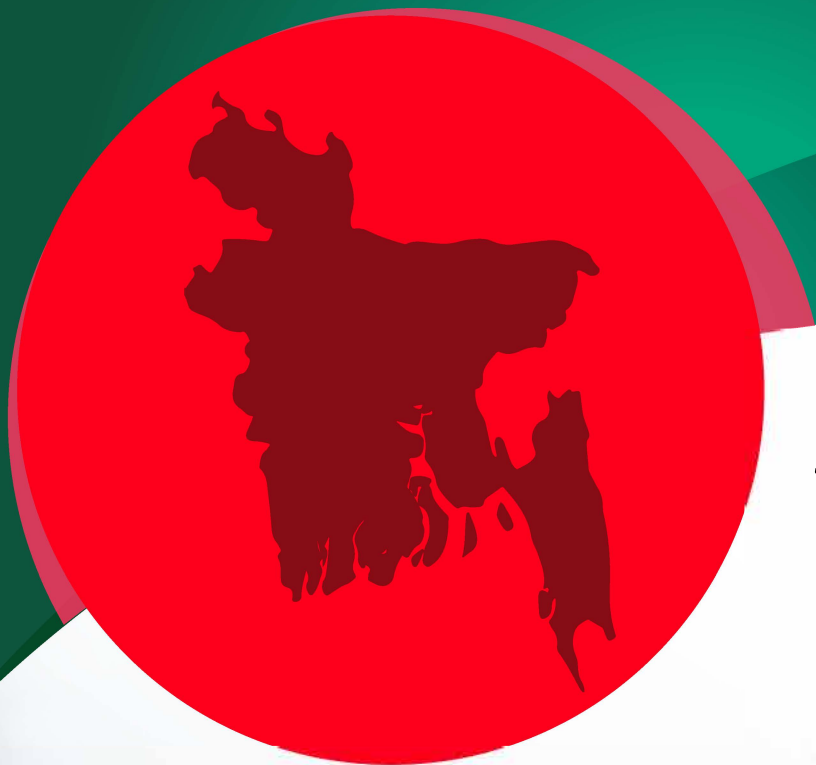


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TABLE OF CONTENTS

From the Editor	Syed S. Andaleeb	iv
 <i>ARTICLES</i>		
On Good Governance	Abul Maal A. Muhith	1
Commentary	Ahrar Ahmad	29
Commentary	Lawrence Ziring	34
Commentary	Craig Baxter	36
The Role of Private (Non-Government) Universities in Higher Education	M. Alimullah Miyan	38
Adoption of Arsenic-Safe Drinking Water Practice in Rural Bangladesh: An Averting Behavior Model	Sonia Aftab A. K. Enamul Haque M. Zakir Hossain Khan	48
Transparency Status of the NGOs in Bangladesh	A.K.M. Ahsan Ullah	60

THE ROLE OF PRIVATE (NON-GOVERNMENT) UNIVERSITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

M. Alimullah Miyan

ABSTRACT

Bangladesh faces many difficulties in meeting the quality needs of higher education due to its reliance on conventional approaches. Furthermore, failed governance has led to chaos and anarchy in the public universities that has been exacerbated by partisan allegiance of faculty and political unrest among the students. This predicament motivated leading academicians to lobby for the enactment of the Non-Government University Act of 1992 to expand the base of higher education in Bangladesh. The goal of the Act has been realized through the establishment of 54 non-government universities, accounting for 6% of student enrollments in private higher education as contrasted with around 11% in the government universities. The relevance of private higher education to socio-economic needs is noteworthy as reflected in the employment records of its graduates. Much needed discipline in the academic arena has also been established in the non-government universities by eradicating the session jam concept. Academic life in these universities is devoid of student and faculty politics. The burden on public exchequer has been reduced, permitting in turn better funding and reform of the public institutions. Non-government universities are also market responsive, reflecting global perspectives in higher education. Brain drain has been minimized through retaining students and faculty and attracting faculty and young scholars from abroad. Through the establishment of non-government universities, a homegrown reform agenda in higher education has been set in motion, which has begun to produce positive results. The knowledge culture created by non-government universities may eventually take over the 'muscle culture' prevailing in the society, provided the government's attention shifts from regulating inputs to measuring outputs. The acid test of such output is the extent of absorption of graduates in the employment market. Most significantly, the private universities are inducing changes even in the way the government universities operate.

