



## EQUITY AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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### Abstract

*Higher education in India is passing through a phase of unprecedented expansion, marked by an explosion in the volume of students, a substantial expansion in the number of institutions and a quantum jump in the level of public funding. The enormity of the challenge of providing equal opportunities for quality higher education to ever-growing number of students is also a historic opportunity for correcting sectoral and social imbalances, reinvigorating institutions, crossing international benchmarks of excellence and extending the frontiers of knowledge. The 12th FYP shall focus on utilizing this historic opportunity of expansion for deepening excellence and achieving equal access to quality higher education. 11th FYP Achievements: India has made enormous strides in achieving these goals in more than six decades since independence, and the success milestones of its higher education system are recognized globally. Yet, considerable challenges remain. To meet these challenges, the University Grants Commission (UGC) called for a major thrust for expansion of higher education and promotion of greater regional and social equity in the 11th FYP. During this Plan, provision was made for setting up of 16 new Central Universities and 374 Model Colleges in low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) districts. The Government of India (GoI) provided for concomitant expansion with equity through implementation of the recommendations of the Oversight Committee. There was also a continued focus on achieving quality and supporting reforms in higher education and promoting excellence. But considerable challenges remain.*

**Keywords:** *Equity, Inclusion, Community Education Development Cell (CEDC), Five Year Plan (FYP), Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER)*



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### Introduction:

A massive expansion would require immediate attention to consolidation and better utilization of existing infrastructure in the colleges and universities. The existing institutions need to be incentivized and required to increase their student intake capacity. At the same time such an expansion cannot take place only within the existing institutions or with public sector funds. There is a need to create new institutions at a large scale and allow for a significant role for communities and private sector to meet this deficit. It is vital that this

expansion should be inclusive, so that the additional capacity is created where it is needed most. This would mean that the creation of new institutions should be focused in states, regions and districts where student enrolment and institutional density is lower than national average. Instead of spreading additional capacity across the board, there is a need to focus on select streams and programmes where the current capacity is particularly low. We need to evolve suitable models of collaboration where public purpose and resource can be synergized with private philanthropy, commitment and energy to create new institutions that help to redress the sectoral, regional or social skews in higher education.

A key measure of inclusive expansion will be significant increase in vocational education through new polytechnics, new Community Colleges and vocational study provisions within the existing universities. This would involve education for livelihood through skill development, by de-emphasizing on degrees, and would serve disadvantaged sections. These initiatives will not merely duplicate existing mores but create new pedagogical practices and respond to a different set of needs. Through a range of transferable credit-based courses leading to Certificate, Diploma and Associate Degrees, this would also bridge the gap between secondary and higher education. The achievement of the goals for equity and inclusion would call for a strengthening of the following approaches during the 12th FYP.

- Building of capacity and improvement of infrastructure which can attract and facilitate the retention of students from rural and backward areas as well as differently-abled and marginalised social groups.
- Providing for pro-active measures through proper *implementation of reservation policy* for students belonging to SC/ST/OBC and the disadvantaged.
- *Increasing the incentives offered to differently-abled* students as well as those from the marginalised sections so that they can participate in higher education with facility.
- *Strengthening measures to increase the achievement capacity* of SC/ST students and those from marginalised sections so as to reduce drop-out and to improve performance.
- Given that a part of the gap that is observed between social groups and gender at the level of higher education is due to lower numbers and quality of passouts from the school system due to higher drop out and segmented quality, there is a need for *improving the quality of schooling and retention of students from the marginalised sections* through enhancing the performance of the schooling cycle. The task is to be addressed by the school system.

- *Monitoring of performance with respect to improving equity at the institutional level as well as higher (state and country) levels.*
- These measures may be part of a long term plan to be drawn up to attain equity for all groups by the year 2022. This has to be drawn sector-wise with a clear roadmap. Strengthening of the following strategies is, therefore, proposed for the 12th FYP initiatives:

**Enhancing Participation of Women:**

- Schemes for capacity building for women administrators, Post-doctoral Fellowships for women, women hostels, facilities and infrastructure for women, scheme for single girl child should be expanded and strengthened during the 12th FYP.
- In order to attract more girl students from the states, where the rural or urban GER for girls in higher education is more than 5 per cent lower than the male GER, a new scheme of Women's Higher Education Stipend (*Mahila Uchha Shiksha Britti*) may be introduced. This stipend may be awarded to girl students from rural and/or urban areas, as the case may be, who score higher than a certain grade in earlier public examination and having family income less than a certain specified level. The stipend should be in addition to the tuition fee waiver.

