

Draft Proceeding of
Regional Consultation Meeting, Ravenshaw University,
26 October 2009

The Task force for Higher Education held its 4th regional workshop at Ravenshaw University, Cuttack. Mr Devdas Chhotray, the Vice Chancellor of the University welcomed the guests, the Task Force Chairman Padmabhushan Prof. (Dr.) Trilochan Pradhan, Shri Debiprasad Mishra, Honourable Minister for Higher Education, Shri Madhusudan Padhi, IAS Commissioner-cum-Secretary, Higher Education Dept. and all the participants. The VC spelt out the objectives of the task force and inaugurated the regional workshop. Dr Dhanada Mishra, Chairman of HDF briefed about the thrust areas for discussion. He also described the vision of the centre and the issues that are currently plaguing higher education. He focused on discussions under four heads: Governance, Faculty, Students and Infrastructure.

Prof. Binayak Rath, VC of Utkal University presented a neat write-up on Higher Education and pointed out that he had formed a core committee with representations from all disciplines. Prof Rath emphasized on education and empowerment as keys to human development. He discussed various aspects of equity and social justice. He called for more investment in education (including female education), access to new knowledge for keeping pace with social changes. Other important inputs included setting up new universities with specialized focus, continuous upgradation of PG courses with choice based credit system, fixed tenure of principals, State Eligibility Test (similar to National Eligibility Test conducted by UGC) for teachers and reforms in examination system. He was in favour of depoliticizing the educational campuses.

Shri Debi Prasad Mishra, Honourable Minister, Higher Education pointed out the objectives of the task force and opined that there was an urgent need to completely revamp the higher education system in the state. Shri Mishra pronounced the problems that have been persisting for long time and appealed to the university authorities and private organisations to join hands to boost higher education. Mr Mishra laid emphasis on upgrading the primary and secondary education, developing infrastructure and the urgency of improving Gross Enrolment Ratio. In particular, he discussed the role of private investment in Higher Education.

Mr Bhatruhari Mahatab, MP, Cuttack, aptly reminded the participants that it was time to retrospect. He introspect and made specific recommendations keeping the needs of the state in view. He also maintained that there was urgent need to understand and identify our weakness and strengths to make our presence felt at national and international levels. Mr Mahatab placed his ideas before the academia and media to create awareness and invited extensive debate on how to reform the current scenario.

Shri Prabhat Tripathy, Hon. MLA, Banki reiterated the view expressed earlier that knowledge was the only answer to many problems in the society and thus the need to excel in higher education would pave the way for a better knowledge-based society.

Prof. T. Pradhan, Chairman of the Task Force shared his views on what could and should be done while moving on a fast track to evolve a process and a system for Higher Education. Prof. Pradhan placed his suggestions such as new unitary universities, borrowing best practices from neighbouring states and

countries, having campuses of big universities in different parts of the state, focusing on research and development, earmarking more money for fundamental research, instilling the sense of 'belongingness' and 'ownership' among the stakeholders, etc and called for thoughtful debate on these. He also suggested to have benchmarking of quality for all the institutions imparting higher education in the state.

Mr Madhusudan Padhi, commissioner-cum Secretary of Higher Education voiced his concern about the non-recruitment of teachers since 1992 resulting in an acute shortage of teaching faculty in various colleges of the state. His words of caution also included checking the unplanned growth in higher education and problems of physical infrastructure in our colleges. In the light of this Mr Padhi requested the participants to give practical and implementable suggestions and have an Odisha centric plan to solve educational problems.

Prof. Ananta Sahu, former Pincipal of erstwhile Ravenshaw College did not favour expansion of higher education and pleaded for making the existing system accountable to make things better. He suggested certain specific action points which included among others; performance based assessment of the colleges and universities, rationalization of colleges, providing incentives to colleges producing good results, punishing those misappropriating funds and scientific methods of internal assessment. He also suggested that +2 education should to be dropped from the ambit of Higher Education and be sent back to schools.

Prof. Susmit Prasad Pani of Utkal University made an exhaustive presentation on all aspects of higher education. He reinforced it with a write up.

Prof. P.L. Nayak expatiated upon all aspects of university education and suggested segregation of +2 colleges, building up of world-class institutes and presented a detailed note on the inputs in Higher Education.

Innovative ideas on fixed academic calendar, introduction of grading system, provision for credit transfer, uniform curriculum across the state, autonomy to different institutes, introduction of 5 years integrated courses, etc. Mr. Vivek Pattnaik, former Chairman of OPSC, put across his views regarding employability of students, focus on agriculture and allied areas, new demand-driven disciplines such as: International Law, financial studies and risk management and attention to humanities subjects. He suggested Odisha specific Language studies and administrative training to teachers who get into academic administration. Mr Trilochan Kanungo reinforced the suggestion of sending +2 education back to schools and having a system in place for teachers' evaluation by the students. . Mr Kanungo called for a distinct policy for the institutions, especially the private ones which have been below attainment in terms of facilities and performance.

Other suggestions which emerged from the day long discussions include:

- Establishment of a State council for Higher Education as a single window regulatory and funding authority
- Setting up of a State Open University and specialized State Universities for various areas such as: Law, Medicine, Business Management, Teachers' Education, Physical Education.
- Direct recruitment of principals and fixed tenure for the teachers
- Collegiums for recruitment of VCs

- Model statues of Universities
- Raising Entry level barrier for getting into Medical colleges ensuring quality
- Development of centres of excellence in Orissa.
- Universities to generate their revenue/fund
- Provisions of Simulated Labs (such as management games, finance lab)
- Promoting Industry-academia interface
- Allowing teachers to develop his/her own course and conduct exams
- Retired teachers to be roped in as mentors
- Sharing of resources (man and material), collaborative programmes
- Ph.D intake based on a common test
- Teacher-taught ratio to be strictly maintained, NO recruitment of contractual positions
- Focus on physical education (games and sports, Yoga education)

All Orissa College Physical Education Member of Teachers' Association interacted and furnished a report on all aspects of Physical Education in the State.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks by Shri Devdas Chhotray, Vice Chancellor.

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