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Expansion of quality assurance mechanism in south Asian higher education system: an empirical analysis

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Abstract

Higher education institutions in south Asia are faced with two fold pressure; need to expand and demand to enhance the quality. In this region mechanism of quality assurance is at very nascent stage and faced with problems of resources limitations: economic resources are insufficient and human resources are under-developed. But the expansion and implementation of QA mechanism is helping to improve the quality of higher education and better utilization of resources. Assistance of international organizations, which are working for quality assurance mechanism, is important to enhance human capacity QA mechanisms' credibility. This study is designed to map the state of higher education and quality assurance, to investigate into the role of international organization (INQAAHE) in the expansion of QA and to probe the questions: What are south Asian countries doing for quality enhancement and assurance? How is it expanding? What are the national needs?

Keywords: Higher Education, Quality Assurance, INQAAHE, South Asia

Introduction

South Asia entered into the 21st century with high knowledge poverty, fragile economic condition, gigantic pool of under-developed human capital, poor quality of education and low productive institutions. Now after twelve years many positive changes and new developments can be seen in this region but there is still a long way to go because the process of transformation and transition is very slow and uneven. Education particularly higher education, being an engine of change, has potential to support and speed up the process of socio-economic change. Higher education, in south Asia, is expanding at an unprecedented rate. During the past two decades five times increase has been seen in student enrolment at tertiary level as the enrolment jumped from 5.3 million in 1988 to 17.5 in 2008 and 26 million in 2011 (UNESCO 2012). The age structure of the south Asian population and the high rate of economic development in the area show that the enrolment will further multiply in the time to come and likely to increase up to 50 million by 2025 according to the World Bank estimates. At present more than 152 million south Asians or 10% of the population are of tertiary school age and due to low participation rate only 12% of them are enrolled in tertiary education. The higher education in this region is still facing great challenges that include, increase in demand, economic constrains, quality assurance, capacity building, growth of new ICTs, policy reforms, institutional autonomy, multiple provider and internationalization. Presently, in this region, higher education institutions (HEIs), like many other countries, are faced with two fold pressure: need to expand and demand to enhance the quality of higher education. Globally the process of change was so rapid that perhaps no country in this region was well prepared to face this new development even at present many countries are still struggling hard to face the diverse and complex challenges. Educational institutions in the south Asia have been struggling continuously to respond to the economic, social and political scenario, at regional and international levels, within which education takes place (Rizvi, Engel, Nandyala, Rutkowski, & Sparks, 2005). Higher education sector, akin to other sectors, is facing a strong competition at all levels and in all sub-sectors, this competition is acting as a catalyst in defining the characteristics of programs and in shaping the structure of the policies related to higher education (Ali, 2011).

Achieving quality in higher education is becoming a universal agenda bcause efficient use of resources and productivity of the education depends upon quality assurance and other factors as well. Quality assurance in higher education is instrumental in the development of human capital in many ways; enables to compete at global level, promotes equity and increases accessibility, that ultimately lead to the construction of equitable knowledge societies (Bubtana, 2005). Many institutions and organizations have been created to develop, manage and promote quality culture in higher education. International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) is an umbrella organization. It is helping member countries in quality assurance process in higher education by assisting in policy reforms and developing their capacities. Since the advent of 21st century many universities, in the developing countries, have been following their counterparts in the developed countries by adopting the path of quality assurance to improve the quality of their activities (Lim, 2001). Still less developed countries (LDCs) are not fully benefiting from international quality networks: only 5

out of 41 low income countries (12%) and 17 out of 55 lower middle income countries (30%) show their presence at the platform of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and are benefiting from the international experiences.

Like many other LDCs in this region also, the mechanism of quality assurance is in very nascent stage and faced with problems of resources limitations as the economic resources are insufficient and human resources are under-developed. Consequently there is a possibility that many higher education institutions, in these countries, would be providing sub-standard education which is a waste of tangible and intangible resources devoted to higher education (Materu, 2007) and this is one of the major causes of under-developed human capital and a main obstacle in the way of quality development and assurance in higher education. As the provision of higher education without an assurance of quality is not a guarantee of success for students and institutions, so the implementation of a quality assurance mechanism without taking into account institutional priorities and national needs is not a guarantee of excellence and acceptability. In south Asia, like many other parts of the world, the need and nature of quality mechanism is being debated at all forums; from ministerial level to student union level and from education policies deliberations to media debates. In the high time of global financial crisis the questions of quality and its nature in the national and international context have regained momentum.

Methodology

This study explores the higher education system and quality assurance mechanism in south Asia. It analyzes the aggregate country-level data which has been accessed from multiple resources: national bodies which include ministries of education, commissions, committees etc. and international organizations which have database repositories. This scientific study also benefits from previous quantitative studies, surveys and data compilations which come from different resources. Special attention has been paid to cross-country comparison and where necessary comparison with other regions or groups has also been presented. Likewise time series data has also been used to gauge the change and impact during a specific period of time. The study has the following objectives:

- To map the state of higher education and the quality assurance mechanism
- To investigate into questions: what these countries are doing for quality enhancement and assurance? How is it expanding? And what is the role of international organization in this expansion?
- To estimate the national needs regarding quality assurance mechanism and to examine the pushing and pulling forces i.e. expansion, market competition etc.

This study has been divided in to three parts; in the first part a general picture of the south Asian region has been presented. Here state of economy and education has been discussed and demography of south Asia has also been presented. In the second part, in order to estimate the level of development and expansion, an empirical mapping of higher education and quality assurance mechanism has been undertaken by using datasets from international organization, information available with the ministries of education and other sources. While in the third part the role of international organizations, particularly INQAAHE, in the development and expansion of QA mechanism has been discussed by making inter-countries comparison with a special focus on the structural changes, national needs and global trust.