Introduction

Knowledge is the engine of growth for any nation. An advanced level of instrumental knowledge and skills enable people to contribute towards national development. All over the world, economies are changing as knowledge is supplementing physical capital as the source of present and future growth. As knowledge becomes more important, so does higher education. The quality of knowledge generated within higher education institutions and its availability to the wider economy is becoming increasingly critical to national competitiveness. According to UNESCO, higher education is a long term social investment in productivity, social cohesion and cultural development. Basic and applied research within higher education and collaboration between universities with international orientation and national business and industry can foster innovation and efficiency in resource utilization while properly addressing environmental concerns. Higher education enhances knowledge generation and cultural development including institutional autonomy, intellectual freedom and a culture of peace based on democracy, tolerance and mutual respect. A properly functioning higher education system can also lead to enhanced quality in basic education.

Funding is central to the success of the higher education system in terms of both institution building and access. Unfortunately, traditional public funding is falling short in meeting quantitative expansion and qualitative improvements. Hence, alternative funding modalities are gaining ground. Private (non-government) universities are emerging as a substantial supplement and more importantly, as a model for market-driven, dynamic and quality higher education. The importance of private universities is gaining momentum and is taking on an increasingly larger share of enrollment, reaching as high as 50 percent of the student body in higher education in certain countries.

Critical Role of Higher Education in Developing Countries

Higher education is critical to the developing countries as it needs to cater to increasing numbers of students, especially from disadvantaged backgrounds.. It promotes general education in addition to technical skills to ensure flexibility, innovation and continual renewal of socio-economic structures in a fast-changing world. Higher education in developing societies can ensure optimum utilization of limited resources and effectively make

up for scarcity of material resources through developing human resources as an alternative to achieving socio-economic development. Developing societies are endowed with people, but have very limited natural resources and financial capital. By developing the people into human capital, they can overcome some of the limitations of financial capital and at the same time lay the basis for generating capital resources. Education and skill development may be chosen as the route for creating human capital.

Higher education also acts as a means of attaining enhanced social mobility. A vast number of people in the developing countries are caught in a vicious poverty trap. Spreading higher education among underdeveloped segments of the population can empower them to move up to a higher level of enlightenment and prosperity. Individual achievement benefits the wider community and acts as a propellant for inducing others to pursue higher education. In terms of intellectual capacity building, from individual, family, and community level up to the national administration and policy making, higher education plays a vital role. Quality higher education can result in a more pro-poor and pro-development policy framework and increased income generation from home and abroad by skilled human resources. Effective higher education plays a central role in promoting productivity, innovation, entrepreneurship, gender mainstreaming and overall socio-cultural advancement. A new vision of higher education in developing societies should combine the demands for universality of higher learning and greater relevance to the society. This vision stresses the principles of academic freedom and institutional autonomy, while simultaneously emphasizing social accountability.

Dimensionality of Higher Education

To achieve its anticipated goals, higher education must be relevant, internationalized, effective, dynamic and accessible to all. Relevance is about being responsive to the market and society in terms of learning content. Relevance is not confined to gainful employment alone. It is also about capacity building in policy issues and introduction of ethical standards, democracy, peace and equity. Internationalization and cross-border cooperation can enhance relevance and marketability of higher education through exchange of experience and expertise between universities in the developed and developing countries and also through continuously adapting to the ever-changing skill requirements in the global milieu. Simultaneously, to be effective, the quality of education must also be of the highest

standard, encompassing the existing body of knowledge along with dynamic exploration of emerging frontiers. To ensure propagation of learning and its resultant benefits to all segments of society, higher education must also be accessible to all.

