

The Bangladesh Open University

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In analysing Human Resource Development (HRD) it is important that demographic changes, perception and expectation of society and socio-economic development needs are given due consideration. In diagnosing the future manpower needs, analysis of the match between the people trained and the demands of the labour market and economy is necessary.

Such a diagnostic study compiled by available statistics in the Background Paper for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Ministry of Education, government of Bangladesh, gives a clear picture of the inadequacy of the existing educational facilities. Tremendous gaps exist in the demand and supply of human resource in relation to the labour market needs. Thus the government policy is to provide educational facilities to meet the needs of the country. Therefore, the main objective of the proposed Bangladesh Open University (BOU) will be to provide flexible and need based education to those who do not have the opportunity of entering the existing system.

The Bangladesh Open University (BOU) will be an innovative type of institution and will be a combination of various aspects of a conventional University and an industry. The two major decision-making bodies will be the Board of Governors and the Academic Council. The Chief Executive Officer of the University will be the Vice-Chancellor who will be assisted by three Pro-Vice Chancellors. The Directors under them will head various Divisions and Schools. The Divisions will be major units such as Administration, Admission and Examination, Finance and Accounts, Student Support Services, Media, Computers and others. The Academic Units called Schools will be responsible for the preparation of academic programmes. Most of the programmes will be interdisciplinary, professional and job-oriented in nature which will not require discipline-based departments. The university may establish nine or more Schools of Studies such as School of Education, School of Management, School of Agriculture and Rural Development, School of Engineering and Technology School of Social Science, Women's Affairs and others.

Academic Programmes

It is envisaged that during the first two years, the University will undertake preparatory work for launching the programmes. The following programmes will be launched from the third, fourth and fifth years subject to addition and alteration. In the beginning the University intends

to launch Certificate in Mass Education, B.Ed., C.Ed. Diploma in Management, Certificates in Bangla and English Language Proficiency, Degree in Nursing, Diploma in Agriculture Extension, Family Planning, Computer Application, Electrical Engineering and others. Subsequently the university will launch B.A., B.Com. Certificate in Electrical Appliances and other subjects. The time frame for the implementation of various programmes is subject to flexibility and adjustments according to the prevailing situation. One of the important functions of the University will include development of course materials consisting of self-learning printed material, audio and video cassettes. Printed matter will comprise the major medium of instruction. The examination system will include continuous assessment and terminal examination with weightage of 30 per cent and 70 per cent respectively and will follow a grading system. The academic sessions, nature of degrees, diplomas and certificates of BOU will differ from those offered by the present universities. So in matters of accreditation and equivalency of degrees, diplomas, certificates and other related matters it has been suggested that the University Grants Commission and the Ministry of Education should take necessary measures so that such matters do not pose problems.

In the multi-media system of BOU audio/video cassettes, radio and TV broadcasting will be used as supplementary components. It has been estimated that on an average two audio of 15 min. each and one video of 25 min. duration will be used for each five credit course and play-back facilities provided at all study centres. This will be reinforced by broadcasting. Initially the broadcasting requirements of BOU will be half an hour on alternate days on radio and TV. This will gradually increase by the fifth year to 30 minutes every day including repeat broadcasts which will be on air early in the morning.

The utilisation of computer technology will be implemented in two phases. In the first phase PC-AT's may be installed at specific offices of the university as "stand alone work station with multi-use facilities" (Draft Final Report 1991). In the second phase it will be possible to have computer aided instruction and computer assisted learning. Highly sophisticated electronic media like tele-conferencing, taletex videotex have not been seen as feasible in Bangladesh.

Print Matter. Due to resource constraints and lack of high technologic-

al skill printed course material will be the most important medium in the teaching learning process. Consequently, emphasis will be placed on the print media for low cost education. For preparation and publication of the course materials the BOU will have to establish modern technological innovation of Desk Top Publishing (DTP) which will produce low cost course materials. Publication and distribution of course materials will be a massive task involving high grade professionalism and effective implementation. The output may be distributed to private sectors for printing and binding. The distribution facilities of BOU needs to be of an excellent quality since timely availability of course materials is essential. The main distributing agency will be the postal system but computerising BOU's warehouses and distribution unit is imperative for prompt, reliable and fool-proof distributional mechanism.

Competent and highly organised student support services is a major component for effective functioning of an Open University. The main aspects of the Student Support Services will include creation of regional centres, study centres, guidance, counselling, library facilities, providing student motivation and evaluation of assignments. Providing adequate motivation to the students is important as it helps greatly in the reduction of dropouts and enhancement in the quality of education especially when special emphasis will be given to the disadvantaged section of society.

Staff Development will form one of the most important components as adequate training is necessary for its successful functioning. Foreign and in-country training facilities will be made available to planners, managers, professionals, engineers, counsellors and researchers. Technical and academic assistance will be taken from relevant international organisation. Thus foreign consultants will be involved in providing technical and intellectual expertise.

The total cost of the project will be around US \$43.10 million which is equivalent to Tk. 1,602.93 million. This is, at this juncture, a preliminary estimate as stated in the Final Draft Report. The main campus will include about 16 hectares and the cost of the physical infrastructure is estimated to be about US \$9.27 million. Equipment and furniture will comprise 8 per cent of the base cost, media 8 per cent, staff development 6 per cent, consulting services 12 per cent, research and studies 1 per cent and project implementation 35 per cent. It may be mentioned here that these cost items are subject to

alterations and the high consulting services of 12 per cent mentioned above is open to discussion and revision.

It has been estimated that the output of the project will be quite large in number. As mentioned earlier, the academic programmes will be offered from the third year. About 36,000 primary and secondary level teachers will undergo training in the subsequent three years. It will provide programmes for approximately 1,512,000 students at the same level annually. Besides providing training to 9,000 strong personnel for Mass Education Programme it will provide trainings, certificates and diplomas and degrees to 23,000 participants in various disciplines like nursing, SSC level education, management, health and family planning, disaster management, language proficiency and others.

The Asian Development Bank statement says that the success of the Bangladesh Institute for Distance Education (BIDE) prompted the Government to approach the Bank in 1989 (ADB) to seek technical assistance for extending distance education by establishing an Open University. Thus the main issue in developing the project concept was to find a viable way to redress the human resource needs of the country through the Open University system by using available technology. The project is at present in its early stage and may undergo further modification.

It is an accepted fact that the education achievements of LDC countries play a major contribution to the process of development. Although education is an investment in human capital and Open University to a great extent addresses the equity-efficiency problem our expectations are high. So for the BOU to be successful serious endeavour must be made to see that the various components are implemented and coordinated effectively. Concerted effort needs to be made in matters relating to research, training, appropriate technical expertise, innovative strategy and determination of priorities. One must be aware of the significance of the complexity of the administrative and academic work involved. In trying to establish the limits of feasibility due reflection needs to be given to the success of its innovative nature and its capacity to transfer part of its institutional power to the less privileged section of society for socioeconomic development. A feasible and meaningful project of this nature must pay adequate importance to both these aspects.