South Asia at a glance

Numerical picture of South Asia		
Indicators	2000	2008
Surface area (sq. km) in million	5.14	5.14
Population, total (billion)	1.35	1.51
Population growth (annual %)	1.9	1.5
Life expectancy at birth, total (years)	62	65
Primary completion rate, total	67	79
School enrolment, primary (% gross)	89	107
School enrolment, secondary (% gross)	44	50
School enrolment, tertiary (% gross)	8	10
Ratio of female to male secondary enrolment	75	85
Literacy rate, adult total	58	63.8
GNI per capita, Atlas method (current US$)	443	772
GDP growth (annual %)	4	6.9
Agriculture, value added (% of GDP)	24	19
Services, etc., value added (% of GDP)	50	52
Source: The World Bank Group		

South Asia or Indian sub-continent does not have a distinct geographical demarcation so in the absence of well defined boundaries one cannot say exactly what does make South Asia. South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) considers seven countries south Asia; Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (SAARC Charter) and these countries are also the founding members SAARC organization. But the World Bank places eight countries in South Asia by including Afghanistan also, whereas the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSTATE) considers nine countries in south Asia, by including both Afghanistan and Iran in this region. To avoid any ambiguity, here in this study, we will consider seven founding countries of SAARC as south Asia.

Regions	**World's Poor**
South Asia	43.5%
Sub Saharan Africa	24.3%
East Asia and Pacific	23.2%
Latin America & the Carib.	6.5%
Europe & Central Asia	2.0%
Middle East and N. Africa	0.5%

The region of south Asia presents a great diversity in terms of geographical, geological, environmental, ecological, economic, cultural, political, social, theological and demographic variations. Historically South Asia had been home of great civilizations which dates back thousands of years. The period from 17th to first half of 20th century is marked with the period of European colonialism in major part of South Asia: Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka were under direct rule of Great Britain while Nepal and Bhutan were up to some extent protectorate of the British Empire. France and Portugal also showed their presence by occupying some part of this region. South Asian countries got independence after the World War II except Bhutan and Nepal as these countries were not occupied.

South Asia, with a population of 1.56 billion and an area of 5.14 million km², is the most densely populated geographical region of the world. It homes 20% of the total world population and 40% of Asian population whereas the surface area of south Asia is only 3% of the earth's land area and 10% of the Asian continent. The population growth rate, in south Asia, is 1.5% and the life expectancy is 65 years. In this region 70% of the population lives in rural areas and 75% of this rural population is under poverty line. Likewise 43.5% of the world poor population is living in this area.

During the 1990s an average increase of 5.9 % was recorded in the GDP. In this region, the increase was 4.5% in 2000, 9% in 2007 and 6.9% in 2008 and 5.8% in 2009 (Bhaskaran, 2010) whereas in 2009 the world GDP grew by 0.5% only. Despite of a good economic development, in South Asia, during last two decades this area is remain a low income area and all south Asian countries are classed as less developed countries with an average per capita GDP (PPP) of $2718 which is far lower than the world average of $10,400 (2009 est.). Whereas the combined GDP of the seven south Asian countries is only 6% of the world's total GDP (PPP) of seventy trillion US dollar. According to the World Bank data Bangladesh and Nepal has the lowest per capita GDP of $1335 and $1104 respectively so both are classified as low income countries while Bhutan, India, Maldives, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are lower middle income countries. According to the World Bank annual report 2008, the biggest share of the world poor population is concentrated in south Asia as more than one-third of the population lives on less than $1 a day in this region.

Country information

Country	Conception	Population	GDP(PPP) $ **per capita**	Classification
Bangladesh	1971	162.2	1465	LIC
Bhutan	Early 17th century	0.69	5212	LMIC
India	1947	1148.8	2941	LMIC
Maldives	165	0.39	4894	LMIC
Nepal	1768 unification	29,3	1205	LIC
Pakistan	1947	170.3	2713	LMIC
Sri Lanka	1948	20.2	5026	LMIC
Table is base on the World Bank Data 2010				

LIC=Low income countries, LMIC= Lower middle income countries (the World Bank classification 2009)

Similarly, the mean age has increased from 62 years in 2000 to 65 years in 2008 andthe population growth rate has decreased from 1.9% to 1.5% during the same period. Due to the lake of basic health facilitates and low female literacy (65% only) one-third of the world's maternal deaths are recorded in this part, nearly half of children under five years of age are malnourished.

In Asian continent, South Asia is the least developed sub-region in terms literacy rate, Gross enrolment ratio (GER) at secondary and tertiary levels, transition rate, school life expectancy and per capita economy.

Indicators on education show an improvement during last decade as the youth and adult literacy rate has improved, participation rate at secondary and tertiary level has augmented considerably. But this region still has the highest adult and youth illiteracy rate in the world. According to UNESCO statistics 26 million children, mostly from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds, are still out of schools. UNESCO report 2008, states that 77.9 million of the world citizens are illiterate and majority of them are living in east and south Asia. In other words this region has the most uneven distribution of wealth and people living here are with the least basic facilities. This area has the world's lowest adult literacy rate 58,9% only, while sub-Saharan Africa which is considered as the most under-developed part of the world, it has 63,5% adult literacy rate. Similarly in south Asia youth literacy rate is also very low, which stands at 81.8%, followed by sub-Saharan Africa where 74.3% youth are literate.

