

**HIGHER EDUCATION INNOVATION AND RESEARCH APPLICATIONS (HEIRA)
CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY, BANGALORE
THE FORD FOUNDATION, NEW DELHI**

**The Pathways to Higher Education Programme (2009 -13)
South Asia Conference on Higher Education
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Higher education in India has undergone several drastic changes in the last few decades with the traditional notion of the university being gradually replaced by alternative spaces and methods of teaching and learning. Increased access to higher education by hitherto marginalized students has resulted in a socially diverse classroom, thus posing new challenges for pedagogy. While policy reforms in the last two decades have increasingly focused on the issue of access to education, the *quality of access* in terms of institutional measures to help students face the challenges of mainstream education still remains an issue of concern. Linguistic barriers and the role of technology in education have emerged as important gap areas that institutions will need to address. More importantly, making knowledge relevant and contextual to students coming from diverse backgrounds still remains a challenge, one that calls for a rethinking of both curriculum and teaching methods. Building research capacity at the undergraduate level through training in critical/analytical skills, developing resources in regional languages and facilitating community engagement in higher education are other significant concerns. There are but some aspects of the larger debate on making higher education more inclusive and thereby a means for social transformation and sustainable growth.

The **Pathways to Higher Education programme (2009-13)** supported by the **Ford Foundation** is one attempt to address concerns about access, quality and inclusiveness in education. A key project of the **Higher Education Innovation and Research Applications (HEIRA) programme at CSCS, Bangalore**, Pathways was principally devised as a collaborative learning experience working hand-in-hand with undergraduate colleges and the local community. This pilot programme seeks to develop a Campus Diversity model in select undergraduate colleges across three states (Maharashtra, Kerala and Karnataka) in India to enhance quality of access to higher education. The focus of this four-year programme is on skill-building for socially disadvantaged students, along with teacher training in curricular and pedagogic reform so as to ease the integration of these students into the mainstream. The larger objective is to equip students with better research and critical/analytical skills to make both students and teachers active stake holders in the higher education scenario. In working through a series of diverse activities including workshops and student-led campus projects focusing on ideas of social change through engagement with the larger community, the project has in the last four years attempted to build a vibrant institutional culture in colleges with respect to issues of social justice and student diversity.

The **South Asia Conference on Higher Education** is the final event of the four-year Pathways programme, and also an opportunity to address some of the larger issues related to inclusive education. The event would be an ideal platform for interaction among all the institutions that have been part of the Ford Pathways programme in South Asia, to share their experience of designing and implementing the project over the last few years in their specific regional contexts, and reflect upon its outcomes and future possibilities. The conference will include other stakeholders in the Pathways programme in India, namely representatives from the Ford Foundation, participant colleges, consultants/external resource persons, experts in the field of higher education and institutional partners. A key objective would be to obtain inputs from experts and stakeholders for ways of both mainstreaming and upscaling the work done through Pathways.

The consultation on higher education will bring together a focused group of participants for a discussion on some of the current debates in the sector. In keeping with the larger question of social inclusion, the consultation would examine the impact of the changing social composition of the classroom, and therefore the need to reinvent curricula, resources and pedagogy to make it relevant to students. The consultation will also look at development of resources in regional languages, and the increasing role of technology in knowledge production. The need for community-based research and policy reforms for the sector would be other significant areas of debate.

The Centre for the Study of Culture and Society (CSCS) is an interdisciplinary research and academic organization founded in 1998 in Bangalore. The institution pioneers the model of a research centre for the future by putting together systems for in-house research, training and outreach. Training and outreach include institutional handholding and incubating proof-of-concept technological systems that would sustain the pedagogic needs of the future. In 2001, CSCS launched its academic programme with a PhD in Interdisciplinary Cultural Studies, in collaboration with the Manipal University (then MAHE). Upto 2012, the PhD programme has offered over 60 taught courses of 42 hour/14 week sessions, with over 40 students registered and 12 students already completed in two affiliating locations. While the PhD programme is now formally closed, CSCS has continued to strengthen its collaborations on research initiatives with several academic institutions, partners and donors.

Higher Education Innovation and Research Applications (HEIRA) engages with the Higher Education (HE) sector through key institutional partnerships with research centres, universities and undergraduate colleges. Our overall objective: revitalization of the field through interventions aimed at bringing together HE institutions that the system has so far kept apart.

HEIRA has wide experience in qualitative and quantitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation for policy making. It has produced, both in-house and through its institutional partnerships, several reports and scoping studies on the higher education sector in India. In the years to come, HEIRA aims to incubate scalable models for knowledge production and institutional design, focus on evaluation and assessment mechanisms as well as curriculum design, and develop new models for fostering research programmes.

HEIRA has identified inter-institutional collaborations, interdisciplinarity in research and teaching, and integration of hitherto segregated forms of knowledge production as the key strategies through which higher education could be made more relevant and more capable of addressing the challenges of our present time. The strategies are operationalised through support for curriculum development and production of resource materials; teacher-training initiatives and skill-building for students; and building research capacity. HEIRA interventions work through the following focus areas: Integrated Science Education, Indian Language Resources, Social Justice in Higher Education, Policy Inputs, Faculty Development, Gender, Networked Higher Education/Digital Humanities.

Formerly known as the Higher Education Cell (2007 - 2011), HEIRA received initial support from the Sir Ratan Tata Trust.

The Ford Foundation is a global private organization founded in 1936 and headquartered in New York. The Foundation with its stated objectives of strengthening democratic values, reducing poverty and injustice, promoting international cooperation and advancing human achievement has been working to foster social change through diverse initiatives and a network of collaborations in several countries. Key areas of work at present include economic fairness, education and social justice, human rights, democracy, freedom of expression, sexuality, reproductive health and rights, metropolitan opportunity and sustainable development among others.

In 2001, the Ford Foundation launched a global programme called Pathways to Higher Education to address affirmative action in higher education. The programme is premised on the fact that, despite the democratization of modern societies world-wide, students from socially and economically under-privileged backgrounds are still under-represented in higher education institutions. The Foundation supports 125 institutions that are engaged in transforming their curricula, classroom practices, and policies to become more sensitive to issues of disadvantage. The larger objective is to make higher education hospitable to hitherto marginalised students by improving the quality of their access to the institutions and also getting institutions to recognize the centrality of social justice questions to the sphere of higher education.