

# State Universities

## Undeniable Academic Social Enterprises in Sri Lanka

Today, the state universities in Sri Lanka are on the crossroads to ensure the sustainability, even though they are the catalysts behind the nation building and accruing global recognition. Inc-omparable prehistory, history and rich heritage persist to be the nation with wisdom and culture through unfolded growth of knowl- edge and education system since the ancient days to recent dec- ades. This enabled the country to thrive while undergoing many numbers of catastrophes and chal- lenges. Although Sri Lanka is a tear drop shape small island at a corner of South Asia, it has been deemed as a smart nation surpass- ing many other wealthy nations in Asia and African continents. Here nobody can deny the commenda- ble role and contribution of the universities in the nation building process. Yet, within last two to three decades' state universities are fallen into unimaginable com- petitions and turbulent environ- ment due the impact of globaliza- tion and rapid development of the world. Although universities are the agent of social transforma- tion, today they are in the implicit pressure generated by the host societies and explicit pressure generated by the universal func- tions. Historically university played role as ideological apparatus- es, through expressing ideologi- cal struggles in societies. Then became as a mechanism of selec- tion and socialization of domi- nant elites. Later, it started to

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functions with scientific research, to find solutions for unsolved present and future problems. However, today universities are also expected to produce skilled labour force as professional university. Eventually, universities are expected to be embraced with hybrid function in social transformation and professional development. This led the universities to undergo a global competition to ensure the sustainability through outcome based education. Hence, the universities are supposed to be academic social enterprises to anticipate the demands and desires of all the stakeholders right around the globe. The new world order claims people to multiple role as analytical thinkers, creative thinkers, collaborators, continuous learners, global citizens and peace makers. Universities are required to produce meta skilled people to meet the global challenges. This global aspiration compels the state universities in Sri Lanka to incorporate a vital changing process that includes benchmarking the universities from the global contexts; incarnation of academic social-entrepreneurial leadership: genuine practicing of good governance; replacing free education with responsible education; blended university life from diverse academic, cultural, demographic and geographic tertiary; Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of all categories of staff; contextualized quality assurance; sufficient and sustainable resources allocation and utilization. These academic social entrepreneurial strategic interventions yield better outcomes from the state universities to ensure the sustainability.

Review global context of the university system from the past to present is an inevitable task to benchmark our universities restart from the purpose of origin to move

toward the future outcomes. Since the first and the oldest university al-Qarawiyyin, Morocco established in 859 A.D, the primary purpose of the university to contribute for the social transformation through different ideological struggles in societies. However, In the modern world universities are required to adapt and to respond to the changing character and needs of other social and economic

institutions are frequently heard. According Dahrendorf (2000, p.106) "stagnant universities are expensive and ineffectual monuments to a status quo which is more likely to be a status quo ante, yesterday's world preserved in aspic". This demands the university system to shift into a new paradigm but the education systems in many of the developing countries are already broken system with traditional orientations. Indifferently, in Sri Lanka

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The universities are to be provided leadership through a social entrepreneur, who pursues novel applications that have the potential to solve community-based problems across the world. On one hand the universities are primarily the agent for social transformation, on the other hand, they are required to find solutions for economic challenges. Social entrepreneurs combine commerce and social

issues in a way that improves the lives of people connected to the cause. The social entrepreneurship in the university system should be one step further on the academic perspectives. In the context of education, social entrepreneurship models provide an opportunity to respond quickly, build long term sustainability and create avenues for collaborations between multiple sectors. Many universities in the world including leading universities in U.S. and U.K. such as Harvard and Oxford already adapted the social entrepreneurship models. And they have already revealed a wide spread success in social-change while improving social condition beyond the locality. Creating sustainable business models through

social-entrepreneurship will support the universities, especially as organizations that balances creating economic value and a social mission. Like other enterprises the academic social entrepreneurial leadership also should be supported with a conducive ecosystem that include university council, administrative environment, academic and non-academic staff, student and other stakeholders. Here the university council can provide a vital mentoring and guidance supports to the academic social entrepreneurial leadership of the vice-chancellors. This intensifies holding the council members of the universities as change incubators with entrepreneurial mind settings beyond political spheres.



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One of the principal arguments for the existence of public education is social responsibility. Although this argument remained unchanged to make freely available education for all the children, today the responsibility over the free education in Sri Lanka stand with many questions from all the stakeholders with reference to return on the investment of public. Two major questions are; do the public education produce desired outcomes? Are the public resources utilized efficiently and effectively to produce desired outcomes? All the stakeholders are accountable to answer these questions with reference to social responsibility. This is more emphasized on state universities, as the supreme education institutions that depend 100 percent on the public resources. This responsibility overarches all the stakeholders; policy makers, higher educational authorities, university administration, academic and non-academic staff and students etc. Exemplarily students should acknowledge and accept responsible education instead of free education in all their performance and behaviour in the outcome based education. In the state universities students do not pay for their education, staff are paid higher wages and given privileges compare to other sectors in the country, even though country finds shortage in public fund. Yet, public funding of higher education and research is still important. The concept of public responsibility must be understood much more widely. As state universities in Sri Lanka depend on the public fund and resources, we are responsible for more than 20 million people in the country. Although free education system is politically sound, yielding is not sustainable any more. Hence, it should be transformed into respo-

-nsible education system to ensure outcome based sustainable university system.