The quality of education that is being provided, specifically in public schools, is questionable. A large proportion of children lack basic numeric and literacy skills by the time they complete primary education. A sample study in India found that 44 percent of children in grades 2-5 could not read a simple paragraph and close to 62 % were unable to read a short story (UNA-China, 2009), in the rest of the south Asia the quality of education is very poor (Education_Encyclopedia, 2009) at all levels.

The poverty prevails in this region due to three main reasons; low level of human capital development and huge imbalance between population and resources as well as population growth and resources development.

Environmental degradation, inadequate infrastructure, and social exclusion are also among the many obstacles to growth and poverty reduction. Only 4.1% of South Asian GDP (PPP) is spent on education.

Higher education in south Asia

Before the advent of modern education system in South Asia, the *indigenous education system* was already functional for last many centuries. Under this system education was provided at all levels including higher education. The institutions, in those times, were autonomous and community based. State was nothing to do with these centers of learning.

Region	Total population	School age population. Tertiary. Total	Enrolment at Tertiary level (Million)	Participation ratio at Tertiary Level	Adult literacy rate (%). Total	Youth literacy rate (%). Total	GDP per capita (PPP) US$
North America and Western Europe	749	48.7	34.0	69.8	95.0	99.5	35164
Central and Eastern Europe	399	33.4	20.7	62.1	98.4	99.1	12425
Latin America and the Caribbean	566	51.9	17.7	34.2	92.2	96.6	8967
East Asia and the Pacific	2001	166.4	46.4	27.9	87.9	96.8	4363
Central Asia	78	8.2	1.9	24.3	99.2	99.2	4199
Arab States	321	32.4	7.1	22.0	80.6	92.3	15530
South Asia	1638	149.4	17.5	12.3	58.9	81.8	2821
Sub-Saharan Africa	764	73.8	4.1	5.6	63.5	74.3	1782

Source : UNESCO 2009

The era of colonization where changed other aspects of the Indian sub-continent culture it also changed the education system; since the mid of nineteenth century indigenous education system has been replaced by Modern education system where state is responsible for the provision, management and funding of the education.

South Asian countries started expanding higher education lately because basic or compulsory education remained the state priority for decades. At present states are relatively motivated to devote more resources to higher education. Participation rate in higher education is on the rise in all entities of the region and the gender gap is diminishing. According to the World Bank, wide disparities persist in South Asian region as far as female education is concerned at primary and secondary level but at higher education level and tertiary level overall gender parity is satisfactory and in some countries females have outnumbered (The World Bank, 2009).

Though modern education system was introduced in south Asia at the end of nineteenth century but education started expanding during the last quarter of 20th century. Student enrolment, at all levels, is on the rise but still the combined participation rate is very low at levels: Sri Lanka and Maldives are the only countries of the region where adult and youth literacy rates are more than 90% but the combined gross enrolment (CGE) ratio, even in these countries, is merely 70%, and in the rest of the south Asian countries literacy rate and CGE ratio are lower than these two countries. Pakistan has the lowest CGE ratio after Bangladesh.. According to UNESCO 2008 data, in south Asia gross enrolment ratio at primary level is107 percent and completion rate is 79 percent whereas enrolment rate is 50 percent. Similarly the participation rate at tertiary level, in all south Asian countries, is in single digit except that of India where it is 13.5 percent. This decrease is attributed to high dropout rate, low transition rate and low completion rate. Here one thing is worth mentioning that in these all countries tertiary education as compared to primary and secondary education is getting higher allocations in term of per student expenditure.

The expansion and massification of higher education is a recent phenomenon in this region which coincided with the modernization, industrialization and technological development. Tertiary education, in this region, is also expanding on high rate. During past years, a record increase has been witnessed in student enrolment. According to the IAU & UNESCO data 2008, in south Asia there are nearly six hundred universities and more than twenty one thousand tertiary colleges or HEIs where more than 17.5 million students are enrolled and nearly one million teachers are attached with the process of teaching and research. This region has witnessed one of the highest

increases in the student enrolment at tertiary level in the world during past few years; since 1988 the student enrolment at tertiary level has increased by sixteen times in Bhutan, five times in Sri Lanka and Nepal, more than three times in Pakistan and India and it has doubled in Bangladesh. Though the participation rate at tertiary level is augmenting in these countries but at the same time the resources allocated to higher education are decreasing. The table shows that the per pupil public expenditure as percent of per capita GDP has been lowered up to 250% in Bhutan, 76% in Nepal, 35% in India and 11% in Bangladesh since 2000 whereas during the same period the student enrolment has increased significantly. The universities and higher education institutions are facing economic resources shortage which is aggravating every year (UNESCO, 2006) as the economic resources, allocated to universities, are not being increased in proportion to the increase in the student enrolment. Although, since 2000, per capita GDP (PPP) of these countries has increased, on the average, by 70% or more but the per capita budget allocation for higher education has seen a downward movement. Besides that the factors of inflation and devaluation have further intensified the situation. As a result this insufficiency of economic resources is leading to the scarcity of human resources and ultimately low efficiency and questionable quality of higher education institutions.

Pupil-teacher ratio 2008

	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
	2008	2008	2008
Bangladesh	43,7	25,2	18,8
Bhutan	29,9	23,7	13,5
India	40,2	32,7	27,6
Maldives	13,3	13,7	1,9
Nepal	37,8	40,9	25,7
Pakistan	40,7	41,9	18,3
Sri Lanka	23,5	19,5	24,2

If we have a look at past 20 years data then it reveals that student enrolment in south Asian universities has increased up to 224% but during the same period teacher population saw an increase of 99% only, this has brought pupil teacher ratio from 15.9 in 1988 to 25.9 in 2008 which is much higher than the world average value of 15:1. In many poor countries of Africa, as the UNESCO data shows, the situation is far better than south Asia if compared in terms of per student budget allocation and student teacher ratio. In south Asian universities extra load on the teachers, due to increased student teacher ratio, is leading to low output, questionable quality and ultimately sub-standard education.

