

**The Emerging Issues on Access and Equity
in Higher Education:
Experiences from India**

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Access to higher education

inextricably linked with

-enhancing capacity of the system

-ensuring inclusiveness and equity

Two pronged Access Policy of the 1990s

Enhancing capacity of marketable higher education *through private providers*

Providers of higher education with public funding to address issues of *inclusiveness and equity*

Two pronged Access Policy of the 1990s

ENHANCING CAPACITY:

- Largely through private providers
- In programmes which have high market value: first degrees in medicine, engineering, business, law
- In certain states/provinces more than others

Two pronged Access Policy of the 1990s

INCLUSIVENESS AND EQUITY

- Only in institutions with public funding
- Through a quota based reservation system for constitutionally identified marginalized social groups

Capacity without Equity

- Private providers who proliferated in the 1990s were outside of regulations pertaining to affirmative action
- These institutions were run practically as “for profit” institutions, although most of them were registered as “not-for-profit” societies or trusts
- Their social base is narrow, largely urban and affluent

Equity without enhanced capacity

- GER is only about 10%
- Institutional capacity in public institutions did not expand visibly in the 1990s
- This, coupled with the Quota Based Reservation system, created some disaffection in institutions, particularly in segments such as postgraduate medical education

Trends in the present decade

- A phase of major expansion of public institutions of higher education has begun
- The stated aim of the current Five Year Plan is to push up GER from the present about 10% to about 15% in 5 years
- [How realistic is this?]

Trends in the present decade

- A visible policy shift towards a more facilitative approach to establishment of private institutions
- Many established private institutions are being granted “deemed-to-be university” status

Trends in the present decade

- A growing political consensus for widening the net of quota based affirmative action
- Constitution has been amended to make quota based affirmative action more inclusive of unrepresented social groups

Trends in the present decade

- Clear indication in the political circles to enforce quota based affirmative action even on the fast expanding private sector (which focuses largely on marketable professional programmes)
- This might invite some resistance
- It is not clear whether there would be some public subsidy for those from marginalized groups enrolled in private institutions

Some more efforts at the school level

- Without ensuring near universal success in school, equitable access to higher education is difficult to be realized
- Universal Primary Education is yet to be fully realized.
- There is a mission mode operation recently initiated for Universal Secondary Education

Equity beyond Quota

- Is there a fair chance of success for those who are admitted through quota based affirmative action?
- There is very little evidence of institutional arrangements at present for ensuring that.

Equity beyond Quota

Barriers on the path towards success:

- Language: Some of the “corrective measures” may have negative implication
- Study Skills
- Social exclusion and social distance

Equity beyond Quota

- **WANTED:** An empathetic institutional response to the need for support and mentorship
- The challenge is get out of traditional notions of student support and devising structures that go beyond classrooms and examinations

Flux!

- Higher education institutions are changing drastically in their social dynamics
- The full impact of the social engineering brought about through quota based affirmative action is yet to unfold completely
- That the scenario is going to be qualitatively different by 2020 is a safe conclusion!

Thank you!

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