity of the system.

PRESENT SCENARIO OF HIGHER EDUCATION

No doubt considerable progress has been made in Higher Education in the country. In the xi plan India moved from an "Elite system" of Higher Education to a "mass" system, when the GER crossed the threshold of 15%. However, our GER at 19.4% still remains below the world average of 29% (as of 2010). This increase in GER has, naturally been accompanied by an increase in the Higher Education institutions serving the population. From 26 Universities and 695 colleges at the time of independence, we have risen to 700 Universities and 35539 colleges today. This is a 20 fold and 46-fold increase in the number of Universities and colleges, respectively. However, as the low GER very aptly indicates, increase in the number of institutions has still remained in adequate to meet the increased demand for Higher Education. According to ILO estimates, by 2020 india will have 116 million workers in the age group of 20-24years as against 94 million in china. In addition to this, the average age of india's population by 2020 will be in early or late 40's. To take advantage of this demographic dividend (indeed, to prevent socio-economic complications arising out of a large employable young population).This massive workforce would need to be gainfully employed. This means that our country must have the foresight to create systems and capacities to educate and skill such large numbers of people. Emphasis will also have to be laid on giving

an education that supports and promotes employment generation, entrepreneur sprit, and innovation as there are the factors that will help in creating sustainable job opportunities within india.

Access to Higher Education differs widely across states.The more progressive southern states have better GER's as well as higher availability of educational institutions. These are also states with high per capita spending on higher education while most hilly region states have low institutional density, their GER's vary from high to low. This may be due to the the fact that higher education does not completely depend on the physical availability of institutions but also on other socio-economic factors such as income of the parents, willingness to migrate, cultural factors etc . States with high population density present a different picture. Here on an average, institutional availability per1000sq.kms is unable to ensure good access due to large population and possible lack of institutional capacity. In Bihar, Jharkhand, Ordhisa and Rajasthan, both the institutional density and GER are very low.

Under the xi plan 374 districts were identified as educationally Backward districts (EBD's) for the establishment of model degree colleges. These were districts with below average GER (below 12.4%).Fig.6 illustrates that 191 out of the 374 districts has less than 8 colleges per lakh students. This implies that, were all these students are willing to able to attend colleges ,each college would need to serve upwards of 12500 students. This shows that paucity of higher education institutions serving many remote areas. Also on an average, about one-third of the weak districts are in tribal/ hilly/border/ forested areas. Historically such regions have had low access to education; this evidence further demonstrates the need for special development efforts of these areas.

SUGGESTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND PROGNOSIS

1. All Universities must be teaching cum research universities. Institutions must be given the freedom to expand and diversify as they see fit rather than thrushing a uniform dictat on all institutions.
2. There should be no discrimination between central and state funded universities. All benefits extended to central Universities must also be extended by state governments to the state universities and the centre must incentivize the states to do so.
3. There should an optimum size for a university in terms of the number of affiliated colleges, which must be maintained.
4. There must be tight regulation of private universities in terms of auditing of accounts, payment of minimum salaries to teachers, certain percentage of seats reserved for meritorious students who are to be provided scholarships.
5. Education must be made affordable for all through scholarships or loans provided by the state. Every student who gains admission must get an assured loan or a scholarship from the state.
6. Universities must be freed from the constraints imposed by funding agencies to obtain approvals for every single post. Funding agencies must provide block grants against a plan and universities must be allowed to spend them according to their priorities, subject to the plan.
7. India can provide affordable higher education to foreign students, if we remove systemic impediments. It will also enrich the ethos of our universities.
8. We need to improve governance of universities by developing expertise in educational management and avoid burdening good academic's with administrative chores. We must have separation between academic administration and overall management (including fund raising). State governments must abandon the trend of appointing Civil servants as university administrators.
9. Given the federal nature of our country and the role of states in education, there must be Higher Education Councils (HEC's) in the states which will coordinate with the NCHER, to allow different institutions created and funded by the centre and states to grow on equal footing. These HEC's would also insulate the state universities from outside interference.
10. There should be fastrack statutory mechanism in place for the adjudication of disputes between teacher, employees and management of institutions and universities in respect of matters concerning service conditions as well as in matters of disputes relating to fee, admissions etc.
11. Curricular reform to be the top most priority of the newly created NCHER which would create a curricular frame-work based the principles of mobility within a full range of curricular areas and integration of skills with academic depth.
12. The NCHER should prepare and present a Report on the state of Higher Education in India annually to Parliament. The NCHER should be subjected to external review ones in five years.
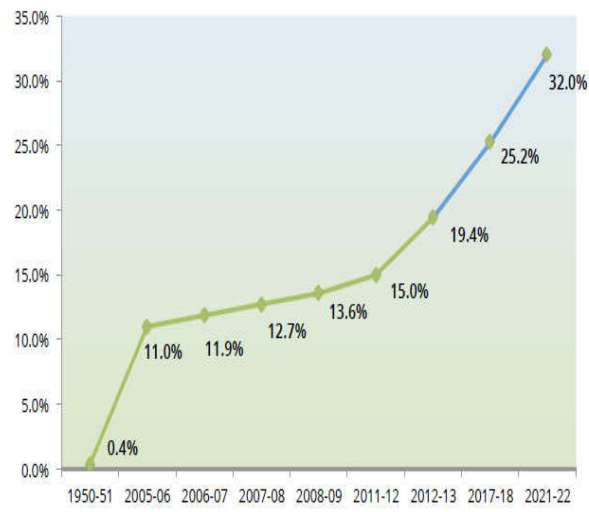
Figure 1