Quality Assurance mechanism in higher education

The rising demand for education reflects the growing recognition of its economic and social benefits, both for individuals and societies (UNESCO/OECD, 2005) thus higher education in south Asia has just started expanding due to increasing market worth of graduates. In the society and in the job market those who have value added education from quality institutions always have better place and returns. There are many other socio-economic factors and forces also which play a crucial role in pushing forward and pulling upward the higher education institutions (HEIs), in south Asia, to take practical and feasible steps to assure and to enhance the quality of services and facilities provided by them.

Push and pull forces

Like many other regions, in south Asia also there are several driving forces behind QA drive. These forces are of varied in nature: on the one hand increasing demand of higher education, in terms of capacity, accessibility, equity, new disciplines and facilities, is pushing both public and private sectors to go for assurance of quality in order to maximize the utility of limited available resources. Likewise a huge expansion and elevated competition, in the field of higher education, are pushing higher education institutions and all stakeholders to regulate the “quality” by meeting the set standard in order to ensure the excellence in the product and services. While on the other hand the enhanced public accessibility to information, through media, is making HEIs and quality assurance agencies (QAA) more open. This openness of institutions and awareness of society has resulted in the emergence of movements and organizations to protect consumers’ right (Bleakley, 2001). It has made HEIs more careful and cautious in all matters pertaining to students, teachers and programs. Ultimately these strides are adding to the quality of the institutions.

Today the process of quality assurance has become an integral part of higher education in many countries. So we see that quality assurance mechanism:

- Enhances the acceptability and credibility of the institutions by increasing the worth and value of degrees and credentials. This brings repute and respect for institutions at national and international level and ultimately reduces the monopoly of foreign credentials holders
- Helps to make higher education and HEIs transparent and trustworthy for all (EU, 2009)
- Develops a congenial environment where institutions have an enhanced interaction with stakeholders and other institutions this promotes a culture of competition/ collaboration among the educational institutions.
- Promotes an environment which is, both, producer (service provider) and consumer friendly, consequently this builds the consumer confidence in institutions and programs
- Helps in protecting consumer rights by ensuring the provision of what had been promised
- Encourages adopting better approaches towards resource management which reduces or even eliminates the under-utilization, misuse and waste of tangible and intangible resources.
- Enhances the value and recognition of the qualifications inside and outside of the country.
- Prepare local higher education institutions, both in the public and private sector, to compete with the cross border higher education providers which are establishing institutions/ campuses in the developing countries (Materu, 2007)
- Eliminates or reduces the substandard education that is being delivered to students in LDCs where the process of QA is not so mature.

Special importance of higher education for south Asia

South Asia is among the lowest ranked regions in the world on the basis of per capita economic productivity, combined participation rate in education, share in the world economy and the provision of basic health facilities. All natural resources and factors which can play an important role in the economic development of a region are found in south Asia except that of developed human power and motivation to utilize in a proper way. The World Bank 2009 K4D indices, for knowledge (KI) and knowledge economy (KEI), show that the conditions in south Asia is worst than Africa as far as education, innovation and the use of ICT are concerned (table …)

Ranking of south Asian countries on Knowledge Index

	Knowledge Economy Index		Knowledge Index		
Country	Rank	Change in Rank since 2000	Rank	Change in Rank since 2000	KI Value
Sri Lanka	88	2	92	6	4.04
India	109	-2	110	1	2.95
Pakistan	118	15	115	10	2.48
Nepal	131	-6	131	-4	1.62
Bangladesh	138	1	132	-1	1.55

Table based on K4D Data

This region lack quality trained brain which is prerequisite to find innovative solution of local problems through the use of modern technologies. Consequently south Asia is faced with dual problem; firstly the scarcity of developed human capital and secondly what human capital is being produced is of low quality; which is leading to low productivity and waste of resources at all levels and all fields. This is not the end but a mean of the plight for this region because a vicious cycle of "low quality produces low quality" is going on for last half a century.

Ranking of regions on the basis of KEI and KI

Rank	Change in Rank since 2000	Regions	KEI	KI
1	2	Europe and Central Asia	6.45	6.69
2	-1	East Asia and the Pacific	6.41	6.71
3	0	Middle East and North Africa	5.47	5.68
4	0	Latin America	5.21	5.37
5	0	Africa	2.71	2.72
6	0	South Asia	2.58	2.55

Table based on K4D Data

This region can come out of its socio-economic problems if a fast track policy of "quality human capital development" is implemented. As south Asia has a big pool of human population so it can only be transformed into quality human capital through quality education that will result into better utilization of available resources and the provision of competent man power for local, national, regional and international economic development. In future this region can also become an economic giant like the neighboring country China.

Trends in quality assurance mechanism

The quality assurance mechanism comprises on two components; Internal Quality Control (IQC) and External Quality Assessment (EQA). The first component, IQC, is concurrent and localized in nature and its main purpose is to check the conformity of action with the set objectives. IQC is responsibility of the staff members the institutions. It is advantageous because of micro level assessment, reliability and continuity. Whereas, external quality assessment or EQA is retrospective in nature and its objective is to evaluate IQC. EQA is performed by independent QA agency and it is repeated after a specific time period. EQA enables us to make comparison between and among similar programs and institutions.