**Enhancing Participation of SC/ST/Minorities:**

- *Activating and Strengthening SC/ST/OBC Cells:* Establishment of SC/ST cells were initiated in the 10th and 11th FYP periods. There are grants from the merged grant schemes. However, such schemes have not been very effective as the participation and interest have been inadequate. The UGC/MHRD could make it mandatory for all recognised institutions to have a Community Education Development Cell (CEDC) which should monitor the intake of students, performance, capacity building efforts, along with intake in faculty and administrative staff from deprived social groups, including minorities. New programmes should be introduced to strengthen the activities and the performance of these Cells.
- *Remedial Coaching Facilities for Students from Deprived Social Groups:* The programme presently provided for in the UGC Merged Schemes should be restructured and remodelled to make it more effective. The UGC/MHRD may also consider providing a grant for remedial coaching to recognized institutions, not receiving other types of funding from the UGC/Government. *Scholarships and Fellowships* for SC, ST, OBC and Minority students may be enhanced at all levels.

- There may be *more institutions in minority dominated areas*.
- To promote inclusiveness in private self-financing institutions, a *stipendiary system including a fee voucher system* to meet financial requirement of the students from marginalised groups may be evolved through Government funding by a process of reimbursement.

**Reducing Regional Imbalances:**

- The initiative taken to correct the regional imbalances by *establishing 1,000 Polytechnics and 374 Model Colleges* in the low GER districts may be taken on priority basis. The nature of the Model Colleges can either be general Arts and Science Colleges or Professional Colleges or Community Colleges as per the requirements of the earmarked districts.
- The implementation of the "*Model College*" scheme of the 11th FYP for the low GER districts needs to be accelerated *with 100% central government funding* in order to promote inclusiveness and expansion. The state governments may have to provide the land, supply of water and electricity, etc., besides maintaining these colleges as envisaged in the approved policy of the Government of India.
- In addition, a scheme should be introduced to establish a *Model College in each district* of the country, with 100 per cent financial support from the UGC.

**Promoting Equity in all Disciplines:**

In Engineering and Polytechnic Colleges, participation of the girl child is much lower. The stipends mentioned above need to be introduced in all these institutions. The same may also be followed in Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) and other nondegree professional courses.

**Strengthening Infrastructure for Differently-abled Students:**

Schemes for providing appropriate infrastructure and other support facilities for differently-abled students should be strengthened and expanded during the 12th FYP. The UGC should provide support to institutions/Research Centres for development of suitable technologies and textual material for differently abled students. A special Inter-University Centre (IUC) may be set up to coordinate the development of such technologies and their dissemination.

**Inclusive Expansion:**

Growth in numbers is the driving force of change in the field of higher education in India. There are no signs of this growth slowing down. Indeed, there is every reason to push it further, for the GER is still well below the level that could be considered adequate or comparable to countries at similar level of economic development. The challenge of meeting this deficit is compounded by the fact that the existing capacity is distributed very unevenly.

Regional distribution of institutions is highly skewed across and within states, enrollment in public institutions is concentrated in conventional disciplines while private self-financed institutions tend to cater to market-oriented courses. Enrolment data from colleges and universities and the NSS based estimates offer slightly different readings of the total number of students in the higher education sector, but both attest to the fact that the number is increasing at the rate of about 6 per cent per annum. At current rate of growth, we should be planning for at least one million additional students every year. Assuming this annual growth, the student body will grow one and a half times by the end of the 12th Plan. Given the need to push expansion at higher rate and special measures to enhance intake in backward regions and disadvantaged social groups, it would be appropriate to plan for about one crore additional students (or 40 lakh additional seats, assuming an average two and a half year cycle for an average student) by the end of the Plan period.

**Other Measures to Enhance Equity and Inclusion:**

(a) *Utilizing Technology Facilities:* For reducing the differences between urban and rural enrolment and for enabling more women to participate in higher education, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) may be used to a much greater extent. Distance Education facilities using ICT may be of great help in improving the education scenario in the rural areas. The National Mission on Education through ICT (NMEICT) should now be used for bridging the gap between urban and rural and also between male and female populations. Conventional distance education may also be extended to home makers in the urban and rural areas with some more flexibility.

(b) *Extending Loan Facilities:* A large section of students may get an opportunity of education in private and government colleges if a liberal loan facility is available to the persons including the under-privileged students.

(c) *Community Colleges:* Community Colleges should be encouraged so as to bridge the gap in skilled human resource between the general and marginalized sections of the society.

(d) *Greater Autonomy and Flexibility:* In order to improve equity and implement the schemes effectively, the institutions may be given more flexibility so that they can take need-based decisions. Quite often the quota of ST students remains unfilled. In such cases, the colleges should think of an option of providing the same facility to other under-privileged sections. providing the same facility to other under-privileged sections.

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