Adapting and implementing the system of Good University Governance (GUG) have become an inevitable criterion for the universities to improve the quality. GUG is intended to provide a balance between the autonomy granted to institutions and accountability. Limited opportunities at the state universities with increasing demand of higher education has led a large number of private universities to embark on university education. This has led the state universities to encounter many questions among the general public over the governance. Today we are compelled to maintain the sustainability through the good corporate governance on five principles, namely: transparency, accountability, responsibility, independence, and fairness. The GUG has been further signified over the state universities to guide the countries on genuine good governance practices beyond the political manifesto and propagation. The universities are much more complicated organizations than the business organizations. They should be provided with appropriate governance structure to deal with complicated and diverse stakeholders that begin from ministerial political

leadership to students. The role of good governance enables the universities to manage relations among all these stakeholders to ensure the sustainability, which starts and finishes with governance .

People recognise the university life as the best life in the universe. The universities should be able to establish the world of university life beyond the boundaries of academic, culture, ethnic, gender, demography, geography and so on. This ensures the freedom, independence, friendship, knowledge and enjoyment as a global citizen regardless their backgrounds and future destinations. Unbounded university life enables the universities to bestow the real citizen for the universe through six C's; critical thinking, creative thinking, collaborative skills, continuous learning, citizen of the universe, and caring for others. First of all, in the state universities of Sri Lanka, we should stop segregation the university life according their chosen academic disciplines. University life should be common and shared by every student either they are undergraduates or postgraduates, even though they pursue academic programmes in diverse disciplines. While promoting cross cultural communication, cross discipline learning also should be promoted to enrich the students with intra and interdisciplinary knowledge. The universities also must bring halt to inter faculty and interdisciplinary competitions and event that lead to further fragmentation and separation of the students. The students must be divided into different colleges or houses through blending of diverse background and academic disciplines. The universities be able to embody the concept of "salad bowl" with unique and

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distinct background and academic programmes rather than allowing to deteriorate as “melting pot”.

Sustaining the quality and outcome based university system totally depend on the quality of human resources. Usually in the state universities higher attention is paid on the academic development of academic staff but professional development of administration, non-academic and other minor staff not at all taken into the consideration for CPD. Although academic staff play the major role in the university system, the overall performance of the universities is determined by the effective and efficient integrated and collaborative performance of all the categories of staff. CPD enables professionals to become conscious and proactive learners, rather than passive and reactive. CPD helps individuals to regularly focus on how they can become more competent and effective. As promotion of academic mostly relies on one’s international research reputation and contribution, academic also have shown least interest on any other CPD, except mandatory certificate course on teaching in higher educational institution. The universities must recognize changing social setting and environment in the complexed global context that urges a variety of CPD which incorporate many different formal and informal activities. The collaborative CPD should be enhanced across the different categories of staff, academic from disciplines and departments, employees from different institutions. The universities also should consider multiple techniques in CPD such as in-house seminar, out-side workshops, conference participation, mentoring, shadow learning.



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Quality assurance plays a vital role in uplifting of the university system. Yet, writing proposal and getting funds from the international donors to enhance the quality through the existing broken systems universities as patching work or piece meal approach can never achieve the goals. Quality assurance is a holistic approach covering all the process through strategic management, process management, measuring monitoring system that interact with each other to improve the process in the universities. The state universities should review and benchmark the global context on quality assurance that can be contextualized into local settings rather than depending on international donors with inconsistent projects. Each university is responsible for its’ own quality assurance system as a common strategy and action plan. Everyone in the university is responsible to enhance quality of service, maintaining the quality, understanding and accepting the ownership and check the validity of the system regularly. This confirms that doing a quality assurance as a project by a group of people can never sustain the quality of the university.

The university needs an inbuilt quality assurance system covering entire process. Internal quality assurance system should review the quality assurance in the global context and benchmark it for the particular university at the local setting. This process should be supported by higher authorities and other supporting agencies rather than imposing prototype project based quality assurance for the universities.

Ultimately the outcome based sustainable university system depend on resource utilization in the universities. Sustainability studies and sustainable science are expected to be delivered from the universities as models. Yet, universities have failed in implementing their own sustainable initiatives. Universities are free to claim a commitment to sustainability in their public communications, but not ready to demonstrate commitment in practice consistently and persistently. The universities have the power and responsibility to practice sustainability in an observable and authentic dimension to the ways in which universities educate students and the public on the importance of sustainable

development for the nation and the globe. The state universities in Sri Lanka to be role models for the sustainable development, minimizing energy utilization, minimizing cost and waste generation through apply 3R concepts etc. Sustainable campus or university can be defined as it balances well-known tensions between economic prosperity, ecological and environmental conservation, and social and economic justice. As the state universities in Sri Lanka are run with limited resources, pristine environments and a number of socio-economic challenges, it is unavoidable to implement sustainable initiatives. This would enable outcome based sustainable university system while demonstrating and guiding the nation towards sustainable development.

Sri Lanka, to be a thriving nation with all the challenges and dilemmas the role and contribution of the universities in the nation building process remarkable. Yet, outcome based education and sustainability of the university system claims the universities to be redefined as academic social enterprises.

It demands the university system to incorporate changes through eight strategic interventions:

1. Benchmarking the universities from the global contexts
2. Incarnation of academic social-entrepreneurial leadership
3. Replacing free education with responsible education
4. Genuine practicing of good governance
5. Blended university life from diverse academic, cultural, demographic and geographic tertiary
6. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of all categories of staff
7. Contextualized quality assurance
8. Sufficient and sustainable resources allocation and utilization.

Pushing the universities through these strategic interventions will identify the universities as successful academic social enterprises that encompasses economic development and social transformation along with outcome based education and sustainable university system.