The emerging importance of Quality assurance in education can be gauged from the growth of Quality Assurance (QA) agencies worldwide. In the developed countries the concept of general and professional accreditation, in the industrial sector, exists for last one century. However the idea of QA agencies in education sector is not too old, as a world-wide phenomenon, external quality assurance in higher education began in the 1980s (Woodhouse, 2004), during mid eighties changes in National Policy for Education in U.K. and Australia led to mass education and increased transnational education, and during late eighties Malaysia and Japan invited educational providers to augment higher education systems. Later on in the early nineties the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the *Center for Quality Assurance in International Education* (CQAIE) (1991) were established. In 1995 the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) paved the way for internationalization and smooth functioning of organization and enterprises related to services sector. All these developments led to major regional training programs in QA at national, regional and international level. In this scenario the World Bank, UNESCO, the European Union and other IGOs played an active role by extending technical and financial cooperation to make the provision of education with assurance of quality at all levels with a focus on the higher education (Lenn, 2009).

Quality assurance mechanism in south Asia

With the increasing importance of quality assurance the trend and culture of quality assurance agencies is also on the rise in south Asia. A review of education policies of the south Asian countries shows that a wind of change is blowing everywhere as quality of higher education and quality assurance mechanisms have been stressed in education policies of all countries. According to the World Bank "nearly half of all countries, worldwide, have created quality assurance mechanisms, of one type or another, during the last decade or two" (IIEP, 2009) and in the majority of developing countries quality assurance is supported by the state to control, supervise, direct and promote the conformity with the set standards.

India

In India the quality of higher education is assured through the process of accreditation agencies which functions autonomously but falls under the ministry of education. Usually institutes and programs are accredited for a period of five years. National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) is the principal agency which accredits Universities and Colleges in general education. It was established in 1994 by the University Grant Commission (UGC), now it functions as an autonomous institution of UGC. NAAC is also full member of International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (*INQAAHE*).

Until August 2010, NAAC has accredited 143 universities which make 39% of the total number of universities and it has accredited 3492 colleges, which is 20% of the total colleges providing higher education. According to NAAC report, 24% of the accredited colleges are of low quality. The condition of universities is also not much different, according to the sample study of 111 universities, by UGC, only 31% of them are of high quality and others are of medium or low quality. As 60% of the universities and 80% of the colleges have not been evaluated or they do not come under the jurisdiction of UGC or NAAC so the state of quality in these institution is unknown.

In India there are other accrediting agencies also, parallel to NAAC, which are responsible for quality assurance in specialized or professional education institutions. The technical education is accredited by the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), it was founded in 1994; and Agricultural education is accredited by Accreditation Board (AB) established in 1996. Similar NAAC the progress of NBA is also in accrediting programs and institutions is still very slow. As NBA has accredited merely 2371 programs from 325 institutions as against a total of 18526 programs being taught in 5197 technical institutions which mean NBA has accredited 12.7% programs in 6% of institutions only since its inception. Due to very short capacity of accrediting agencies the process and mechanism of quality assurance could not be functionalized and majority of the institutions are running without quality monitoring. According to Nasscom-Mackinsey Report (2005) there are only 15% of graduates of general education and 25-30% of Technical Education who are fit for employment. Similarly

Dukkipati concluded that majority of the higher education institutions in India are providing low quality education as two-thirds of India's colleges and universities below standard (Dukkipati, 2010).

Pakistan

In Pakistan the government replaced the University grants commission (UGC) with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan (HEC) in 2002. HEC has broader mandate and more autonomy as compared to UGC which was resource dispersing and approving body only. HEC works under the ministry of education and it performs multiple functions in the field of higher education as it is responsible for developing, supervising, approving, improving, facilitating and assessing higher education at university and tertiary education college or degree college level. All of the state funding and financial support to public and private universities pass through HEC.

The mechanism of internal quality is not new in the higher education as it exists since the inception of HEIs in the country but the process and mechanism of external quality assurance on the scientific footings is very nascent and in the developing stage in Pakistan. Higher education Commission (HEC), in 2005, established Quality assurance agency (QAA) which is responsible for the implementation and enhancement of the quality of higher education in Pakistan. The quality in, HEIs, is being achieved and assured through three means;

Accreditation councils

There are 11 accreditation councils for different fields of education. These councils have accredited only 22% or 245 out of 1135 tertiary colleges. While all 127 universities are HEC recognized universities but "not" accredited as recognition is taken for accreditation.

Quality enhancement cells

In order to augment the efficiency and to improve the quality of higher education institutions, QAA has been establishing Quality enhancement cells (QEC) in the universities since 2006. By August 2010 in 49% or 62 out of 127universities, QECs have been established which are managed by Quality assurance committees of each university. These QECs monitor the process of teaching and report to QAA on regular basis. Neither detailed data nor evaluative report on the performance of QECs is available with HEC.

Ph.D. Review committees

With objectives to assess M.Phil / Ph.D. programs on a regular basis in order to ensure the quality of programs and to accelerate the review process of higher degree programs of both public and private sector universities the Higher Education Commission in 2005 constituted PhD Review Committees. Each Committee covers specific geographical region. No detailed information or data available on the progress and achievement of these committees.

Sri Lanka

In Sri Lanka University grants commission (UGC) was established in 1978 with a mandate to plan, coordinate, regulate and allocate resources to HEIs. In 2007 a separate Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE) was created to achieve excellence in Higher education and since then UGC functions under MoHE. Although the process of quality assurance had been introduced five years back when Internal QA Units in public universities were introduced in February 2005 and the Quality assurance and accreditation (QAA) Council in the UGC was created in September 2005 (QAA, Sri Lanka). This Council first time formulated a Quality Assurance system for all public Universities.