Quality of higher education hinges on the adequacy of resources, infrastructure, curriculum, research, faculty, management, and governance. Infrastructure in terms of premises, laboratories, libraries and modern teaching aids (Internet, multimedia) constitute the basic prerequisites of quality in higher education. The curriculum must cover all the basic skills and knowledge required for the present and future contexts of market and society at home and abroad. Research should focus on creating new knowledge, both local and international. Competent faculty is a function of education, training, experience and research for continued advancement. Management involves efficient administration of higher education institutions in operational terms while governance relates to institutional autonomy and academic freedom in terms of meeting quality parameters.

In developing societies, conventional approaches to meeting the different dimensions of higher education seem to be having limited success. Increased public funding and emergence of new public and non-government universities only partially meet the quantitative and qualitative challenges. More remains to be done in terms of devising a comprehensive solution to the issues of relevance, internationalization, effectiveness, dynamism and accessibility. Policymakers and stakeholders in developing societies are searching for viable and sustainable alternatives.

Present Scenario in Higher Education

Pressure on higher education is on the rise due to increasing demand for it worldwide. Today, higher education confronts the new realities of expansion, differentiation and knowledge revolution. The challenge gets more pronounced in developing countries, forcing policymakers to think creatively. Previously, higher education in developing countries was available to a small number of students. Today, a dramatic shift from class to mass has occurred and half of the world's higher education students live in the developing countries. As more students complete primary and secondary education, demand for higher education keeps increasing. Developing countries have also seen a rise in real income, thereby bringing higher education within their reach.

Expansion has produced a variety of consequences. Existing institutions have grown in size and traditional institutions have been replicated by public or private ones. A more creative response has been differentiation, leading to new types of institutions and providers. Non-government institutions have joined public ones, while a range of vocational and professional schools now complement the traditional universities.

The public universities, despite substantial expansion, cannot cope with the rising demand. Emergence of non-government universities has proven instrumental in making higher education responsive to changing demand while complying with quality parameters. The proportion of students in private institutions is on the rise, reaching over 50 per cent of total enrollments in some countries, mostly developing ones.

According to the Nuffic Conference (2002), the major challenges facing governments and higher education institutions in the developing societies include access, massification, privatization, commoditization, quality assurance and maintenance, relevance, digital divide, international mobility of staff and trends in donor policies.

Access relates to improved opportunities for women and students from poor families or regions. Massification relates to coping with the enormous growth in the number of students. Privatization signifies growing need of private funds and means to attract private investment without compromising access and quality.

Commoditization implies maneuvers by the developed countries to create a free global market for higher education as a commodity. The challenge for developing countries is to resist being flooded by second-rate, sub-standard courses that do not match their cultural setting or socio-economic needs. Regarding quality assurance and maintenance, in a backdrop of proliferation of national, private and cross-border institutions, the challenge is to ensure minimum quality and pursue continuous improvement.

Relevance signifies connection to the world of work where curricula are geared to the local circumstances, developed in conjunction with employers, thereby avoiding blind replication of irrelevant foreign values and ideas. Digital divide relates to new information and communication technology (ICT) opportunities with implications for huge investments. The challenge is to attract donor support and private funds

to facilitate ICT access and simultaneously match online theoretical teaching with guidance and practical assignments. International mobility of staff, while offering great opportunities for the individuals, can easily lead to brain-drain in favor of the developing societies. The challenge is to resist this brain-drain and to create better opportunities for a well educated staff within the country. Finally, trends in donor policies relates to minimizing the cost of donor support while maximizing the benefits.

Emergence of an Alternative Mode of Higher Education in Bangladesh

Historically, higher education in Bangladesh was organized in the public sector only. That is, all universities were funded by the government through its budgeting process and there was hardly any involvement of the community in the running and management of these institutions of learning.

The university programs operated mostly on antiquated examination systems, leaving little opportunity for frequent or continuous evaluation of students, feedback to the students in terms of their performance, as well as providing a climate of interactive learning process.

The universities in the country went through a chaotic situation and there was hardly any professionalism in managing the educational programs prevailing in the universities. The faculty members, generally, were not attentive to their duties; and, in most cases, classes were not held on schedule due to political unrest and in-fighting among the faculty members, students and administration that created a condition where the universities could hardly function as academic entities. Most university academic sessions were behind schedule by three to four years with outdated curricula irrelevant to the needs of the society, leading to widespread 'educated unemployment' in the country.

