

Taking Stock of Higher Education in the North-East

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About a decade ago, the north-east was backward in terms of the number of institutions of higher education. Now, besides each of its eight states having a central university and National Institute of Technology, and an Indian Institute of Technology and Indian Institute of Management in the region, a number of private universities have also been established. However, these endeavours have not dissuaded students of the north-east from going to other parts of the country for higher education. The central and state governments need to improve the infrastructure of these institutions and attract talented faculty so that there is a visible improvement in the quality of higher education.

Though it was late in realising its responsibility, the central government has taken a number of initiatives for the holistic development of north-east India. In 1971, the North Eastern Council (NEC) was established as a forum of the states in the region to coordinate economic and social development activities. In 2001, the Ministry of Development of North Eastern Region (DONER) was set up to deal with matters pertaining to the socio-economic development of the eight states.

A Forum of Vice-Chancellors of North Eastern Universities was formed in 2008 to strengthen academic activities in the region's educational institutions. The Department of Higher Education earmarks about 10% of its budget for these special category states and the development plans are centrally financed via a 90% grant and 10% loan. Unutilised funds are automatically transferred to the Non-Lapsable Central Pool of Resources (NLCPR), which is administered by the Ministry of DONER.

In this article, we assess the growth and development of higher education in the north-east region and examine the issues related to it.

Late Expansion

Higher education institutions were set up comparatively late in the region. The first college – Cotton College in Guwahati – was established in 1901. In 1947, there were only 16 colleges, a majority of them in Assam. The first university – Gauhati University – was established as a state university in Assam only in 1948 while universities in cities like Calcutta, Madras and Bombay were established in 1857, nearly a century earlier. Due to the difficult geographical conditions, Gauhati University could not attract students from far-flung areas of the region and the access of many students to higher education was restricted. The second university in the

region, a Central University – North Eastern Hill University – was set up at Shillong in Meghalaya, in 1973. Thereafter, more universities opened their doors in the 1980s and 1990s.

Currently, there are 609 universities and degree-awarding institutions in the country. Of these, 41 are in the north-east – 10 central universities, four state universities, 17 private universities, one deemed university, one Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and eight National Institutes of Technology (NITs). While there are 13 Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs) in the country awarding postgraduate diplomas, only one – IIM (Shillong) – is located in the region (Table 1, p 25).

Student Enrolment

The gross enrolment ratio (GER) in the region increased during the Eleventh Five-Year Plan period (2007-12) with the establishment of a large number of educational institutions in the public as well as the private sectors. Interestingly, the enrolment of girl students in the region is higher than the national average.

Total student enrolment in the country during the academic year 2009-10 was 1,46,24,990, out of which 60,80,373, i.e., 41.6%, were girl students. Compared to this, total enrolment in the north-east during the 2009-10 academic year was 4,71,492, of which 2,07,693, i.e., 44%, were girl students (Table 2, p 25). Meghalaya (51%) had the highest percentage of girl students while Sikkim (39%) recorded the lowest.

While student enrolment in university departments in India during 2009-10 was 19,18,833, i.e., 13.12% of the total, it was only 36,373, i.e., 7.71% of the total enrolment in the north-east. However, the total enrolment in colleges was 4,35,119 in the north-east, i.e., 92.29%, way above in percentage terms of the total enrolment in the entire country, i.e., 86.88% of the total enrolment of 1,27,06,157. Thus, it is seen that in the north-east, more students were studying in colleges than in university departments when compared with the national average.