In order to assure quality in HEIs QAA council had started External Quality Assessments (EQAs) process based upon peer review of higher education programs and HEIs. Under EQAs process of, by the June 2010, QAA has reviewed 51% (228 out of 447) subject/ programs in universities. Likewise 10 out of 15 public universities institutional reviews had also been carried out (QAA, Sri Lanka). The programs and institutions that have been reviewed, so far, by QAA were from the public sector only as QAA does not deal with private HEIs where 50% of the students are enrolled. Similarly higher education institutions (public colleges) have also not been brought under the quality umbrella. According to the World Bank report on Sri Lankan higher education "country lacks quality assurance mechanisms for the alternative higher education sector, the private higher education sector, and the external degree programs. While within the public universities, quality assurance mechanisms are only just commencing for postgraduate education programs" (The World Bank, 2009) To improve the quality assurance mechanism the Quality Assurance (QA) Council has been established in January 2010 by the ministry of higher education. This QA council will be fully functional in the near future.

Bangladesh

In Bangladesh University Grants Commission (UGC) is mandated by the government to disperse resources to public HEIs and to approve private universities. Whereas National university which works parallel to UGC, it is responsible for supervision and approval of colleges, setting up curriculum for all HEIs and student assessment.

The mechanism of quality assurance is still passing through germination stages in Bangladesh as at the national level there is no accrediting body which has the mandate of accrediting HEIs and programs. However several localized organization with limited role which are working as accrediting agencies. The National University (NU) has been vested the responsibility to ensure quality in tertiary level colleges but due to lake of human

capacity in the NU it has been overlooked. On the other hand public universities are assuring quality, merely, by their own mechanism of internal quality assurance. To guarantee provision of education with quality in private universities, the establishment of Accreditation Council for private universities is under process which will have mandate to accredit private universities and programs along with many other functions (The World Bank, 2006).

Nepal

In Nepal the Ministry of Education (MoE) was established in 1951 and is the apex body in charge of the higher education sector. MoE has further delegated powers to the University grants commission (UGC) which started functioning in 1994 and it is responsible for the allocation and disbursement of grants, regulating activities of HEIs and formulating policies and programs (UGC Nepal). Few years back UGC, with the help of the World Bank, formed Quality Assurance and Accreditation Committee (QAAC) to develop and implement QAA activities in higher education under the Quality Assurance and Accreditation (QAA) program (Stéphen, 2007). The QAA Division in UGC has been established to facilitate QAAC and to regulate QAA mechanism. In Nepal there are five universities and 600 higher education institutions where 0.25 million students are enrolled. 40% of the institutions are private in nature. As the quality assurance system is not fully implemented so in the majority of the public and private HEIs the quality of education is very low (The World Bank, 2008). No data is available on the number of institutes and programs accredited until 2010.

Bhutan

Royal university of Bhutan (RUB) is the only university in Bhutan. It was established in 2003 and it has 5051 enrolled students where as the participation rate at tertiary level is only 6.5% in this country. The RUB offers Bachelor degree (ISCED 4) in different fields and Master degree in one field only; Master of education. It does not offer M.Phil or Ph.D. degrees. Non-tertiary higher education is also offered at eleven institutes and colleges which are members of the RUB. According to the ministry of education, the quality assurance and accreditation system is not is place except for primary and secondary school level education with a focus on quality teachers, quality curriculum and quality management (Ministry of Education Bhutan, 2006). The RUB has its own inbuilt quality assurance system which, according to tertiary education policy, based upon periodic critical evaluation of the programs (Thinley, 2009).

National needs and priorities of higher education systems

In south Asia despite of common origin and similar education system and affiliating structure the quality assurance mechanism is quite different in all countries. Every country has evolved a specific QA mechanism dictated by the national need which include; culture, size of higher education, availability of human and economic resources. The quality assurance models which are followed in this region include: inbuilt in internal quality control, internal-external quality assurance and external quality assurance through QA agencies.

Now one thing is clear that the process of quality assurance and introduction of QA agencies is due to the expansion of higher education and size of the student enrolment. India has the largest higher education institutions net work and it also has the highest student enrolment in south Asia, so India has comparatively more developed and much mature quality assurance mechanism as the NAAC was established in 1994 and many other QA agencies were established later on. Likewise Pakistan has the second largest higher education system, in this region, in terms of number of HEIs and tertiary level enrolment so QA mechanism in this country also well developed it also has a well established QA system which has evolved after the formation of HEC in 2002.

Accredited universities and tertiary colleges in South Asia

country	Total Universities	Accredited	Total Tertiary colleges	Accredited
Bangladesh	77	N/A	1500	N/A
Bhutan	1	N/A	13	N/A
India	364	**40%**	17625	**20%**
Nepal	6	N/A	570	N/A
Pakistan	127	N/A	1135	**22%**
Sri Lanka	17	N/A	447	N/A
Total	**592**	…	**21290**	…

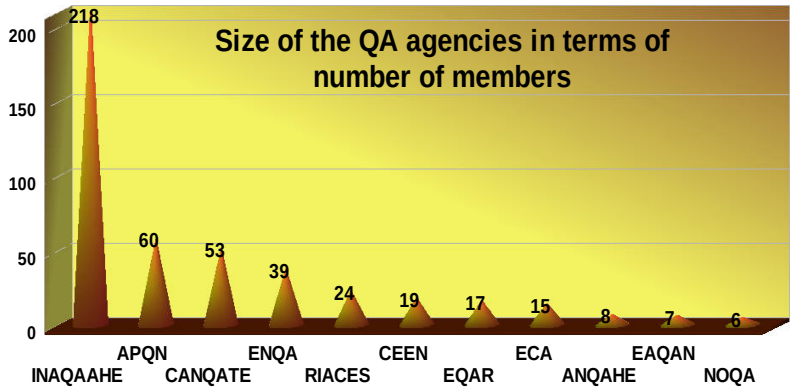
Table based on MoEs Data

Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal has comparatively less developed mechanism of QA and QA agencies as in these countries enrolled population at tertiary level is much smaller and the higher education is also expanding at

slow pace. Whereas, Bhutan and Maldives have very small volume of higher education in terms of student and HEIs population so the phenomenon quality assurance agencies is emerging out.