On the other hand, the government was not in a position to create jobs. This resulted in a large group of educated, but unemployed young people in the society who felt very frustrated but were not in a position to translate their knowledge and skill into anything meaningful or productive. The public universities had all the elements of a good university in terms of structures and systems but, unfortunately, there was hardly any professionalism in terms of academic decisions related to student admission, teaching, training, research, faculty promotion, motivation and evaluation, resulting in campus irregularities causing qualified faculty to move out of

the country.

This also led brighter students to leave the country if they were financially solvent. Parents felt that it may be cheaper in the long run to send their children abroad for education because of more than twice the time period required to earn a degree in the country and because of the poor quality of education being offered.

A phenomenal and quantitative expansion in higher education, chiefly during the last decade, was driven by the widespread advancement of free primary and secondary education through state financing and donor funding. The public universities found themselves incapable of handling the quantitative expansion, despite the fact that a large number of new public universities had been established to meet the growing demand. Thus, the government, induced by the leading academicians and policymakers, decided to introduce private initiative in the field of higher education. Ultimately, the Non-Government University Act 1992 was enacted to facilitate the establishment of non-government universities. Today, there are 54 non-government universities delivering modern, market driven education through international cooperation, competent faculty and modern teaching methods. They contribute to 6% of the total enrollment while the public universities contribute 10%, the rest is accommodated in the degree colleges. Enrollment in private universities grew rapidly from 8,718 in 2001 to more than 63,000 by the end of 2005. The Act of 1992 in Bangladesh is a pioneering one among the SAARC countries which provided a framework for the establishment of different universities without resorting to separate enactments for each university. The legislation survived changes in government and went through minor amendments in 1998. Thus, the non-government university concept has been accepted across the political divide and has become a social reality in Bangladesh.

Although, non-government universities have succeeded in supplementing the capacity of the public sector, their contribution is more commendable in terms of modernization of content and delivery. By definition, non-government universities are tuned to the demand of the market at home and abroad, facilitating propagation of critical expertise and resisting the abysmal brain-drain that is considered devastating to the nation.

Thus, the community efforts supported by the then government by creating an enabling environment through legislation created an alternate mode of

delivering higher education in Bangladesh. Private universities have made rapid strides in expanding higher education in the country and laid the framework of sustained growth in the future to meet skilled manpower needs and social expectations.

Expansion in Opportunities for Higher Education

Private universities have made significant contributions in terms of expanding the base of higher education in the country in the face of growing demand. In quantitative terms, the growth in enrollment size has been phenomenal, being 8,718 in 1998, 27,245 in 2001 and 62,856 in 2004. More significant is the increasing trend as observed from the data compiled by the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh as shown in Table 1.

Public universities, excluding National University and Bangladesh Open University, have a total intake of 10.9% of all students in higher education, while the private universities have approximately 6% of the students. This is a phenomenal growth within a short span of time. The rate of increase is sustained and will increase further as the recently established private universities go through their maturity cycle.

More private universities are likely to be established in the coming years, and there certainly is a desire on the part of the community to establish such institutions as can be seen from the number of applications pending approval. Even though there may be some reduction in the existing number through consolidation and other processes, it may be reasonably assumed that the existing private universities will enroll more students in the coming years through opening new disciplines, expansion in existing disciplines, branching and other growth models.

It is reasonable to assume that the private universities will equal the contribution of public universities in enrollment in the coming decade and thereafter attract proportionately more students. Thus, it can be seen that the private universities have already made a significant contribution in expanding the opportunity for higher education and are well poised to make further gains in this respect.