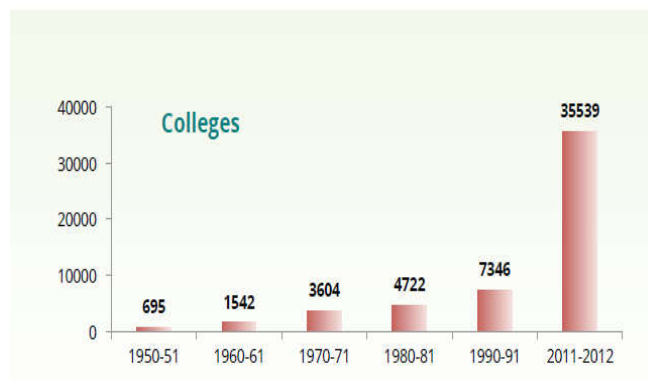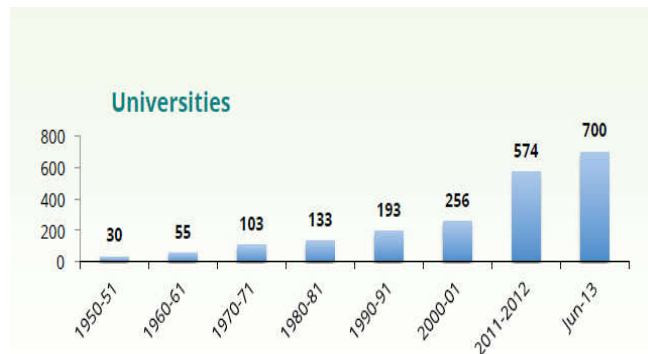Fig 1. Selected Education Statistics, MHRD

Fig 2. UGC, Higher Education at a Glance june 2013

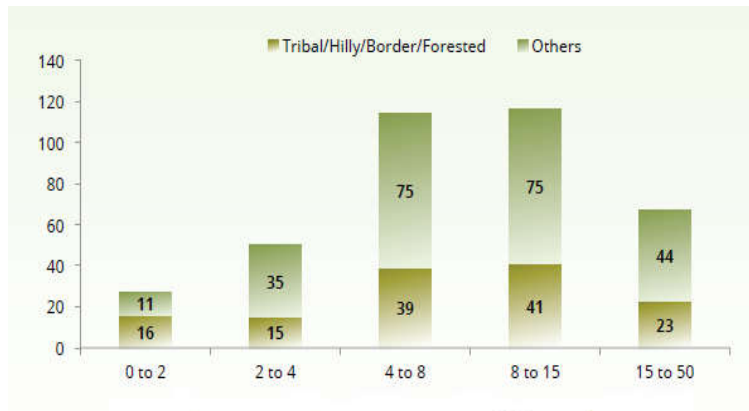Fig 3. Projections of Economically active Population 1990-2020

Fig 4. GER below national average [2001] [CPI for 374 districts]

Fig 5. GER by State Institutional density by state

CONCLUSION

RUSA will aim to provide to greater autonomy to higher education institutions. It is based on key principles of performance-based funding, incentivizing well performing institutions and decision making through clearly defined norms which will rely upon a management information system.

RUSA have a sharper focus on equity based development and improvement in teaching learning quality band research. RUSA gives emphasis to ensure adequate availability of quality faculty in all higher educational institutions and ensure capacity building at all levels of employment. Faculty planning is one of its strategic focus of RUSA.

RUSA will be the only ray of hope for growing up our Human Resource at par with the global changes in rapid pace.

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