The statistics on student and HEIs population shows that in south Asia since the advent of new century a rapid expansion has been seen in higher education but the quality assurance mechanism has not expanded with the same speed. As a result there is no south Asian country where whole higher education has been brought under the cover of QA mechanism. Due to this slow expansion of QA mechanism majority of the institutions are running without any external quality assurance both in public and private sector. Consequently the quality of these institutions and programs is dependent on the internal quality assurance mechanism, which further depends upon the honesty and capacity of human resources of those institutions.

International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (*INQAAHE*) and other QA agencies

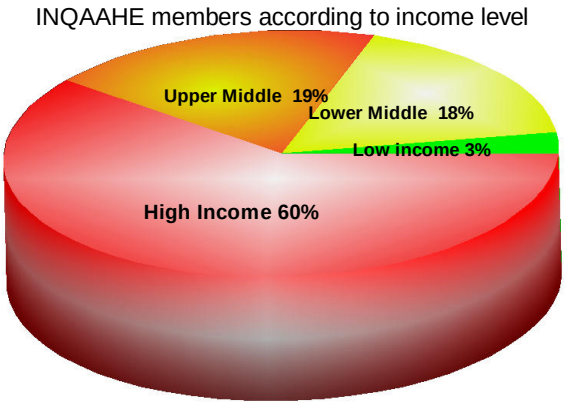


International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (*INQAAHE*), or simply Network, was established in 1991. It is an association of more than 200 organizations from 130 countries all around the world. *The Network* members include HEIs, QA and accreditation agencies and organization linked with higher education. All members are categorized into four groups; full, associate, institutional members and affiliates. It is an international forum of quality assurance, quality assessment and accreditation. It works for the development of standards for reliable quality assessment agencies (Vroeijenstijn, 2009).

There are other QA agencies also but the INQAAHE or the Network has highest member population where as Asia pacific quality network (APQN) has 60 members in 26 countries, Caribbean Area Network for Quality Assurance in Tertiary Education (CANQATE) has 53 members 8 countries, the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) 39 members in 25 countries, the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ANQAHE) has only eight members in eight countries.

Figure

INQAAHE in the world



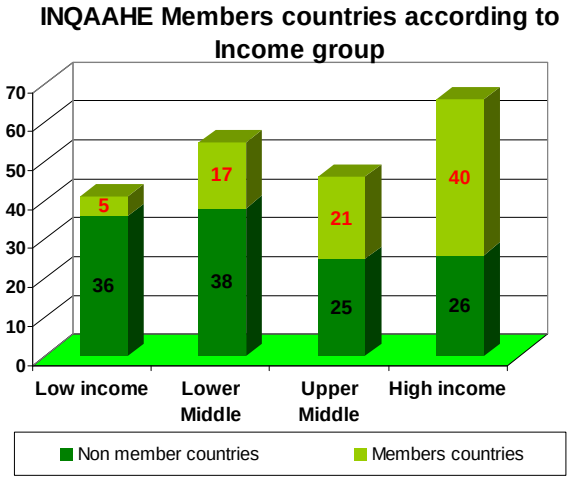
In order to estimate how LDCs are benefiting from international experiences here we have used data on *Network* members. The INQAAHE member data explain "*QA-readiness*" of the member countries, to certain degree, as they are in better position to use this platform for implementing and improving the quality of higher education through capacity building in their countries.

The Network member data shows that in April 2010 there were 216 member organizations; 3% of them were from low income countries, 18% from lower middle countries, 19% from upper middle economies, and 60% of

the Network members were from high income countries. Only five[3] low income countries and seventeen[4] lower middle income countries, in the world, were using the Network platform. In the other words among 98 less developed countries only 21 are benefiting from international experiences for the development of quality in higher education.

This low presence of LDCs at INQAAHE platform demonstrates the state, level and activeness of the quality assurance agencies in these countries whereas most developed countries have already established well-designed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the quality of education (Ross, 2002) at national level and these countries are fully benefiting from the international experiences also.

Role of INQAAHE in QA development in south Asia



Like other less developed countries in south Asia also IQAAHEE is rooting itself. Presently three out of seven south Asian countries are not member of INQAAHE. Among the member countries Pakistan has the highest number of member institution while India has highest number full member organization. From this region seventeen organizations are directly benefiting from INQAAHE experiences, ten of these organizations are from Pakistan.