During the Eleventh Plan, the Planning Commission identified 43 educationally backward districts (EBDs) in the north-east, which included 10 districts in

Table 1: Institutions, Locations and Years of Establishment

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|---------------------------------------|--|
| Central universities (10) | (i) North Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya (1973), (ii) Assam University, Silchar, Assam (1994), (iii) Tezpur University, Tezpur, Assam (1994), (iv) Nagaland University, Lumani, Nagaland (1994), (v) Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram (2001), (vi) Manipur University, Imphal, Manipur (1980), (vii) Tripura University, Suryamaninagar, Tripura (1987), (viii) Sikkim University, Gangtok, Sikkim (2007), (ix) Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar, Arunachal Pradesh (1984), and (x) Central Agricultural University, Imphal, Manipur (1993). |
| State universities (4) | (i) Gauhati University, Guwahati, Assam (1948), (ii) Dibrugarh University, Dibrugarh, Assam (1965), (iii) Assam Agricultural University, Jorhat, Assam (1969), and (iv) Krishna Kantia Handique State Open University, Guwahati, Assam (2005). |
| Private universities (17) | (i) Assam Don Bosco University, Azara, Assam (2009), (ii) CMJ University, Shillong, Meghalaya (2009), (iii) Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong, Meghalaya (2005), (iv) Mahatma Gandhi University, West Garo Hills, Meghalaya (2011), (v) Techno Global University, Shillong, Meghalaya (2008), (vi) University of Science & Technology, Meghalaya (2008), (vii) The Global Open University, Wokha, Nagaland (2006), (viii) Eastern Institute for Integrated Learning in Management University, Jorethang, Sikkim (2006), (ix) Sikkim Manipal University of Health, Medical and Technological Sciences, Gangtok, Sikkim (1995), (x) Vinayaka Mission Sikkim University, Tadong, East Sikkim (2008), (xi) The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, Tura, Meghalaya (2009), (xii) The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, Aizawl, Mizoram (2006), (xiii) The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, Dimapur, Nagaland (2009), (xiv) The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, Gangtok, Sikkim (2004), (xv) The Institute of Chartered Financial Analysts of India University, Tripura (2004), (xvi) Assam Down Town University, Guwahati, Assam (2009), and (xvii) University of Technology & Management, Shillong, Meghalaya (2011). |
| Deemed to be university (1) | North Eastern Regional Institute of Science and Technology, Nirjuli, Arunachal Pradesh (2005) |
| Indian Institute of Technology (1) | Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, Assam (1994) |
| National Institutes of Technology (8) | (i) National Institute of Technology, Silchar, Assam (2002), (ii) National Institute of Technology, Agartala, Tripura (2006), (iii) National Institute of Technology, Aizawl, Mizoram (2010), (iv) National Institute of Technology, Shillong, Meghalaya (2010), (v) National Institute of Technology, Lamphelpat, Manipur (2010), (vi) National Institute of Technology, Dimapur, Nagaland (2010), (vii) National Institute of Technology, Yupia, Arunachal Pradesh (2010), and (viii) National Institute of Technology, Ravangla, Sikkim (2010) |

All the central and state universities in the north-east region (except Tezpur University) have a number of affiliated colleges.

Table 2: Total Enrolment and Girl Students in Universities and Colleges during 2009-10

| State | Total Enrolment | Girls Enrolment | Percentage of Girl Students |
|-------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 15,864 | 6,504 | 41 |
| Assam | 3,10,011 | 1,33,305 | 43 |
| Manipur | 34,204 | 15,392 | 45 |
| Meghalaya | 39,536 | 20,163 | 51 |
| Mizoram | 13,223 | 6,215 | 47 |
| Nagaland | 23,185 | 10,897 | 47 |
| Sikkim | 7,778 | 3,033 | 39 |
| Tripura | 27,691 | 12,184 | 44 |
| Total | 4,71,492 | 2,07,693 | 44 |

Arunachal Pradesh, 12 in Assam, five in Meghalaya, seven in Mizoram, one in Nagaland, four in Sikkim and four in Tripura where the GER was less than the national average. As an initiative of the central government, 18 proposals for establishing model degree colleges in the identified EBDs have already been approved,

which includes six colleges affiliated to Rajiv Gandhi University in Arunachal Pradesh, and 12 colleges in Assam, of which five are affiliated to Assam University, six to Gauhati University and one to Dibrugarh University. Two proposals for establishing model degree colleges in Sikkim and four in Tripura are being processed. The central and concerned

