Chapter 9

# Private Universities' Participation in Open and Distance Learning for Enhanced Access to Higher Education Among Underserved in India

**Akhilesh Kumar Pandey**
*Government of Madhya Pradesh, India*

**Syed Mohammad Haider Rizvi**
*Government of Madhya Pradesh, India*

## ABSTRACT

*It is now well recognised and understood that the higher education is one of the important components in accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations for the countries. However this important sector continues to remain a matter of concern in India primarily because of supply demand gaps, poor quality of teaching-learning, disparities in access and constraints on research & innovation. The conventional mainstream systems of education are able to serve a very small segment of the society. Alongside, new demands of education are fast emerging from the working class and who are away from the centre of activities. The scarce financial allocations from the Government are not able to meet the demand of education. Such a scenario threatens the sustained high growth of the Indian economic engine. The*

*advent of private sector and the opening of private universities and other institutions for higher and professional education has now emerged as important factors that are, now, running sizeable number of professional degree programmes particularly management and engineering and accounts for 59% of all the tertiary enrolments in India. Despite a lot of scepticism about the role of private sector, there has been a policy thrust for private sector's participation in higher education. This paper discusses the needs of private universities and their roles in making access of higher education in masses. The authors have tried to explore the roles of vast network of private universities in expansion of open and distance learning in accordance with the issues and challenges.*

*The illiterate of the 21 century will not be those who cannot read and write,but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn. - Alvin Toffler 1928*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Education, and to say it precisely 'educating people' has been lingering concerns for the societies and nations since ages. There has been tremendous efforts made from time to time and these have resulted in differential achievements in countries. Interestingly, the countries and societies that has had many feathers in their caps in past, have somehow missed the bus, while others who came into the development fold later, progressed much more rapidly and are found in the front rows. This could very well be inferred from the development plans and priorities of the individual countries and the collective resolves of the countries in form of Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals of United Nations, where 'education' has got a prominent place. In the on Sustainable Development Goals, the Goal 04 has been dedicated to education i.e. 'Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning'.

The coverage and emphasis of educational attainments, so far, been on the pre-primary and primary levels of education or in other words the educational objectives were limited to the functional literacy only. The secondary and tertiary levels of education were ignored because of the resource crunch and lack of the political will of the governments. But, now it seems, there has been a realization at various levels that only basic literacy and numeracy is not going to serve the purpose rather the tertiary level education in a university and the vocational and professional education must be given equal importance. The SDGs' Goal 04 in its targets very clearly has put that 'By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university'. The SDG 04 has

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