



A Fair Chance to Access Higher Education: Collaborative Workshop to develop a Policy Brief and Outreach Activity Resource on 28th September 2021

Workshop Report

November 2021

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Introduction to the Report

This 'Fair Chance to Access Higher Education: Collaborative Workshop to develop a Policy Brief and Outreach Activity Resource' was the first Impact Event organised by the *Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana* (FCF) Project. The event was hosted by Central University Haryana (CUH), led by project Consultative Group Member Dr Renu Yadav, and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's Impact Acceleration Account Grant.

The purpose of the workshop was for the FCF team to present and obtain feedback from key stakeholders on both the project's Policy Brief 'Supporting Gender-sensitive Higher Education Access and Choice in Haryana, India' and its Outreach Activity Resource (OAR) 'Organising a College Taster Day' (both of which are based upon key project research findings). In addition, the workshop provided participants from Government Colleges with an opportunity to collaborate in the further development of the OAR by agreeing to pilot it within their colleges.

30 participants were invited based on their key roles as institutional leaders: Haryana Department for Higher Education Representative, college principals, and senior university academics. The workshop was designed to enable the participants to reflect on and consider the contribution that the Policy Brief and the OAR could make to implementing Higher Education (HE) policies and procedures relating to equal access in Haryana and India more generally.

The workshop was extremely successful, in particular:

- The stakeholders' feedback provided the FCF team with valuable insights into the context of HE within Government Colleges in Haryana
- It identified further considerations for the development of the two documents presented.
- As a result of the workshop, four colleges wish to undertake a pilot event based on the OAR.

This report provides an overview of the workshop and the various discussion points which were raised.

Welcome Address

Prof Sarika Sharma – Professor (Dean), School of Education, CUH

Prof Sharma formally introduced the workshop. She confirmed that such a workshop is very relevant to the goals set out in National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which focuses on the growth and development of human resources and overall national development. Poverty and inequality are two key barriers in efforts to achieve these goals. Prof Sharma said that to address these barriers, it is important to have knowledge of the situation in Haryana and India. The development of this knowledge and the achievement of these goals benefit greatly through collaborations between different Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) and countries. She welcomed the government representatives, members of university leadership, and college principals who were participating in the workshop.

Concept of the Workshop

Prof Ann Stewart – FCF project Principal Investigator, School of Law, University of Warwick

Prof Stewart started by thanking everyone present and expressed regret for not being able to join in person. She expressed delight at the fact that so many experts were willing to spend their valuable time and share their equally valuable experiences and thoughts. Prof Stewart briefly introduced the FCF Project's aim to use its research findings to contribute to the development of policy and practices which will be beneficial to young women and men, taking account of the framework provided by NEP 2020. She spoke of the importance of the collaborative approach involving Indian academic and educational policy experts which has underpinned each stage in the development of the five-year research project, and which hopefully will contribute towards positive social change. This approach is evident in the partnership with CUH, which was hosting the present international workshop. She stressed her interest in seeking the thoughts and advice of the participating experts who are involved in policy development in India. Finally, she briefly introduced the members of the FCF Project team.

Introduction of Guest of Honour, Chief Guest, and Resource Persons

Dr Renu Yadav – Assistant Professor at CUH and Workshop Organiser, School of Education, CUH

Dr Yadav introduced the guest of Honour, Dr Hemant Verma, Deputy Director, Department of Higher Education, Haryana, and briefly shared his academic background, recognition, and leadership experiences in Haryana. She also introduced the chief guest, Prof Tankeshwar Kumar, Vice-Chancellor of CUH, Prof Ann Stewart and Dr Emily Henderson (University of Warwick), Dr Nidhi Sabharwal (Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (CPRHE, NIEPA)), Anjali Thomas, Nikita Samanta and Julie Mansuy (all from the University of Warwick), Prof Radhey Shyam (Dean Academics, CBLU Bhiwani), Prof NovRattan Sharma (Dean Academics, MDU, Rohtak), and the principals from different colleges in Haryana who are the key resource-persons for the workshop. She then invited Dr Hemant Verma to address the workshop.

