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# HIGHER EDUCATION'S RESPONSE TO GLOBAL CHALLENGES

2008 ASIA REGIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION SUMMIT  
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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## Executive Summary

Approximately one hundred and fifty participants attended the three-day Asia Regional Summit held in Dhaka, Bangladesh from October 6-8, 2008. Entitled "Higher Education's Response to Global Challenges," the Dhaka Regional Summit was attended by university leaders, U.S. Government (USAID and Department of State) representatives, Fulbright Executive Directors and alumni from the region, and Government of Bangladesh, private sector, and civil society representatives.

Participating countries included Bangladesh, Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Kyrgyz Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Tajikistan, Thailand, Timor-Leste, Vietnam, and the United States.

The Dhaka Summit was an outgrowth from the Higher Education Summit for Global Development, hosted by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, and U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance Henrietta H. Fore that was held in Washington, DC, in April this year. Its aim was to strengthen the role of U.S. and foreign higher education institutions in social and economic development worldwide.

Sponsored by the United States government through the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Dhaka Summit was co-hosted by the University of Dhaka and the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. The Summit's objective was to bring together senior officials from higher education with the private sector, foundations and governments to share programs and develop partnerships. Participants were challenged to look at mobilizing the talents and resources of public and private sector to look at how partnerships can help Asia respond to four critical issues: food security, women's entrepreneurship, teacher training, and disaster management.

The Dhaka Summit opened on October 6 with words of welcome from Denise Rollins, USAID Bangladesh Mission Director; U.S. Ambassador to Bangladesh James F. Moriarty; Vice Chancellor Faiz of the University of Dhaka; and Vice Chancellor Safiullah of the Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Each shared goals for the Summit and challenges for the participants. Hossain Zillur Rahman, Honorable Adviser to the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Commerce, was the Chief Guest at the Opening Ceremony. He added his welcome to those of the hosts and described the opportunities that the Summit would provide. He then urged the participants to examine three major themes over the course of the Summit: ethics, resource mobility, and alumni.

Mark Ward, the Acting Assistant Administrator of USAID's Bureau of Asia delivered the keynote address to the Summit attendees. He focused on the changing landscape of assistance to developing countries, with official government flows accounting for a fraction of what it had in the 1960s, and with foreign direct investment, remittances, and other private flows accounting for over 80 percent of the funds going into these countries. Thus, he highlighted the necessity for new types of partnerships to increase the effectiveness of development – with the higher

education community and in general. He provided several suggestions of the kinds of partnerships that the Summit participants might pursue and encouraged them to learn from their peers and colleagues over the course of the two days.

In the Welcome Session on October 7, Ambassador Moriarty discussed the importance of higher education globally and focused on the four themes of the Summit. He suggested that higher education and academia need to create a working model to improve affordability of food as well as address issues of famine to assist in addressing food security issues. On Women's Entrepreneurship, he relayed the importance of getting women more involved in work. In regard to teacher training, he stated that not enough emphasis is given to supporting quality education and perhaps private companies could help fill the gaps. And lastly, higher education can play a role in researching natural disasters as well as training people how to respond to and mitigate natural disasters.

The topic of Plenary #1 was Building Innovative Higher Education Partnerships, largely focusing on more traditional kinds of university partnerships. All of the panelists touched on how it is better for everyone in society and in a country when a partnership is formed where both parties profit. Another key to building partnerships that the panelists highlighted was the importance of looking at the long term goals and the necessity of innovation. Even though partnerships seem to be a lucrative idea, they only generate results when created for long-term benefits rather than short-term ones. One panelist offered a systematic approach to partnership where everything has to be clearly stated, constantly monitored, maintained a commitment, and equal efforts would be given from each side if resources are scarce. Another touched on the four main themes for overcoming obstacles within the higher education sector which consist of: development, execution, funding, and expanding. In the question and answer period, topics discussed included how to engage in public private partnerships and ways to recruit and incorporate the public sector with the universities.

Following Plenary #1, Mark Ward, Acting Assistant Administrator for USAID's Bureau for Asia delivered a short speech on Innovative Partnering. He encouraged universities to focus on the resources at hand and begin to utilize them. He also encouraged them to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the Summit and the ideas generated there, establishing partnerships with the firms present or establishing alumni associations to create new partnership opportunities.

Plenary #2, Creating Opportunities for Public-Private Partnering, extended the partnership theme from Plenary #1 to include the private sector, focusing on partnerships with local and multi-national corporations and foundations, establishing university and regional corporate advisory boards, and promoting higher education's entrepreneurship and training agenda. The panelists discussed how in the modern age higher education is a powerhouse and has a critical role in empowering people to achieve their goals. Higher education needs to provide the skills and tools to the people in order for their full potential to be reached. They then provided examples of how ROTA, a non-profit organization based out of Qatar, Intel, and Microsoft create opportunities to enable sustained social and economic opportunity for people. The panelists stressed that global partnerships for development are part of the millennium goals and in order for them to work universities need to be willing to collaborate and look at how they can help serve the public

sector. Finally, one panelist highlighted the importance of higher education in meeting critical development needs through the training of more PhDs in addition to creating partnerships.