Ensuring Relevance of Higher Education

As indicated earlier, society expects higher educational institutions to perform several functions including preparation of skilled manpower, development and transfer of technology and providing equitable access. Relevance is the criterion

Table 1. Enrollment Growth in Non-Government Universities

Year	Number of Universities	Total Number of Students	Rate of increase over the previous year in percentage
2000	17	32,791	+145.81
2001	22	27,245	-16.91
2002	37	34,432	+26.38
2003	52	46,080	+33.83
2004	53	62,856	+36.41

Source: University Grants Commission – 2006

by which the outputs of the system are compared in general terms with needs and expectation.

On the criteria of relevance, the private universities have performed remarkably well. They have concentrated on providing market-relevant and demand-based education covering areas like business education, computer science, engineering, medicine etc. These universities have demonstrated more attunement to labor market demands as compared to public universities.

Besides the issue of reflecting market demand regarding the areas of study, the more important question of relevance relates to the creation of knowledge, skills and attitude necessary for productive work in the economy. The employment record of private university graduates is good and from the quality of entry level job offers received by the early generation of graduates, it can be concluded that the quality of the graduates is reasonably high. In other words, the private universities are mostly able to produce graduates who can meet the skill requirements of the employers. The rate of acceptance of private university students into higher degree granting institutions of the developed countries is another reflection of the rigor of training in the private universities.

The private universities are also not adding to the large pool of educated unemployed in society; rather they are producing skilled manpower to meet market demand and to a limited extent contributing to job creation through entrepreneurial efforts of their graduates. The economic and social spin-off from such contributions is manifold and commendable.

Ensuring Academic Discipline in Higher Education

Mention has already been made about the session jam in public universities. This is created by extended closure of public universities due to strikes and other

unexpected causes. This means, on average, it takes 2 to 3 years longer than the planned time for

completing a degree. This situation is pervasive in most public institutions with some variation across institutions and in different years.

As opposed to this, almost all the private universities have the enviable record of graduating students on schedule as per academic calendar. It may be mentioned here that the private universities in Bangladesh have mostly adopted the North American model of higher education involving four years for an undergraduate degree and two years for Master's while semesters serve as academic terms. Concurrent with this, most of them produce an academic calendar of activities and ensure its effective implementation. The result is valuable cost and time saving on the part of students and parents, early job entry and a competitive edge over fellow students of the same age in public universities.

This enforcement of academic calendar has contributed to economic and social progress as well as satisfaction of students and parents. This model of academic discipline is a welcome addition to efficiency of academic activities and is increasingly gaining popularity among academic institutions in the country.

Appropriate Governance and Administrative Effectiveness

Mention has been made earlier that the public universities have appropriate structural arrangement in place for good governance and administrative efficiency but they are unable to serve their purpose for many reasons including politicization, inappropriate manning, and lack of professionalism. As opposed to this, private universities, mostly established by philanthropists, have been to a great extent, been able to evolve good governance and administrative effectiveness despite many environmental constraints.

The founders of these universities have been working earnestly to put in place policies that will ensure good governance and, consequent success, with few exceptions. Similarly, these universities are reasonably well administered with a client focus, and a reasonable level of accountability has been established for administrators, faculty and other staff members. There is no report of politicization in the private university campuses and most institutions have a record of uninterrupted operation. The oversight function by the founders and professionalism of the administrators and faculty have contributed to good governance and administrative efficiency in the private universities. This aspect will be further strengthened as the universities gain experience.

Reversing the Trend of Indiscipline in University Campuses

Public universities are characterized by student unrest which at times turns violent. This is caused by political activities in the campuses primarily by students; faculty politics also contributes to this situation. The prevailing chaotic situation is the biggest obstacle to teaching and learning in these campuses.

As opposed to this, the private universities have been able to reverse this trend by instilling a sense of discipline in their premises. A culture of education has been created in these universities which deters student and faculty politics. This atmosphere is likely to be further strengthened through a healthy tradition of discipline that is being continually reinforced.

Reflection of Global Perspective in Higher Education

It has been mentioned earlier that for higher education to create skilled global manpower it must reflect ever-changing knowledge and skill requirements to be relevant as well as competitive. Exchange of experience and expertise between universities in the developed and developing countries can enhance relevance and adaptation of global perspectives in educational programs.