Table 3: Accreditation Status of Universities

| State | University | Status | Rating | Year of Accreditation |
|-------------------|---|---------|--------|-----------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | (1) Rajiv Gandhi University, Itanagar | State | B | 2002 |
| Assam | (2) Dibrugarh University Dibrugarh (Re-accredited) | State | B | 2009 |
| | (3) Gauhati University, Guwahati (Re-accredited) | State | B | 2010 |
| | (4) Tezpur University, Tezpur (Re-accredited) | Central | B | 2011 |
| | (5) Assam University, Silchar | Central | B | 2008 |
| | (6) Manipur University, Imphal | State | B | 2004 |
| Meghalaya | (7) North Eastern Hill University, Shillong (Re-accredited) | Central | A | 2009 |
| Nagaland | (8) Nagaland University, Lumani, Kohima | Central | C++ | 2003 |
| Tripura | (9) Tripura University, Suryamaninagar, Tripura(W) | State | C+ | 2002 |

state governments will equally share the cost of each project, which is about Rs 8 crore. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has also agreed to provide an assistance of Rs 1 crore to each of these colleges for constructing hostels for girls.

Accreditation and Funding

Table 3 and Table 4 (p 26) show the status of universities and colleges accredited by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in the north-east. The accreditation cycle is for five years and Table 3 shows that of the 31 universities, only nine have NAAC accreditation while some of those accredited earlier have not gone for re-accreditation. The private universities are a recent phenomenon with most in the initial stages of development and none has been accredited so far. Of 813 colleges, only 253 had NAAC accreditation as on 30 November 2011 (Table 4).

Educational institutions in the north-east can be broadly divided into eight categories as far as funding is concerned.

(1) Central universities (nine) receive maintenance and development grants from the UGC.

(2) Central Agricultural University, Imphal, receives grants from the Ministry of Agriculture.

(3) State universities (two) receive maintenance grants from the state governments concerned and development grants from the UGC.

(4) Assam Agricultural University and Krishna Kantia Handique State Open University are funded by the state governments and do not receive any assistance from the UGC.

(5) One deemed university receives grants from the Ministry of Science and Technology.

(6) Central institutions like the IIT (one) and the NITs (eight) receive grants directly

Table 4: Accreditation Status of Colleges

| State | Number of Colleges Accredited |
|-------------------|-------------------------------|
| Arunachal Pradesh | 6 |
| Assam | 194 |
| Manipur | 11 |
| Meghalaya | 11 |
| Nagaland | 6 |
| Tripura | 5 |
| Sikkim | 2 |
| Mizoram | 18 |
| Total | 253 |

from the Ministry of Human Resource Development.

(7) Private universities (17) function on a self-financing basis.

(8) Colleges affiliated to the central and state universities (355) receive development grants from the UGC through its regional office in Guwahati.

In addition to a 100% maintenance grant to nine central universities in the north-east, the UGC provides financial assistance to central and state universities under the General Development Assistance Scheme and 17 Merged Schemes. Central universities in the north-east also get financial assistance under the Scheme of Fellowship for MPhil/PhD scholars who do not receive any other fellowship. The UGC also implements a number of schemes for enhancing the quality of higher education and the universities and colleges in the north-east compete with those of the rest of the country for assistance under these schemes. Some of the important schemes are the University with Potential with Excellence (UPE), College with Potential with Excellence (CPE), Special Assistance Programme (SAP) and the scheme of autonomous colleges.

The objective of the General Development Assistance Scheme is to improve and strengthen the infrastructure and basic facilities in universities to assist them to achieve at least the threshold level and promote access and enhance quality. To fulfil these objectives, the UGC provided financial assistance during the Eleventh Plan period to meet the requirements of universities for infrastructure, staff, equipment, libraries, books and journals.

The UGC allocated a development grant of Rs 9,843 crore to all the central universities in the country for the Eleventh Plan period. Of this, a grant of Rs 5,572.47 crore was released up to 31 March 2011.

It allocated a development grant of Rs 894.81 crore to the nine central universities in the north-east during the Eleventh Plan period. Of this, a grant of Rs 619.17 crore was released up to 31 March 2011. The UGC also allocated development grants of Rs 10.13 crore to Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University (both state universities) for the Eleventh Plan period. Of the above allocations, a grant of Rs 5.06 crore has been released to the universities.

During the Eleventh Plan, the UGC merged 17 schemes to provide grants to universities along with the General Development Assistance Scheme. It allocated Rs 43.28 crore under the Merged Schemes to the nine central universities in the north-east during the Eleventh Plan period, of which a grant of Rs 30.98 crore was released up to 31 March 2011. A grant of Rs 5.59 crore and Rs 6.89 crore was given to Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University respectively, out of which Rs 2.79 crore and Rs 3.44 crore was released by 31 March 2011.

Fellowships

The UGC provides fellowships to MPhil/PhD scholars in central universities who do not receive any other fellowship. Under this scheme, it provides Rs 5,000 per month to a full-time PhD scholar and Rs 3,000 per month to a full-time MPhil scholar, with a contingency grant of Rs 10,000 per annum for sciences and Rs 8,000 per annum for humanities and social sciences. The UGC allocated a grant of Rs 31 crore to the nine central universities in the north-east for the Eleventh Plan period, of which a grant of Rs 21.46 crore was released up to 31 March 2011. However, state universities do not come under the purview of this scheme.

In addition, the UGC released an additional grant of Rs 305.95 crore to the nine central universities of the north-east up to 31 March 2011 for the development of infrastructure during the Eleventh Plan period. An additional grant of Rs 0.90 crore was released to Dibrugarh University and Gauhati University. Further, a grant of Rs 0.11 crore has been provided to Dibrugarh University under the scheme of Incentives for Resource Mobilisation during the Eleventh Plan period.

The UGC, through its regional office in Guwahati, also provides development assistance to the 355 recognised colleges affiliated to central and state universities in the north-east. Apart from the General Development Assistance and grants under 14 of the 17 Merged Schemes, these colleges receive financial assistance under various other UGC schemes for which they have to compete with colleges in the rest of the country.

In addition to routine grants, the UGC also supported universities and colleges in the north-east during the Eleventh Plan under other schemes such as the Scheme of Basic Scientific Research (Rs 13.82 crore), the SAP (Rs 38 crore), the Scheme of Career Oriented Courses (Rs 9.11 crore), and the Scheme of Major and Minor Research Projects (Rs 25.60 crore).

Conclusions

About a decade ago, the north-east was backward in terms of the number of institutions of higher education. Now, besides each of its eight states having a central university and NIT, a number of private universities have also been established. An IIM and an IIT have been set up in Shillong (Meghalaya) and Guwahati (Assam), respectively. As the result of a major initiative taken by the central government, the flow of funds from the UGC to universities and colleges has increased and faculties of engineering and management have been recruited for all the central universities in the north-east resulting in increased access to higher education. The NEC, DONER and Forum of the Vice-Chancellors of the North-East Region have given a fillip to higher education in the region.

However, these endeavours have not dissuaded students of the north-east from going to other parts of the country for higher education for reasons such as different socio-economic conditions, local disturbances and the lack of industrialisation in the north-east that translates into poor campus placement opportunities.

Even though the north-east region is politically an integral part of India, there is a need for more social and cultural integration. Education, particularly higher education, can play an important role in achieving this objective. While there is a

general trend of students of the north-east going to other parts of the country, students from other parts of India seldom join institutions in the north-east. Even IIT, Guwahati and IIM Shillong are generally the last choices of students from other parts of the country.

The north-east has seen a large number of institutions coming up in the last decade. The central and state governments now need to improve the infrastructure of these institutions and attract talented faculty so that there is a visible improvement in the quality of

higher education. This will persuade students not only of the region to enrol in institutions nearby but also attract students from other parts of the country. The institutions should hire more faculty from other parts of the country and student tours can be arranged from both sides. The central government should not only maintain its special focus on the development of higher education in the north-east, it should also consider launching separate schemes exclusively for the universities and colleges there in the national interest.

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