The breakout session on Food Security focused on how universities can help create solutions to crises related to food security and the need for more PhDs who are trained on food production and security. One panelist discussed the need for public-private partnerships as well as partnerships between countries when addressing food security, and another discussed ways in which governments can take an active role in addressing issues related to food security. With the estimated increase in population in the years to come, food demand and production will be a major issue. Partnerships among farmers, universities, government, and the private sector will be fundamental to generating new knowledge and developing new technologies to address issues of food security. Another issue that will need to be addressed in relation to increased populations is declining resources like water. This again will have heavy affects on agriculture thus making conservation and processing of food is very important for these partnerships to address.

The Women's Entrepreneurship breakout session focused on the unique challenge of entrepreneurship in meeting social needs as well as making contributions to a market economy. The panelists discussed the internal psychological barriers as well as external barriers in the region for women's progression in entrepreneurship. One panelist discussed the benefits of integrating courses like "women development studies" into curricula across disciplines. Another panelist discussed how Microsoft used partnerships to teach women to use information and communication technologies and how that has empowered them. Overall, partnerships at the grassroots level and with higher education were deemed very important. It was also stated that the private sector could be utilized to ensure women have hands-on experience. Furthermore, panelists emphasized the need to increase the tolerance, among both men and women, of women working outside the home and to provide women with role models.

The Teacher Training breakout session on Innovative Training Models focused on several issues including how to transfer knowledge considering the teachers in schools often are inadequately prepared for their role. Another point highlighted was that building institutional capacity would have significant impact on levels of education attained by children. It was stated that new partnerships have become imperative to bringing about knowledge to millions of children. Furthermore, partnerships that effectively employ technology can be a great asset in the learning process to support diversified needs. The final issue identified the lack of connection between primary and secondary schools and the university, in spite of the role of the university as the knowledge hub.

The Natural Disaster Management breakout session focused on Bangladesh as a case study of how universities can play a role in disaster response and mitigation. The panelists reviewed recent experience and highlighted the need for multidisciplinary experience in mitigating and responding to disasters. They suggested having regular reports on geo-hazard activities, as well as increasing steps to reduce hazards. Increased information sharing and collaboration and more extensive disaster management education at the university level would improve the preparation and response of communities to disasters. The universities can also play a big role in increasing awareness of geo-hazards, mitigation, and community responses.

Plenary #3, Building Relevant Human Capacity: A Focus on the Fulbright Program, examined the contribution of the Fulbright Program and the role of scholarship programs more generally. During this session, participants talked about Fulbright in a broad context. The participants were divided in several different groups, each group having a discussion about their knowledge about Fulbright. Many of the observations were similar across groups, with particular attention on the utility of the Fulbright alumni networks and how those can contribute to universities' development and external linkages through alumni, organizing trainee programs, networking, etc. The participants discussed the opportunities to partner Fulbright activities with those of USAID, the British Council, and other organizations at a country or regional level.

Plenary #4, Broadening Partnerships and Networks: USAID Global Development Commons Pilot: Focus on Natural Disaster, described USAID's Global Development Commons initiatives, focusing on the pilot activity planned for improving information sharing for natural disaster mitigation and response in Bangladesh. The presenters discussed how information might be shared and some of the specific tools for doing so, including GIS and text messaging for information dissemination. The discussion that followed highlighted the great interest universities have in improving access to information and the role they might play in the pilot activity.

Plenary #5, Higher Education's Role in Building the Workforce, focused on the role of the higher education community in developing a skilled and flexible workforce. The representatives of industry cited examples of how additional training is needed among university graduates as well as examples of uninformed expectations that university graduates may have of the jobs in their chosen fields. They also suggested how industry and universities can partner to improve the relevance of curriculum and real world work experience for university students. The university representative suggested that universities re-examine their missions in light of the needs of their societies and explore different options for providing education, such as tertiary short cycle education that can be designed and delivered essentially on-demand. Finally, the industry representatives proposed concrete partnerships in the areas of engineering, particularly in the solar energy and telecommunications specializations.

The final plenary, Plenary #6, New Commitments and Sustaining Partnerships, elicited the conclusions and recommendations of Summit participants at the regional and sub-regional levels. The facilitators of sub-regional discussion sessions reported the findings and recommendations by sub-region. Overall, participants felt that the themes were relevant to their regions and that they had a number of opportunities for creating partnerships through university contacts, business advisory councils and alumni networks. Then the group was asked to examine opportunities for the whole region. At their tables, participants discussed possible next steps in four concrete areas: 1) regional networks for information sharing; 2) business advisory councils; 3) linkages with U.S. institutions; and 4) resources. They identified concrete steps that they could take as a region with the expectation that they would hold each other accountable for results at the 2009 Global Higher Education Summit.

Denise Rollins, USAID Bangladesh Mission Director, began the closing reception. She summarized how the Summit clarified how partnerships work, what works and what does not.

She announced that the concrete partnerships established over the course of the Summit are the following:

1. Intel will partner with selected Summit countries, pairing institutions with regional Centers of Excellence.
2. Bangla CAT will develop a new program for engineers in the area of solar energy.
3. GrameenPhone will support a new telecommunications engineering program at BUET.

Ambassador Moriarty added another announcement, five Master's degree Fulbright fellowships in the area of food security, and thanked everyone for the participation and contribution to the Summit.

Vice Chancellor Faiz closed deeming the Summit a success stating that the Summit has put forth challenges to its participants and this is a great time to move forward with the thoughts developed. Vice Chancellor Safiullah congratulated the organizers for their success in carrying out the Summit.