Most private universities have established linkages with universities abroad, partly to ensure that credits are transferable and accepted for further education, and partly to transfer academic knowledge and skills through various mechanisms. A good number have also joined the international network of academic bodies both for recognition and cross fertilization of programs and ideas.

Thus the private universities are well poised to keep-up with changes in global perspectives in academic service delivery as well as skill requirement since regional and overseas job markets are an attractive source of employment for skilled Bangladeshis.

Promotion of ICT

Reducing digital divide between developed and developing countries calls for increased promotion of ICT education and training in developing countries. Bangladesh is no exception to this situation. Private universities are making commendable contributions in development of ICT in Bangladesh. This is reflected in the result of a countrywide survey conducted by the ICT in Higher Education Expert Group in July-August, 2005 to assess the condition of higher education institutions offering ICT degrees. The survey shows that private universities have the largest proportion of students enrolled in ICT degree programs (around 68%). The survey also found that the private universities offering ICT programs are reasonably well equipped and have a teacher student ratio of 1:13 as compared to 1:18 for public universities. Clearly, the private universities are producing much needed skilled manpower required for development of the ICT sector in Bangladesh.

Introduction of New Educational Programs

Private universities are working as a platform for launching new market based modern educational programs in the country. In this respect, mention may be made of educational programs like hotel management and tourism, hospital management, nursing, graphic design, performing arts, etc. These have widened the horizon of higher education in the country and also reflect global changes in education and market demand. This trend of developing innovative programs is continuing. At the same time, the private universities are flexibly responding to changing skill requirements of the market place in existing programs through frequent curriculum reviews, contacts with developed country academia and introducing new content elements as and when necessary.

Thus the private universities are leading in program innovation and curriculum modification in line with the ever-changing job market at local and global levels. This in turn is strengthening the higher education base in Bangladesh.

Initiating Reform in Higher Education

On a limited scale, the advent of private universities,

with semester system of education, credit hours, grading system and teacher-centric continuous student performance evaluation and feedback, have set in motion a reform process in higher education which earlier had been impossible, due to resistance from different quarters. The salient aspects of reform that have been implemented include structural shift towards 4 years undergraduate education in all disciplines, adoption of semester system with credit hours as well as grading. The medium of instruction in favour of English is also gaining favor in academic parlance of the country. These reforms carried by the public institutions would have been unthinkable without the alternate competitive mode of higher education offered by private universities.

As the private universities become more institutionalized, greater reform created through a healthy competitive culture can be foreseen in the delivery of higher education. Such a situation will lead to further development of higher education in the country in both the private and public universities.

Reducing Burdens on the Public Exchequer

Until the advent of private universities, public universities with almost 95% of government funding used to cater to the needs of higher education in the country. Private universities receive no grant from the government and operate on self funding and are now enrolling around 6% of the students numbering around 63,000 as of 2004. The government is relieved of providing funding for these students out of the public exchequer, amounting to 139 billion takas as shown in the following computation.

Presently 10% of the eligible students get admission in the public universities. In the Strategic Plan for Higher Education in Bangladesh: 2005-2025 (January 2006) of the University Grants Commission, it has been estimated that at the present rate of 10%, around 185,000 students will seek higher education in public universities by the year 2025. Creation of this additional capacity in the public sector will require the establishment of 12 new universities at an investment of Tk. 160 billion with around 6,000 students per university.

It is possible for the existing private universities and the new ones to be established to take on the enrollment of most of these students and thereby relieve the public sector from incurring most of this expenditure. The argument that the public sector universities reach the needy segment of population is hardly tenable as seen from the results of socio-

economic background of public university students as reported later.

Clearly, the private universities serve as a safety valve to meet the increasing demand for higher education, as well as a mechanism for public expenditure saving in the country's higher education sector.

Cost Effective Service Delivery

Private universities are also cost-effective in educational service delivery. The average cost per student exclusive of capital cost has been estimated at 2,50,000 for a business undergraduate student and the all inclusive costs of such a student vary from Tk. 200,000 to Tk. 700,000 in private universities. In the public university, 95% of the cost plus the capital investment cost is borne by the government. The entire capital investment cost and recurrent cost of the private universities are borne by the students and founders. The unit-wise cost of operation of private universities is better than the public universities, thus creating more value for money invested.

