

Chapter 3

Open and Distance Learning for Sustainable Development in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

Bangladesh Open University (BOU) is considered as a Mega University for its continuous growth over the last two decades. The modus operandi of education makes BOU distinct from other traditional universities. In Bangladesh this is the first and only university that adopts Open and Distance Learning (ODL) as a mode of delivery. From its inception, BOU has taken several initiatives for the development of ODL in Bangladesh. The main intention of such initiatives is to contribute national development. The success and sustainability of any organization largely depends on its management capacity to cope with the rapid world-wide change, which is also true for BOU. To evaluate the role of BOU in sustainable development, this chapter outlines the achievements of BOU and challenges that it is facing in delivering effective ODL. This chapter also discusses the origins and meaning of the term “sustainability” and strategies that should be taken into consideration to ensure sustainable ODL, which can provide a framework for its successful implementation linking BOU’s contribution to sustainable development.

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INTRODUCTION

The concerns for Sustainable Development in Bangladesh are rooted in its constitutional obligations clearly enshrined in article 18A of the constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, which says that "The state shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to preserve and safe-guard the natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forest and wildlife for the present and future citizens". The Government has, therefore, been quite conscious of the emerging issues of Sustainable Development for its developmental planning. "Vision 2021" of the Government is aimed at achieving a transformation in the socio-economic and environmental areas to accomplish the status of middle income country by 2021. The vision plan acknowledges the need of education for all. Strong and steady growth in economy has created huge demand for Higher Education, which cannot be met exclusively by conventional systems of Higher Education. Total enrolment in tertiary sector has tripled since 2000 and crossed two millions in 2012. However, despite such a phenomenal growth, the participation of people from eligible age groups was only 13.23%, which was much below in comparison to neighboring countries, like China (26.70%) and India (24.80%) for the same period. Looking ahead, the British Council counts Bangladesh – along with Nigeria, the Philippines, Turkey, and Ethiopia – among the emerging economies with the greatest forecast growth in tertiary enrolment for the next decade (monitor.icef.com, 2015). It is in this context that Open and Distance Learning system due to their flexible and innovative nature have been a priority for policy planners in Bangladesh.

Over the last two decades, Bangladesh Open University has been using a number of strategies to deliver education for distance learners. Remarkable progress has been made in distance education in Bangladesh in respect to access, equity, and cost-benefits (Jung *et al.*, 2011). BOU has been working since 1992 to reach the unreached or underprivileged population offering a range of educational programmes, which is also the vision of GoB (Government of Bangladesh) to literate people of Bangladesh for sustainable development. From this view, BOU's contribution should be taken into account in country's development. The emergence growth of the WWW (World Wide Web), ICT (Information and Communication Technologies) and telecommunication (communication over a distance by cable, telegraph, telephone or broadcasting) have made ODL popular (Peng *et al.*, 2009) in the developed and in many developing countries. Compared to global situation of ODL, Bangladesh Open University is still struggling in adopting modern technologies and ICT based teaching facilities for its learners. The limitations of the national ICT infrastructure, combined with low funding, lead to a very limited access to the internet. For

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