

Bangladesh

Country Summary of Higher Education

Background:

Recent expansion of tertiary education sector: Tertiary education in Bangladesh comprises two categories of institutions: degree awarding universities and colleges affiliated to the National University (NU). There were only 4 universities in Bangladesh at the time of independence in 1971. All of those universities were publicly financed autonomous entities. At present, there are 29 such universities. Private universities are a relatively new phenomenon in this country. In early 1990s, private sector came forward to establish universities. Since the country experienced a spectacular growth in private universities— mostly in and around Dhaka and couple of other large cities. At present, there are more than 50 Private Universities. Number of colleges providing tertiary level education is around 1,400. Most of them offer BA (pass) education of three years' duration and only one-third of them offer B.A. (Honors) courses. All of these colleges are affiliated to the NU, meaning, NU awards the degrees. Nevertheless, access to tertiary level education in Bangladesh is still very limited. Only about 12 percent of the year twelve graduates can enter into higher education. More than 80 percent of these students are in the NU affiliated colleges. Others are in the public and private universities. Though the number of private universities increased in recent decade, the student population served by these private universities is growing rather slowly.

Tertiary education system: University Grants Commission (UGC) as the apex body of the government for higher education is responsible for funding of public universities. Though Private universities do not get any government assistance in terms of funding, they need to receive approval from the UGC to operate and award degrees. Tertiary colleges are under the NU. However, the NU's responsibility is limited to setting up curriculum and organizing and administering exams. The teachers are recruited through the nation wide competitive Public Service examination, known as BCS exam. Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for posting, transfer and promotion of teachers.

Quality Assurance Mechanism: Absence of quality assurance mechanism is a critical issue in Bangladesh. Each public university relies on its own mechanism to ensure quality. This mechanism includes curriculum reviews by the Curriculum committee, assessment of achievement and designing future action plans by the Academic Council etc. There is no provision for external review of quality for the universities. The NU is responsible for maintaining the quality at the tertiary level colleges. Nevertheless, the NU is busy mostly with arranging exams and publishing results and there is no activity to ensure quality of the affiliated colleges. The UGC carries out monitoring of private universities in a limited extent. The private universities need UGC's permission to open and operate departments. However, most of the private universities have failed to meet the minimum requirements of physical infrastructures, fulltime qualified faculty, libraries, teaching aids and other facilities to provide proper education.

Government Strategy: Bangladesh has recently developed a National Strategic Plan for Higher Education for the next 20 years. The strategic plan highlights major challenges facing the sector in Bangladesh and recommends strategies to address the issues. The strategic plan recognized, among others, limited access, weak governance and management of institutions, and low quality of higher education are the major issues which need to be addressed. The Plan proposed a number of policy reforms and interventions to be implemented in three consecutive phases. Some of the key recommendations made by the Plan are: (i) depoliticization of public universities; (ii) setting up a national search committee for selecting Vice-chancellors and other senior officials; (iii) strengthening of UGC; (iv) establishment of accreditation council; (v) enhanced support for research; and (vi) development of strategies for retaining and developing quality teaching staff.

Summary Data Table:

Table1: Basic Statistics - Tertiary Education in Bangladesh (2007)

		Unit	Public	Private	National	Total
N of Institutes		N	28	54	*	83
Enrolment	Male	N	86,922	68,086	464,904	619,912
	Female	N	29,475	20,583	290,684	340,742
	Share of Fem	%	25.3	23.2	38.5	35.5
	Total****	N	116,397	88,669	755,588	960,654
	Share	%	12.1	9.2	78.7	100.0
N of Students Per Teacher		N	17	16	10	
N of Teachers				5638		
Per Student Expenditure			37090	**	***	

* There is 1 National University in Bangladesh catering around 1500 tertiary colleges; ** Ranges from 35000 to 1,80,000 BDT

*** information is not available; **** Excludes Open University

Table2: Basic Statistics - Financing Tertiary Education in Bangladesh

	Education as a Share of GDP	Education as a Share of Total Public Expenditure	Tertiary Education as a Share of Total Public Expenditure	Tertiary Education as a Share of Total Ed Expenditure
2003-04	2.1	14.28	1.06	8.6
2004-05	2.2	10.29	0.53	5.11
2005-06	2.3	13.46	0.75	5.52

Issues:

Access	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Access is very limited with a little more than 4% of the 17-23 age cohort receives higher education
Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Low quality, particularly in some of the newer private universities and in the affiliated colleges The difficulties in recruiting, retaining and offering adequate professional development to academic staff Lack of internal and external quality assurance measures
Relevance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The absence of a national strategy for research Linkages between university and industry are weak. Lack of Information on graduate employment
Financing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The low levels of government funding and the very high percentage of that funding allocated to salaries, leading to inadequate funding for equipment, computers, books and journals and building maintenance.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The governance arrangements in four of the largest public universities and many higher education colleges fuel politicisation of academic decision making and operations.
ICT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The limitations of the national ICT infrastructure which, combined with low funding, lead to very limited access to the internet and the international academic community by staff and students.