Promoting Faculty Development

Private universities are promoting faculty development through various mechanisms, although on a limited scale. However, the faculty base of private universities is no less strong in qualitative terms as compared to public universities as can be seen from the data compiled by the University Grants Commission in Table 2.

Given the nascent character of private universities, the proportion of faculty with higher degree of around 57% compares very favorably with the proportion of little over 61% in the public universities. Thus the private universities are operating with a healthy faculty base and are promoting faculty development through education, training, academic retreat and other mechanisms.

Building Political Consensus and Community Engagement in Higher Education

Higher education has been treated with apathy by the government, community and donors as can be seen in the very low allocation of funds in the budget compared to other countries in the region. The community has also demonstrated an ambivalent attitude to the disarray in higher education and donor contribution has been literally absent from the early 1990s.

The private university initiative, piloted by a few philanthropists, triggered the interest of the political

Table 2. Proportion of Faculty with Different Degrees in Public and Private Universities of 2004

Level of Degree	Public Universities	Private Universities
1. PhD	36.42	26.33
2. Other Higher Degree	24.82	30.59
3. No Higher Degree	38.76	43.08
Total Number	6462	3653

Source: University Grants Commission – 2004.

parties, the community and the donors to issues relevant to higher education. The Jatiya Sangshad witnessed a stormy debate around the Besharkari Bishwabiddalay Ain bill of 1992, when as many as 82 cut motions were moved. The bill was eventually passed by the Jatiya Sangshad under the auspices of the ruling party. In the next round, when the opposition came to power, the party preserved the main character of the law and only enacted some minor amendments in 1998. Thus, in an otherwise confrontational political atmosphere, a consensus among major political parties have been built around the establishment and operation of private universities. This engaged the political parties to ponder the issues of higher education and seek alternate ways of service delivery in the field of education.

The community has also begun partnering with different private universities in different forms. There is also a favorable views in the media about the development of private universities.

The donor community has taken the home-grown effort of the community in creating access to higher education and has begun engaging itself in broader issues of strategy formulation in higher education for the nation as a whole.

Thus, the private universities have contributed to the development of concern for higher education among the stakeholders and interested parties through consensus building and engagement.

Contribution to Equity and Access

It has been observed that admission to higher education is not only limited (4% of 17-23 cohorts in Bangladesh as compared to 11.9 in India, 29.3 in Malaysia and 37.3 in Thailand) but also highly inequitable. Children of professionals, businessmen, civil servants and teachers are almost exclusively represented in higher education institutions. A World Bank review of 1990 found that “the financing arrangements in the education system and the struc-

ture of enrollments result in highly inequitable distribution of public spending on education, with the 10 percent best educated people in a generation receiving as much as 76 percent of the cumulative public spending appropriate to the entire generation through publicly financed education”. Although around 10 percent of the budget for higher education is allocated to students in the form of stipends and subventions, these do not benefit the poorer segment because of being awarded on the basis of merit, not on the basis of economic need. Thus, the marginal impact of public spending on the disadvantaged section is quite clear.

It follows from this that the mandated allocation of 5% of the seats to the poor but meritorious students in the private universities is a definite contribution to equity. In practice, in many private universities, more than the minimum proportion of students receive free education on the basis of economic needs. Thus, the private universities contribute to equity and also increase access by expanding the base of higher education in the country.

Besides, private universities also encourage entry to higher education by offering additional financial support in the form of scholarship, grant, fee waiver, rebate, student loan etc. This creates social mobility and to a limited extent contributes to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Program of the government without utilizing any public fund.

Saving and Earning of Foreign Exchange

As of the early 1990s, all enrollments in higher education were in the public universities which could not keep pace with the increasing demand for entry. This led to the exodus of a large number of students for studying abroad, primarily in the neighboring countries where enrollment of Bangladeshis reached almost 100,000 students. Education in the advanced countries is very expensive; it is not very cheap in the region either. In any case, a large amount of remittance had to be made from the country for the tuition and living costs of this sizeable student body abroad.

