

# Preface

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The word 'Equity' is very complex as there is no common agreement amongst the philosophers, sociologists, economists and political scientists with regard to its scrupulous connotation. The policies that aims to achieve equality in the frame while assuming that everyone is homogeneous and is capable of achieving the same is both ambiguous and undesirable. The word equity is much broader that crosses the issues of access and opportunity, participation and retention rates and outcomes. The assurance of equity broadly reflects a state in which the outcomes are not the result of differences in economic, social and educational background.

The significant growth of number of students enrolled in various post-secondary institutions in the recent past decades has caused an unprecedented expansion of higher education systems. This rapid demographic growth has been in part through expansion of the universities, in part through the development of non-university sectors. In the early 1970s American sociologist Martin Trow proposed three factors of higher education growth – the rate of growth of number of students, change in the size of systems and institutions, and the proportion of the relevant age cohort enrolled. The author identified a typology of three stages in the development of higher education: elite higher education, mass higher education and universal access. This observation looks relevant and applicable today too.

The rapid and constant social, economic and technological mutations and international competition make the importance of a well-educated citizenry and labor forces to every country very decisive. Higher education is increasingly marked, especially in developed countries, by a growth in the numbers of non-traditional students, adults returning to education.

The development of the information technologies (IT) has offered new perspectives and possibilities of expansion of higher education. IT has changed the nature and potentialities of distance learning and are participating in developing new forms of higher education organization. Using IT and releasing higher education from the constraints of time and place widens the perspective of lifelong learning and the transformation of the concept of a learning society.

Despite expansion in access to tertiary education, the available data shows that the opportunities of participation in higher education has been highly indefinable. The differences are more significant between developed and developing countries. Unfortunately, the discourses of equity has surrounded around participation rates and quality rather than on differential levels of success or outcomes. Trow recognized the persistence of elite sectors under high participation without offering a detailed analysis of the effective dynamics of social stratification and mobility.

Even in a mass higher education context, inequalities tend to change shape and the differentiation of higher educational institutions forms different tracks, promoting or reducing social mobility. In other words, the question is not 'access?' but 'access to what?' The equalities in access to higher education are replaced by inequalities in levels of success or outcomes.

The terms access, participation, exclusion from higher education and exclusion while in higher education for disadvantaged group or section of the population is a complex socio-political as well as economic process that has multiple reasons and causalities. The chapters in this book try to examine access and describe the various spaces where cohorts of relevant age group that are included, excluded, or are at risk of exclusion. Though there are several commonalities in the experience and outcomes of social exclusion across groups and regions, there are also some critical differences in the ways in which it takes place that have led to somewhat different struggles for equal rights.

Besides simple access, the challenges of keeping students in the institution is also a paramount concern. The inequality in educational quality and quantity, between different sections of society is also significant in analyzing the effective equity issues.

Measuring access and equity from a comparative perspective means that we try to take into account what the specific conditions of the development of higher education in each country vary the way the issue of equity was raised and considered. Equity does not mean the same thing in a country where the majority of age cohort participates in higher education compared to another country with a recent development of higher education. The philosophy and the place of higher education in the overall system of education and its relation to the social and economic environment also distinguish the countries in this frame. Equity policy and the deliberations around equity seem to be embedded within national and global agenda. The advanced market oriented systems or highly developed egalitarian countries (especially in Europe) or emerging countries do not face the challenge of equity in the same way. While for some countries, equity has worked well for decades, others have mostly focused on academic standards and quality, with little effort to social and educational equity or are becoming aware of the challenges of this issue.

The issue of equity in higher education raises many questions: what are the most effective policies and initiatives to achieve equity? Does higher education expansion contribute to greater inequality? What role, if any, the research universities can play in

developing institutions of universal access and lifelong? What is the role of research universities in improving equity? How a country can reconcile mass higher education in relation to structures of elite research universities? Does the escalating costs of higher education have a negative impact on public equity policy?

This book entitled 'Equity in Higher Education: A Global Experience' provides an original and broad look at equity in higher education across 11 countries, contributing to comparative higher education literature on Colombia, Argentina, Brazil, India, Malaysia, Greece, France, Spain, Portugal, Poland and Mexico. Based on the different national contexts and experiences, the authors attempt to analyse how the social origin, ethnic origin, economic, political, family background and gender remain important factors of access and success in higher education.

We take this opportunity to place on record our deep gratitude to all the contributors to this volume. Their scholarly chapters on the country of their specialization will significantly contribute to the existing body of literature on the subject. We also thank the chapter reviewers for their comments. Finally, thanks are due to our publisher Studera Press, Delhi for extending all kinds of co-operation and bringing out the book within the stipulated time frame.

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