Address by Guest of Honour

Dr Hemant Verma – Deputy Director, Department of Higher Education, Haryana

Dr Verma expressed delight at the collaboration between the University of Warwick and CUH. He shared some statistics on girls and HE in Haryana and that it has been a state government policy to provide a girls-only college every 20 km in the state so that girls do not have to travel too far to access HE. He explained that this development has significantly contributed to increasing the General Enrolment Rate (GER) for women in the state to 32.7 which is much higher than the national average GER for women in India (27.3 according to the All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-20). The state has been focused on providing equitable and quality access to education for girls. He pointed to the 60 or so women's only colleges in India which also do not charge tuition fees. Additionally, there are aided colleges that are providing educational facilities to girls. Providing free public transport has greatly contributed to increasing the enrolment of girls in Haryana. Within the framework provided by the NEP 2020 they are considering integrating vocational education with mainstream education to encourage post-graduate employment. He pointed out that Haryana also has a women's university Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya which provides undergraduate, postgraduate, and research-level educational facilities to women in the state.

Address by Chief Guest

Prof Tankeshwar Kumar – Vice-Chancellor, CUH

Prof Kumar said that this topic is very important and that access to HE and gender-sensitive HE can bring social change. He provided a brief introduction to the context of Haryana; how there has been considerable growth in HE in the state; and how there has been a numerical increase in the number of students at the undergraduate level in colleges and at the post-graduate level at universities. Girls are outnumbering boys even in courses such as computer science and electrical engineering. He emphasised the need to provide more buses to good colleges and universities to bring girls to HEIs. He pointed out that more institutions and more dedicated transport facilities (in addition to free public transport),¹ would cater to the educational preferences of more parents and students. Within this context, outreach activities are important. Prof Kumar gave the example of how the people, during the pandemic, believed that Oxford University would be able to provide a vaccine for the epidemic. He said that such public trust in the capabilities of the universities and provision of affordable HE are important in encouraging parents to foster and facilitate their children's educational and career trajectories.

¹ In several Indian states and cities, including Haryana, undergraduate and university students can obtain bus passes which provide them with free access to state-funded public transport buses. In contrast, a dedicated bus service would cater to the commute needs of the students from a particular college or institution which would be preferred by students and families as a safer, possibly more socially approved mode of transport.

Presentation of the Policy Brief

Dr Emily Henderson – FCF Project Co-Investigator, Education Studies Department, University of Warwick

Dr Nidhi Sabharwal – FCF Project Partner, CPRHE, NIEPA

Dr Henderson and Dr Sabharwal briefly presented the Policy Brief (which had been shared with all the participants before the workshop). The Brief aimed to add to the existing vibrant conversation on gender and HE in Haryana. They highlighted two key research findings. First that the family plays a significant role in educational choices and decisions even though a majority of new students accessing HE are first-generation students and ‘trailblazers’—the first in their family to access HE. Secondly, that Government Colleges are ‘frontier institutions’ providing educational facilities to students from socially non-traditional and economically deprived backgrounds. Within this context, increased and well-targeted outreach by Government Colleges can positively change how students and families make informed decisions to access HE.

Discussion of the Policy Brief

Chaired by Prof Radhey Shyam – Dean Academics, CBLU Bhiwani

Discussants –

Dr Dinesh Gabba – GC, Bhiwani

Dr Satyamanuya Yadav – GC, Gurugram

Dr Kusum – RBS Collge, Rewari

Dr Ashok Beniwal – GC, Adampur, Hisar

Dr Rajendra Rana – SD College, Ambala

Dr Antresh – CUH

The Chair summarised the valuable contributions made by the discussants and remarked that several important issues were raised in this session.

The participants were appreciative of the observations and recommendations being made within the Policy Brief. They agreed that outreach is more important in colleges located in rural areas as they have relatively low enrolment in comparison to urban colleges. One participant recommended that collaborations or consultation with local leaders such as the village sarpanch would be very fruitful in rural contexts. On the other hand, one participant expressed that outreach should not be restricted to only Government Colleges; private aided colleges are also relevant sites where most students are first-generation students.