The private universities with steadily increasing enrollments have halted this mass exodus of students and the related foreign exchange. This trend in foreign exchange saving will continue to increase as enrollments increase from the existing 6 percent to 10 percent in the coming years.

The private universities are also attracting foreign students and thereby beginning to earn foreign exchange for the country, even though at a modest scale at present. Foreign students are finding the educational standard of private universities attractive and are enrolling in their educational programs. Within this short span of time, the private universities in the country have been able to attract more foreign students to study (487) than public universities (185) as of 2004. This trend of attracting foreign students is likely to increase in the coming years with the consolidation of private universities and their enhanced internationalization.

Thus private universities have contributed to substantial savings of scarce foreign exchange and are contributing to a modest increase of the same.

Generation of Employment

The private universities have contributed to job creation in society through faculty, administrative and staff positions at no cost to public funds. Around 5,000 faculty positions have been created. Precise data on staff and administrative positions are not available but this will be similar in magnitude. Given the high rate of unemployment and limited size of the job market, employment generation by the private universities is a positive contribution.

Development of Knowledge Culture: Reversing the Brain Drain

Mention has been made of the large scale migration of student and faculty from Bangladesh for different reasons. Loss of good students is a potential for brain drain since many do not return. The migration of faculty is almost an irreversible loss to the country.

By providing good educational opportunity with efficient management and promoting a knowledge culture through professionalism, the private universities have been successful in halting substantive brain drain in case of students and starting brain gain by attracting academics from abroad. The non-resident Bangladeshi academics have already started making short to medium term commitment to work in Bangladesh, some are thinking of resettlement, while students working for higher degrees abroad are looking at private

university academic positions as one of the options to consider for choice of work location.

Thus, the private universities are making significant strides towards creating a knowledge culture by offering good education for retaining talents, attracting non-resident Bangladeshi academics, Bangladeshi young scholars studying abroad, foreign faculty as well as foreign students.

Conclusions

The Non-Government University Act of 1992 was enacted to encourage the founders to expand the base of higher education through establishment of self-reliant, autonomous and well organized universities in the country. The purpose of establishing non-government universities in the country was to restore discipline in the field of higher education, promote qualitative improvement, and reduce the burden on the public exchequer for higher education. Good education can be promoted under different paradigms and approaches and this perspective was reflected in the Act of 1992 by keeping a provision for establishing many universities under the law.

The purpose of the law has been largely realized through the establishment of 54 private universities. The growth in enrollment is substantive; at the same time the relevance of the education imparted for the socio-economic needs of the country is heartening as reflected in employment records. The much needed discipline in the academic arena has been established in the private universities by erasing the session jam concept. The universities have demonstrated good governance, as well as effectiveness in administration of academic life. The academic life in these universities is devoid of student and faculty politics in contrast to the situation in other higher educational institutions.

They have reduced the burden on public funds by taking over a significant load of higher education students. This will permit better funding of public institutions and consequent reforms.

Private universities are market responsive in terms of innovative programs, curriculum review and content modification, and in the promotion of ICT. They also reflect global perspectives in higher education through extensive linkages and networking which in turn make the graduates competitive in the global marketplace. The global reflection is also getting recognition abroad by attracting foreign students in the country. There are more foreign students studying in private universities than public universities. Brain

drain has been minimized through retaining students and faculty and also by attracting faculty and young scholars from abroad.

Through the establishment of private universities, a home grown reform agenda in higher education has been set in motion and this indigenous approach is already producing good results in view of private university friendly attitude of successive governments under a broad legal umbrella. Private universities are successful in creating a knowledge culture by reversing the trend of indiscipline in higher education. The knowledge culture is gaining momentum and may take over the 'muscle culture' prevailing in the society, provided the policy makers in the government continue to sustain the broad framework for growth of higher education in the private sector and gradually shift from regulating inputs to measuring outputs of these universities. It should be remembered that the acid test on output is the extent of absorption of graduates in the employment market both at home and abroad.

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