INQAAHE is active in developing quality culture in south Asian higher education by promoting good practices, facilitating research, giving advice and providing expertise (INQAAHE, 2010). It also collects and disseminates information in order to provide an opportunity to its members to learn from knowledge sharing. Apart from this INQAAHE also working for the capacity building of its member organisation through conferences, workshops, publication of a research journal titled “Quality in higher education” thrice a year, electronic bulletin quarterly, guidelines of good practices, development funds for conference travel and visits to other agencies. The Network is providing different services, as well, to its all members this include: database of Go od Practices in QA (GPQA); the Clearinghouse of policies, procedures and practices from all over the world; a rapid-answer Query Service; and a Register of Reviewers and Consultants (INQAAHE, 2010)

South Asian countries and INQAAHE membership type

Countries	Full members	Institution members	Associate members	Affiliate	Total
Bangladesh	0	0	0	0	**0**
Bhutan	0	0	0	0	**0**
India	3	1	0	1	**5**
Maldives	1	0	0	0	**1**
Nepal	0	0	0	0	**0**
Pakistan	1	6	2	1	**10**
Sri Lanka	1	0	0	0	**1**
Total	**6**	**7**	**2**	**2**	**17**

[3] Ethiopia , Ghana , Kenya , Rwanda, Vietnam

[4] Albania , Azerbaijan, China, Ecuador, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Jordan, Maldives, Mongolia, Nigeria, **Pakistan**, Philippines, Samoa, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Timor-Leste

Global standards to enhance global trust (how to adapt)

As international ranking organization rank the world universities on the basis of research output, quality of education and quality of faculty so universities ranking can be used to estimate the state of the quality of higher education in any country. Presently there are two rankings are world renowned: Academic ranking of world universities (ARWU) and the times higher education ranking. According to the ARWU ranking 2010, among top 500 universities in the world 106 are in Asia whereas in south Asia, where 40% of Asian population lives, there are only two world ranked universities, both are located in India and no other country of this region has any world ranked university.

Number of top 500 universities in south Asia ARWU Ranking

Region/ country	2004	2007	2010
Asia	**89**	**100**	**106**
South Asia (total)	**3**	**2**	**2**
Bangladesh	0	0	0
Bhutan	0	0	0
India	3	2	2
Maldives	0	0	0
Nepal	0	0	0
Pakistan	0	0	0
Sri Lanka	0	0	0

Whereas in China alone there are thirty two world ranked universities (ARWU 2010). Israel which is also an Asian country, it has a population of 7.9 million which is equivalent to one fourth population of Nepal, and Israel has an area of twenty thousand square kilometers, half to the Bhutan, there are 34 universities in Israel and seven of them are among the top 500 universities in the world. Similarly South Korea also has seven world ranked universities (ARWU). According to the Times Higher Education (THE) ranking also very few world class universities are from south Asian region. Let us if we distribute the world ranked universities, by considering population a criterion, then among top 500 universities at least 100 universities should be found in south Asia as 20% of the world population lives in this region.

The very low presence of world ranked institutions points towards many possibilities and reasons; the HEIs in south Asia are short of economic and human resources, faced with under-developed human capital, lake of motivation, ineffective or inefficient quality assurance mechanism, curriculum at school and HEIs level has shortcomings or HEIs do not follow world standards.

National need and Cultural issues

The expansion, promotion and implementation of QA mechanism can help to overcome many of these problems because QA is a well designed methodology to assess, improve and guarantee the desired outcomes of a process, program or service. So this is high time for south Asian countries to expand and implement QA mechanism on all levels of education so that “desired outcomes” could be achieved. In this regard Quality can be achieved and assured in the higher education institution by following the approach of “think local and go global” because each country has a unique context for quality assurance due to multiple factors; geography, population size, demography, economic level, human capacity, education system and quality assurance needs. So south Asian countries must at first step know their local needs, at second step learn from the international experiences and at third and final stage create and carve their own QA system. Similarly Lim (1999) has also proposed that QA approaches followed in the developing countries need to modify according to the conditions and national needs of these countries, by designing QA simple models according to national requirements and expectations. The idea that the *whole is greater than sum of parts* is usually not caught because an attempt to achieve and assure quality in parts and pieces is the most common mistake committed by most of the countries. To ensure quality of an institution it is necessary to consider a system as a whole along with all its parts, sub-parts and complementary elements. Possibly missing quality of one component may render whole system inadequate.

Conclusions

Education in south Asia is expanding very rapidly but the process of transformation and transition is very slow. Consequently south Asian countries are standing on the lowest rung of different world indices and rankings. The expansion in quality assurance mechanism in south Asian higher education does not coincide with a huge expansion of higher education in terms of number of institutions and student enrolment. In all south Asian countries the process of quality assurance is at a nascent stage and the establishment of Quality Assurance Agencies is a very recent phenomenon. Furthermore, QA agencies are not fully able to meet the national

demands due to their low capacity and scant resources. These countries are also not properly benefiting from the international experiences. On the INQAAHE platform, Pakistan has the highest visibility as there are ten member organizations from this country followed by India which has with five member organization. Maldives and Sri Lanka each have one member while Bangladesh, and Bhutan have no INQAAHE member. Therefore India, Nepal, Pakistan and Maldives are getting INQAAHE assistance in order to develop the human, institutional and resource capacity for the progress and propagation of QA assurance mechanism in their respective higher education system. In this regard Quality can be achieved and assured in the higher education institution by following the approach of "act local and go global" because each country has a unique context for quality assurance due to country differences so at first these countries know their local needs and available resources, in a second step learn from the international experiences, like INQAAHE, and at a third and final stage create and carve their own QA systems that fulfill national as well as regional demands.

The expansion, promotion and implementation of QA mechanism can help to improve the quality of higher education, better utilization of resources, enhance the acceptability and credibility of both public and private institutions at home and abroad this will brings repute and respect for higher education system of the country because QA is a well designed methodology to assess, improve and guarantee the desired outcomes of a process, program or service. So this is high time for south Asian countries to expand and implement QA mechanism on all levels of education so that "desired outcomes" could be achieved.

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