

HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

1. INTRODUCTION:

Universities are key institutions of the modern world that cradles for knowledge, particularly for modern science, which has produced technology that has changed the world more in the past 200 years than the previous 2000-years. But universities are not like magic boxes that just churn out new science and technology. They are dynamic and complex organizations whose building blocks are the faculty, students, administration and physical infrastructure. The purpose of the modern university is to effect the transmission of existing knowledge, create new knowledge, and generate employment skills needed for a modern economy. Its organizing principle is that of a self-governing community of scholars engaged in free inquiry, discovery and teaching.

Access to basic education is the right of every individual. Education is the most important instrument in enhancing human capabilities, and in achieving the desired objectives of economic development. Education enables individuals to make informed choices, broaden their horizons and opportunities and to have a voice in public decision-making. It is one of the most important factors that act as a counterweight to social and economic mobility imposed by cultural and historical biases. Education is a vehicle of nation building through which a nation's shared interpretation of history and cultural values are reproduced across generations. At the country level, education means strong economic growth due to productive and skilled labor force. At the individual level, education is strongly correlated to higher returns in earning and a more informed and aware existence. The emerging global scenario offers immense opportunities and challenges, and only those nations can benefit from it, which have acquired the required knowledge base and skills.

2. HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN:

Half of the world's illiterate and 22 percent of the world's population live in South Asia. Pakistan does not fare well on account of literacy within the region. Sri Lanka and Maldives have almost attained full literacy. The adult literacy rate for India is 61 as compared to 53 percent in Pakistan. India, according to a recent study done by the World Bank, has attained 100 percent Gross Enrollment ratio (GER) and 90 percent Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) at the primary level.

Pakistan is ranked amongst the lowest in the world in higher education enrollment rates at 2.9 percent. Other Asian developing countries, such as India and Korea, stand at 10 percent and 68 percent respectively. According to a report of the steering committee for higher education in 2001, only 2.6 percent of the students between the ages 17- 23 enrolled in universities, which have increased to 2.9 in 2005. The target is to double enrollment in the next five years by increasing the capacity of the existing higher education institutions and also establishing new ones. The quality of education provided is not up to the mark, which can be gauged from the fact that not a single Pakistani university is ranked among the top 500 universities of the world.

Public expenditure on education as a percentage to GDP is lowest in Pakistan compared to other countries of South Asian region. Pakistan spends only 2.1 per cent of its GDP on education compared to India, which spends 4.1 per cent, Bangladesh 2.4 per cent and Nepal 3.4 per cent.

3. HEC:

The commission began its operations in 2003 by first writing a programme for the five year period between 2005 and 2010. The Medium Term Development

Framework identified four areas for emphasis. The first was access to the institutions providing higher education. In 2005, only 2.9 per cent of 13 million people in the age group 20 to 24 years were enrolled in institutions of higher learning.

The commission wrote in its programme that it would pay particular attention to increasing enrolment in institutes of higher learning. This would be done in several ways: by encouraging students to go for higher education by giving them stipends, by increasing the capacity of existing institutions to take in more students, and by establishing new universities. In March 2006, President Musharraf announced that his government would establish six new universities, each with the help of a different donor. This would be done under the commission's auspices.

It is expected that these initiatives will help to increase enrolment in higher education from 2.9 per cent to five per cent by 2010 and to 10 per cent by 2015. If this happens, Pakistan should have 1.8 million students attending institutions of higher learning. If the dropout rate is not more than 10 per cent, this would mean that the country will be turning out graduates at the annual rate of 1.6 million. This, of course, will be a quantum jump in the number of graduates coming out of schools and colleges.

However, increasing the supply of higher education facilities and the number of graduates does not necessarily mean an improvement in the quality of human resources available to society and economy. Pakistan does not have a programme in place for testing the quality of graduates at the national level but that notwithstanding there is an impression that the quality of education has suffered at all levels over the last several decades.

The commission's Medium Term Development Framework states: "The present quality of higher education is very low. Not a single university of Pakistan is ranked among the top 500 in the world." Accordingly, the commission began to focus on improving the quality of teachers arguing that the first step in any programme to improve the standard of education at any level was to have more qualified teachers available to the students. This was also the part of the programme that drew the most criticism, in particular from several members of the current faculties. This should have been expected since any change — and what the commission is intending to undertake is a colossal change — will be resisted by those who are likely to be hurt by it.

The government turned to new organisational forms that were answerable essentially to the president whose objectives they were entrusted to achieve. The two agencies that were established were semi-autonomous bodies with their own budgets, programmes, staffs and leadership, and were given the mandate to raise a part of their resources by directly working with the donor community. The two programme leaders had the direct encouragement and support of the president. That they succeeded in bringing about some impressive change was because the president was prepared to step in whenever the programme leaders felt that their forward movement was being blocked by vested interests.

The two bodies that received these mandates were the Higher Education Commission working under the leadership of Dr Attaur Rehman and the National Commission on Human Development that was founded and is operating under the direction Dr Naseem Ashraf. If they succeed in their two very separate missions, they will do so for the remarkable dynamism and charisma of the two leaders made responsible for these two efforts and the fact that they were using entirely different organisational forms and structures in order to achieve their objectives and those of a reformist president.

Recently, the visionary decisions reached by the chancellors' committee to increase allocations in respect of development and recurring budgets for the higher education sector by 50 per cent each year (till they reach one per cent of GNP for the higher

education sector) must be strictly adhered to, if Pakistan is to follow the path of Japan and Korea and develop into a knowledge economy, The plan is to increase the number of PhDs in the public sector universities from 1,700 to 15,000-20,000 in five years. But our public sector universities are dinosaurs, and what is desperately needed is their restructuring. The creation of nine new engineering universities along the lines of the Indian IITs is welcome, but what about the existing universities?

Fareed Zakaria wrote in a recent article for Newsweek, while Al Qaeda has been weakened considerably in the last several years, the only activity that remains is by way of "Al Qaeda Central by which I mean a dwindling band of brothers on the Afghan-Pakistan border". The current western interest in Pakistan's educational sector, therefore, was prompted by some of these concerns. Not only were the donors prepared to put money into the sector. They were also organising seminars and workshops to understand the nature of the Pakistani malaise and possible cures for it.

The work of capacity-building at the local level was entrusted to the Human Development Foundation of Pakistan and that of bringing about a quantum change in higher education to the Higher Education Commission. The third was to recognize that the educational sector needed a partnership between the public and private sectors. The government neither had the capacity or the resources to handle the colossal task alone; it needed to work with the private sector that had already demonstrated the imagination, passion and resolve to improve the level of education at all levels in the country.

4. PROBLEMS OF HIGHER EDUCATION:

- 1) Low Quality of most teachers:
- 2) Rote Learning:
- 3) Physical violence:
- 4) Cheating in Examinations:
- 5) Pathetic ethical environment:
- 6) Bad Intellectual environment:
- 7) Academic research environment is impoverished:
- 8) Religious elements in the Universities:
- 9) Role of HEC:
- 10) HEC has failed to stop Brain Drain: