

Need for Inclusive Growth in Higher Education of India

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Introduction

Inclusive growth is the modern day's *mantra* of development. Inclusive growth is defined as a concept that advances equitable opportunities to every section of the society. The concept is becoming increasingly important against a background of widening inequalities in the society which are associated with globalisation and related economic reform policies. For a long time, the term 'equity' has been popular in policy discourses; 'Growth with distribution', 'growth with equity', 'growth with human face', 'integrating growth with development' and 'pro-poor growth' have been some of the important and popular slogans in development policy discourses. Now, these terms are being replaced by 'inclusive growth'. Inclusive growth might mean either progression in our thinking and approach (we already achieved equity and we may have to go beyond), as Abhijit Sen (2010) felt, or retrogression as equity and other terms described above are viewed as representing much larger strategies of development and as concepts more desirable than inclusiveness, which could be narrowly interpreted as ensuring representation of every group of population, but not necessarily equal or equitable representation. However, it is widely and generally felt that inclusive growth might mean all of these and much more. The Commission on Growth and Development (2008) defines inclusiveness as a concept that encompasses equity, equality of opportunity, and protection of the people mainly the weaker sections in market and employment transitions; it is an essential ingredient of any successful growth strategy. It is a growth strategy 'with emphasis not only on the distribution of economic gains but also on the security, vulnerability, empowerment, and sense of full participation that people may enjoy in social life' (World Bank, 2006).

Inclusive growth refers to both the pace and the pattern/distribution of growth, which are considered interlinked and, therefore, need to be addressed together. The inclusive growth approach takes a longer-term perspective and is supposed to be inherently sustainable. This is distinct from the mechanism of income distribution schemes which can, in the short run, reduce the inequalities between the poorest and the richest, but the reduction in inequalities might not be sustainable over a long period (Lanchovichina and Lundstrom, 2009). It is a growth process which yields broad-based benefits and ensures equality of opportunity for all (Planning Commission, 2007). It is regarded as 'the only sure means for correcting the deeply ingrained regional imbalances, inequities and for consolidating economic gains' (World Bank, 2006).

Higher education in India expanded at a very fast rate during the last quarter century or so. Does the rapid expansion automatically lead to reduction in inequities in education? While some strongly argue that the benefits of expansion have percolated to the lower strata of the society, some (e.g., Deshpande, 2006) view that higher education is inherently an exclusive field and hence its elitism is an integral aspect of its nature; and that modes of exclusion are built into its fundamental structure as a matter of principle. Hence, it cannot be expected that growth in higher education will necessarily percolate to the downtrodden strata of the society. Some (Raftery and Hout, 1993) even argue that the principle of ‘maximally maintained inequality’ would hold according to which educational inequality remains unchanged until enrolment ratio at a given level reaches the saturation point, estimated at around 95 per cent. Many also feel that inequalities would be higher at lower levels of education, and they become less at higher levels of education, as only the more able would survive up to higher level of education. However, one might note higher degree of inequalities in higher education as the costs of participation in higher education are much higher than costs of school education.

How inclusive is higher education in India? The National Sample Surveys (NSS) provide some rich empirical data that help in unravelling some of these dimensions of growth and inequalities in higher education in India. Based on an analysis of data of several rounds of the NSS over the period 1983 to 2009–10 [38th (1983), 43rd (1987–88), 50th (1993–94), 55th (1999–2000), 61st (2004–05), 64th (2007–08), 66th (2009–10) rounds; and also the special rounds devoted to education, namely, 42nd, 52nd and 64th rounds], supplemented by official statistics of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) and University Grants Commission (UGC) and other studies that analysed these data and even provided estimates, growth and inequalities in higher education are examined here. For the period 1983–84 to 2004–05, the estimates on different indicators used in this article are drawn from Azam and Blom (2009),¹ Dubey (2008), Raju (2008), Sinha and Srivastava (2008) and Srivastava and Sinha (2008).² Gross enrolment ratios, transition rates and higher education attainments are drawn from Azam and Blom (2009); estimates on eligible enrolment ratios and net enrolment ratios are drawn from Raju (2008); other estimates for 2005–05 and for earlier years are drawn from other sources mentioned above. Comparable estimates are made by the present author for 2007–08 and 2009–10 using NSS data of the concerned rounds.

Looking at the two dimensions of inclusive growth that are described above—the absolute and relative—the article examines the evidence on a few select indicators of higher education development, and tries to answer the question, ‘How inclusive is higher education in India?’ Inequalities in education are examined by several characteristics, such as gender, caste, religion, economic conditions and between several regions. Inequalities in education are often examined by social groups—by caste (scheduled caste (SC), scheduled tribes (ST), other backward castes (OBCs) and non-scheduled/non-backward castes) and by religion (Hindus, Muslims, Christians and others) and by gender—between women and men. These dimensions are widely considered as important inequalities that need to be addressed and accordingly receive serious attention of the policy makers. Other equally, if not more, important dimensions

of inequalities refer to interstate ine-qualities and inequalities between rural and urban population, and inequalities by economic groups—between the rich and the poor. These categories are not mutu-ally exclusive; the principal dimensions of inequalities often overlap; they even mutually reinforce each other. For example, SC population may be predominantly economically poor; the relatively economically poor may be living in rural areas; ST population may be predominantly living in rural areas; gender categorisation cuts across all other categories; and so on. Further, SCs may be generally worse off; but in some states they may be much better off than non-scheduled popula-tion. As Shariff and Sharma (2003) have shown, a dalit or Muslim in south India, though from the most disadvantaged among communities, would have better access to higher education than even upper caste Hindus in many other regions. It is widely recognised that economic and social factors such as class, gender or race, that contribute to inequalities, do not function in isolation but are inter-linked; and the ‘mutual reinforcement of inequalities’ (Drèze and Sen, 2013, p. 214) get further strengthened with addition of every new dimension of ine-quality, which of course is uneven across the whole country, the degree of reinforcement being higher in northern regions than in other parts of India. Hence in order to understand one form of inequality, other forms of inequalities involved should also be simultaneously taken into consideration. The manner in which one source of inequality functioned had a direct or indirect bearing on how the other sources fashioned inequality (Sen, 2008). Acknowledging all this, the article examines the extent of inequalities in education between different broad social, gender, regional and economic groups of population and finds out which groups improved/worsened in terms of inequalities.⁴

Equity in higher education does not only mean providing entry for the disad-vantaged sections into higher education institutions; it is also about their continu-ation in higher education and successful completion of higher education. Equity in labour market outcomes—employment and earnings—is yet another impor-tant issue.⁵ Ignoring these labour market dimensions, growth and inequalities in higher education are examined here considering two important indicators—gross enrolment ratios and higher education attainments. Available estimates for a few years drawn from others’ studies on net enrolment ratios, eligible enrolment ratios and transition rates are also referred to in this context. at the time of independence. Today, about 40 per cent of the students in higher education are women, and about one-third are from weaker socio-economic strata of the society. The growth in higher education also made a significant contribu-tion to socio-economic and political development of the nation. Its contribution in strengthening democracy and ensuring political stability is also significant.

However, the growth in higher education has not been problem-free, nor is it even. Certain aspects of the growth are quite marked. But for the first two decades of development planning in India, the growth rates in higher education have been modest until the beginning of the last decade of the last century. The rate of growth in enrolments was nearly doubled between 1990–91 and 2000–11. In fact, much of the growth has taken place between 1995–96 and 2010–11. The sudden rise in demand for

higher education caused setting up of new colleges and universities. The rates of growth in a number of colleges and universities have doubled in the present decade compared to the previous decade. Most of the new institutions that came up during the past two decades have been in the private sector, which itself has an effect on equitable access to higher education. The growth in the enrolments experienced in the earlier decade could not be sustained in the present decade. Growth in teachers has never kept pace with the growth in enrolments, resulting in a steady increase in pupil–teacher ratios in higher education, which has its own effect on the instructional process and the overall quality of higher education. Further, except for the decade of 1960–61 to 1970–71, the growth in teachers has been below the rate of growth of number of colleges and universities. Similarly, except for the two recent decades, growth in number of higher education institutions—universities and colleges—has been below the growth in enrolments also, reducing the overall accessibility of higher education. However, during the present decade, a large number of colleges and universities were set up, and the rate of growth far exceeded the rate of growth in enrolments and teachers. But that the number of teachers has not proportionately increased suggests that average number of teachers per university/college has declined. Growth in public expenditure has also not kept with pace with growth in student numbers or with the growth in the number of higher education institutions, resulting in sparse distribution of financial and physical resources.

Further, the growth has been uneven across different social and economic groups of population, between rural and urban regions and between several states. Though some progress has been made, inequalities in higher education are persistently high.

Estimates on a slightly different indicator, transition rates are also worth examining. Generally, transition rates are defined as enrolments in the first year of higher education as a proportion of enrolments in the final year of school level education. Constrained by unavailability of required data, Azam and Blom (2009) have redefined transition rate as total population in the age group 18–23 who either attend or have completed higher education as a proportion of population in the age group 18–23 who have completed higher secondary education. This is, thus, not confined to fresh entrants in higher education in the numerator or to just who were in the final grade of secondary education in the last year in the denominator; it includes a small part of the stock of school/higher education graduates. The transition rate thus defined is estimated to be fairly high, higher than eligible enrolment ratio. This ratio was 67.4 per cent in 1993–94, which increased to 71 per cent by 2004–05, after a marginal decline to 65.2 per cent in 1999–2000. These rates suggest that a high proportion like 70 per cent of the high school graduates take admission in higher education institutions. This is seemingly very high. A more accurate estimate is made here based on enrolment of age 18 enrolled in first grade of higher education as a proportion of total population in the age group of 18–23 who have completed higher secondary education. This is better than the way Azam and Blom (2009) have measured, but this is also not perfect (see Tilak and Biswal, 2013). But given the constraints on data,

An equally, if not more, important problem of higher education in India refers to the quality of education. It is widely held that though there are a few pockets of excellence, many institutions of higher education in India are indeed substandard in their quality, producing unemployable graduates. The fact that no Indian higher education institution figures among the top 200 in global rankings of universities is also widely noted (Tilak, 2014). The need to improve the quality of infrastructure and teachers in higher education, and thereby, the quality of the graduates is obvious.

While the above figures refer to all groups of population on average, there are wide differences between several groups; certain groups of population fare much worse than others.

On the whole, the quantity and quality of the system of higher education in India reflected in huge numbers are highly inadequate for rapid economic growth, to face global challenges, to reap gains from policies of globalisation and international competition, for reducing inequalities—regional, social and economic—for sustainable high levels of human development and for building an equitable system of higher education that ensures opportunities for all and helps in the creation of a knowledge society.

Objectives of the Study

1. To explain the status of Higher Education in India
2. To Discuss the need for Inclusive Growth in Higher Education of India

Persistence of Inequalities in Access to Higher Education

Probably the most important problem faced by the higher education system in India is the persistence of inequalities in access to higher education. Inequalities in access to higher education result in socio-economic inequalities in the society which, in turn, accentuate inequalities in education. In fact, it is a cyclic chain of inequalities: inequalities in access to higher education result in inequities in access to labour market information, which result in inequalities in employment and participation in labour market, resulting in inequalities in earnings contributing in turn to socio-economic and political inequalities. The socio-economic and political inequalities again are translated into the education sector, resulting in inequalities in education. Inequalities in access to education reflect loss in individual as well as social welfare. That economic returns to investment in education of the weaker sections are estimated to be higher than returns to their counterparts (Tilak, 1987), implies that inequalities in education would cause huge losses in national output; and that inclusive strategies that contribute to equity should be viewed favourably not only from the point of view of social justice but also even in terms of economic well-being, as the total equity gains might surpass the losses in efficiency, if any (Patnaik, 2012).

Gender Inequalities in Higher Education

One of the most important dimensions of inequality is between men and women. Women are generally found to be lagging behind men in every sector including higher education in India as in many countries, though reverse trends could be observed of late in a good number of countries.

During the post-independence period, there is a significant improvement in women's participation in higher education. Women constitute 43 per cent of the total enrolments in higher education in 2011–12, while there were only 14 women per 100 men in higher education in 1950–51, according to the available UGC statistics (UGC, 2013). Thus, compared to the earlier decades, this marks a significant improvement. While this 43 per cent is an all-India average across all disciplines of study, there are wide variations between different states and also across disciplines. Women students constitute 11 per cent in engineering/technology, 4 per cent in medicine and less than 5 per cent in education. Nevertheless, the overall level of participation of women in higher education has improved remarkably and the current overall level is quite impressive. Further, research

studies (for example, Basant and Sen 2012) have also shown that 'after controlling for other factors, the chances of women participating in higher education are higher than that of men' meaning the generally observed inequalities by gender in higher education need to be interpreted with caution.

We have also concentrated on two important indicators on higher education: gross enrolment ratios (net and eligible enrolment ratios, and transition rates are also referred to) and higher education attainment—percentage of adult population having completed higher education, while examining whether inequalities in higher education have increased or declined overtime. But for minor differences, evidence on all indicators yields similar conclusions and somewhat consistent patterns can be observed in terms of both growth and inequalities. The article also throws light on which groups have improved most over the years in their higher education status and inequalities between which groups have declined or increased. However, this article concentrated on formal access to higher education, and has not examined dimensions relating to substantive access, except examining transition rates, and rates of Higher Education Attainment, which capture partly some of these aspects.

From the long array of tables and graphs presented above, the following can be described as the main features and trends in growth and inequality in higher education in India.

There has been a rapid growth in higher education in India. But the experienced growth is inadequate. The overall gross enrolment ratio is around 21 per cent in 2012–13, which is much less than the world average and even the average of the developing countries. It is also less than what is needed for sustainable high economic growth, and for transforming India into a 'knowledge economy' and an advanced or semi-advanced society. It may also be reiterated that not just higher education, but quality higher education is important.

The eligible enrolment ratios and also the transition rates are found to be reasonably high, but there is scope for improvement in these ratios as well. The eligible enrolment ratio was about 50 per cent, while the transition rates were about 70 per cent, both in 2004–05. Transition rates that are referred here are the estimates made by Azam and Blom (2009) using a definition, which is not strictly in conformity with the standard definition used in the literature on educational planning. A more reliable estimate of transition rate seems to be only around 20 per cent. The seemingly high eligible enrolment rates, and wide differences between estimates of transition rates based on alternative definitions, may suggest the need for proper definitions and measurement of these ratios.

In terms of the stock of the higher educated people in the country—the higher education attainment rate, the absolute levels achieved are low, and the progress made over the years is also low. Overall, only 8 per cent of the adult population (age group: 15–64) had completed levels of higher education in India in 2009–10. Many advanced countries have above 40 per cent of their adult (25–64) population with higher education.

Growth in higher education does not seem to have resulted in reduction in inequalities in a significant way. Every group of population has registered modest to significant levels of progress in case of enrolment ratios and the rate of higher education attainment; but inequalities in higher education seem to be persisting—by social groups (caste and religion), by gender, by region (rural and urban) and between the rich and the poor. In case of both gross enrolment ratio and higher education attainment, the direction of the progress—increase/decrease in inequalities is similar.

Comparison of the rates of higher education attainment for the population of the age group 25–34 with that corresponding to the population of 15–64 may indicate changes over generations to some extent. Comparable estimates for 2004–05 show that out of the younger population (25–34), a higher proportion of people had higher education compared to the total active adult (15–64) population (Table 11). This is true with respect to every subgroup of the population. That younger age group has higher rates of higher education attainment than the total adult population would suggest improvement over the years for all groups of population. It is also clear that inequality between different groups tends to decline, though not very significantly.

Despite the overall rapid growth in higher education, inequalities seem to be persisting. The reasons, inter alia, could be that much of the growth in higher education has been in the private sector which does not concern itself with inequalities. Second, the reduction in public subsidies and high rates of cost recovery may also account for slow improvement in inequalities. Moreover, it may be observed that even when we noted improvement, it is only with respect to simple or formal access, but not substantive access, provision of which requires a variety of innovative measures that enable the weaker sections to fully and meaningfully benefit from the state policies and provisions. The article has not sufficiently dealt with this dimension.

Table 1. Higher Education Attainment in India, 2004–05 Comparisons of Different Age Groups

	15–64	25–34		15–64	25–34
All	5.91	8.70			
Male	7.50	11.00	Hindus	6.20	9.20
Female	4.20	6.60	Muslims	3.00	4.20
<i>Inequality (M/F)</i>	1.786	1.667	Christians	7.70	10.90
Rural	2.70	4.40	Others	8.80	12.80
Urban	14.40	20.00	<i>Inequality:</i> Hindu/Muslim	0.484	0.457
<i>Inequality (U/R)</i>	5.333	4.545	Q1	0.89	1.50
SC	2.38	3.90	Q2	1.91	3.30
ST	1.94	2.60	Q3	3.37	5.60
Non-scheduled	7.29	10.70	Q4	6.16	10.10
<i>Inequality Non-S/SC</i>	3.063	2.744	Q5	14.63	23.00
<i>Inequality: Non-S/ST</i>	3.758	4.115	<i>Inequality: Q5/Q1</i>	16.438	15.333

Source: Based on Azam and Blom (2009).

Who Improved Most?

According to the relative definition of inclusive growth that we described in the first section, inclusive growth requires that not only all sections of the society improve over the years but also the rate of improvement has to be faster in case of weaker sections than their counterparts. We have noted that all sections of the society have improved their relative status with respect to both gross enrolment ratio in higher education and higher education attainment over the years.

Simple rates of growth in the gross enrolment ratio and in higher education attainment between 1983–84 and 2009–10 are estimated here (Table 12). They are simply based on the figures relating to the base and final years. They are also simple average rates of growth. The growth of any particular group of population is not smooth during the period.

First, with respect to gross enrolment ratio, women improved at a rate of growth of 12.2 per cent per annum compared to men who experienced a rate of growth of only 5.7 per cent during the same period. Among the different caste groups, OBC had experienced the highest rate of growth between 1999–2000 and 2009–10 (Table 12). Keeping the OBCs aside for a moment, one can find that SC and ST had a very impressive growth of 12–15 per cent compared to a mere 3 per cent growth among non-scheduled population. There are no significant differences in rates of growth in enrolment ratios among Muslims and Hindus. Both groups progressed at a rate of growth of about 9 per cent, Muslims experiencing marginally a higher rate of growth. Similarly, rural population has registered a very higher rate of growth compared to urban population. In a sense, these rates of growth suggest that there has been pro-poor growth, the rates of growth of marginalised sections being higher than their counterparts. The same cannot be stated about the economic groups of population. The third quintile has progressed faster than the other quintiles. The middle 60 per cent of the population experienced higher rates of growth than the bottom and even the richest quintile. We find more or less a similar pattern with respect to rate of growth in higher education attainment, a stock variable. Except the economically weaker sections, and marginalised religious groups, all other weaker sections of the society, viz., women, SCs and STs and rural population had registered higher rates of growth than their respective counterparts. Among the religious groups, Hindus and Christians are much ahead of all others; and Muslims are ahead of 'other' religions. More notable exception is by economic groups of population. While the middle quintile had experienced the highest rates of growth in higher education attainment, the bottom quintile was the least. The top quintile enjoyed a rate of growth of above 10 per cent between 1993–94 and 2009–10 compared to about 5 per cent by the bottom quintile, showing widening of inequalities between the poorest and the richest.

Table 2. Who Improved Most? Simple Rate of Growth Per Year (%) (1983–84 to 2009–10)

	Gross Enrolment Ratio	Higher Education Attainment
<i>All</i>	7.71	8.21
<i>Gender</i>		
Women	12.21	13.46
Men	5.70	6.44
<i>Caste</i>		
SC	11.55	13.94
ST	15.05	14.97
OBC*	21.66	–
Non-scheduled**	2.96	4.89
<i>Religion</i>		
Muslims	9.09	6.59
Hindus	8.55	8.88
Christians	3.24	8.48
Others	6.33	5.50
<i>Regional</i>		
Rural	12.24	10.00
Urban	4.52	6.08
<i>Economic Groups (1993–94 to 2009–10)</i>		
Q1	9.82	5.16
Q2	10.35	5.77
Q3	13.99	22.34
Q4	10.67	5.24
Q5	8.62	10.30

Notes: *1999–2000 to 2009–10. **1983–84 to 2004–05 for GER.

Thus, based on both indicators—the gross enrolment ratio and higher education attainment—we note that the economically weaker sections have not progressed much, nor the inequality between the bottom and top quintiles reduced significantly. Muslims are yet to catch up significantly with Christians and Hindus.

The growth in higher education has been in favour of the other weaker sections, but not as much the economically weaker sections.

That in general the weaker sections experienced higher rates of growth than non-weaker sections both in case of gross enrolment ratio and in case of higher education attainment should not be taken as if convergence is taking place rapidly. The extent of inequalities is still very high, as already noted.

What Are the Implications?

As noted earlier, the various groups that we considered for analysing growth and inequalities are not mutually exclusive. The extent of inequalities would be very sharp and clear, when sub-categories are also considered by gender, caste/religion, economic levels and regions. For example, the rate of higher education attainment varies between 2.5 per cent in rural areas and 14 per cent in urban areas in 2004–05. But the corresponding proportion is infinitesimally small—0.03 per cent among the poorest population living in rural areas, while it is 52 per cent among the richest population in urban areas. The difference would be much bigger if we consider SC or ST among the poorest quintile living in rural areas vis-à-vis the non-scheduled population of the top expenditure quintile living in urban areas. In other words, no broad category like SCs, or rural population or women, is a homogeneous category.

The Constitution provides for reservations for SCs/STs and OBCs in student admissions and also in recruitment of faculty in higher education institutions.

These affirmative policies formulated considering the broader social situation, are an important instrument not just formal equality, but *substantive* equality and they became very controversial. Quite a few studies (for example, Basant and Sen, 2006; Sundram, 2006) have concluded that there was no need for extension of reservations to ‘other’ backward castes. Many also raised the question: Do the benefits of affirmative action, if any, percolate to the most downtrodden groups, or are they limited to the ‘creamy layers’ of the dalit and adivasi populations?

The illegitimate use of the affirmative action programmes by upper-income dalit and adivasi families remains a running theme in the Indian discourse on affirmative action. Basant and Sen (2012) argue in favour of parental education as a criterion for affirmative action in place of caste and religion. Ideally, as Roemer

(1998) argues, policies may aim at distribution of education that varies along with individual’s level of effort instead of family background and other characteristics for which they cannot be held responsible. Family background and other characteristics include not only social but also economic factors. Mehta and Hasan

(2006) find that lower completion rates at secondary level of education and economic status are more important factors that need to be addressed in this context than providing reservations based on social identity. Some (for example, Higham and Shah, 2013) have argued that affirmative action policies in India have been conceived as a ‘contradictory resource’ — while on one hand, weaker sections benefit from these policies in securing admission in schools, they nevertheless do not address the deep-seated and historical inequalities; after all the weaker sections, even through these policies, do not necessarily get admission in high quality institutions; besides they result in a division amongst the weaker sections between those who benefit from these policies and those who do not, and remain locked in the vicious circle of exclusion. On the whole, it is widely felt that given the structural nature of caste, religion, ethnicity and class inequalities in contemporary India, the extent to which affirmative action policies can fundamentally redress highly structured patterns of inequality remains doubtful (Syed et al., 2013, p. 715). All this calls for a different approach to policies relating to targeting, focusing not only on formal access, but also to ensure substantive access. In general, it is important to see that these policies do not allow either ‘unfair inclusions’ or ‘unfair exclusions’, to use Sen’s (2000) terminology.

In public discourses, the issue of inequality is equated to the problems of women and those of SCs, STs and OBCs. Having received some serious attention of the policy makers during the post-independence period, inequalities by gender and inequalities by caste have declined somewhat significantly, and some modest to impressive progress could be noted. Recently, inequity experienced by the religious minorities particularly Muslims, has begun to receive attention. Other variants of inequality are yet to receive serious public attention. Of all, inequalities by economic groups of population have not received as much attention as they should have. As a result, inequalities between rich and the poor seem to have not declined but increased over the years. Inequalities in education between economic groups of population cut across religious, caste and gender groups, and even regions, and hence they deserve serious attention. But space in policy discourses is taken away by caste and gender inequalities. Promotion of caste- and gender-based equality should not entail compromising and curtailing the equality of other underprivileged groups to augment access to higher education. Regional inequalities are still very large and although some attention has been paid to this issue in the past, it deserves more attention than what is paid. It is important to pay serious attention to reducing inequalities in access to higher education between different income groups of population.

Unequal family incomes translate into unequal access to higher education. A major reason for low participation of low-income groups in higher education is lack of finances to meet household costs of higher education or the need to supplement the household income by work. Literature is also abundant that shows a strong correlation between participation in higher education and students’ family background that include socio-economic factors. Hence, it is necessary to address the socio-economic factors.

While there are some schemes/subsidies for the socially backward sections and also for women, no such schemes are offered to rural youth, and to economically weaker sections. General public subsidies and specific, targeted subsidies are needed. Sound and well thought out measures are required to reduce the exclusive nature of higher education.

Among the reasons for students dropping out or discontinuing studies after senior secondary education, economic factors figure to be the most important ones, accounting for about two-thirds of all the factors (45 per cent was accounted by 'to supplement household income' and another 20 per cent 'to attend to domestic chores'). This indicates the need to ease economic constraints of the poor households. Further, only a tiny fraction (1.2 per cent) accounts for the factor, 'institution too far'. If this is the case, policies of expansion of higher education, particularly setting up of a large number of colleges and universities may have to be re-examined.

In fact, quite interestingly, the eligible enrolment ratios—which are around 50 per cent for every social group and regional group—suggest that once the students graduate from secondary education, all have more or less equal chances of getting into higher education institutions. This also stresses the need to reduce inequalities in access to secondary education to improve participation in higher education. Large expansion of higher education—in terms of increasing enrolment ratios (it is envisaged to increase the gross enrolment ratio to the level of 30 per cent by 2030)—is not possible, unless school education, particularly secondary education is expanded and strengthened in such a way that the transition rates are further raised. It is not adequate to focus on admissions into higher education. Effective measures are needed to ensure continuation of students admitted in higher education and they complete the studies with high levels of attainment. Strong support mechanisms are to be devised for all weaker sections in this regard.

Lastly, it may be noted that goals of inclusive growth in higher education contradict with some of the strategies that are being adopted for the growth in higher education. Heavy reliance on private sector and cost recovery measures may not help in ensuring inclusive growth in higher education; they may actually work in negative direction. Sustainable inclusive growth may be possible only with strong and vibrant public higher education systems with liberal public funding.

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