Several participants also made specific suggestions for additional recommendations to be made by the Policy Brief. For instance, one participant suggested that some efforts need to be directed towards students, especially young women who are orphaned or are children in single-parent households. This need has become more crucial during the Covid pandemic. Students have lost parents due to the pandemic and are struggling to continue their education. Another participant suggested that counselling in school should happen at least four months before public school examinations. These counselling sessions should provide higher education information. There could be small videos on HEIs, their facilities, and the courses available, as well as on the application process. These should be distributed via mainstream and social media. Additionally, leaflets and newsletters can also be useful.

The participants supported and added to a number of the Policy Brief's findings. Families are significant in students' access to higher education. They recommended that forms of cash incentives could be offered to students from poor families who enrol in HEIs. The participants acknowledged that access to HE is gendered especially since there is an increasing number of women being enrolled in HE. They confirmed that marriage can definitely be a barrier to HE, especially in Haryana where the marriage age is low.

They recognised that an increase in transport in rural areas will increase access. They shared that some colleges have donated buses, but there are unanswered questions regarding who will be responsible for running and maintaining the buses. Only some colleges have these resources. A participant suggested the need for appropriate personnel on these buses who would be able to "oversee" the girls using them and to have trusted drivers and conductors. Another participant pointed out that many students commute from far (even if the government provides some free or reduced fares). Therefore, hostel facilities are very important.

One of the participants suggested that apart from counselling about HE courses during schooling, there is also a need to share information about skill/vocational education. The majority of students opt for traditional HE but they are not necessarily making an active decision based upon informed choices. They may be unable to obtain jobs relating to their course. Economically disadvantaged students need to also have access to vocational and skill education. Students are not making informed choices about traditional education; they, therefore, need to be given counselling to make better decisions. It was also suggested that similar counselling needs to be provided for postgraduate education during the third year of education in colleges. One discussant considered that, upon completing their master's degree, students are taking on jobs unrelated to their studies, which suggests a waste of their time and money.

The Policy Brief highlights the present role played by cybercafes in accessing HE. In response, one participant observed that although they (HE in Haryana) may claim that IT facilities are available, issues remain. Students often cannot be reached as the cybercafé's email address and phone number are often left as personal details in the application form. Another participant specifically suggested that undergraduate students could be engaged as researchers gathering raw data for different academic research projects. It would be helpful for academics seeking primary data. It was argued that such engagements would also provide academic research experience and also small part-time employment opportunities for students.

Outreach Activity Resource Presentation

Prof Ann Stewart – FCF project Principal Investigator, School of Law, University of Warwick
Nikita Samanta – FCF Project PhD Student, School of Law, University of Warwick

Prof Stewart and Ms Samanta presented the OAR which has been developed by the FCF Project team. They acknowledged that they are aware of a variety of outreach efforts being made within Haryana. They stressed that the OAR is an attempt to add to the body of different outreach options available to colleges in Haryana. The OAR which acknowledges the importance of families in decision making will help students and families to make more informed educational choices that will suit their needs and aspirations. The OAR recognises that the Government Colleges are local knowledge hubs and that they are in the best position to organise outreach to help students and families to make better educational decisions.

Discussion of the Outreach Activity Resource

Chaired by Prof NovRattan Sharma – Dean Academics, MDU, Rohtak

Discussants –

Dr Sanjay Joshi – GCW, Mahendargarh

Dr Sangeeta Sapra – GC, Murthal

Dr NN Yadav – GC, Narnaul

Dr Mahesh Yadav – GC, Mahendargarh

Dr Karan Singh – GC, Pali, Rewari

Dr Raj Pal Kuashik – GC, Israna, Panipat

The Chair summarised the valuable contributions made by the discussants and remarked that several important issues had been highlighted in this session. The comments and suggestions made by the discussants are summarised below.

The OAR was well received overall with one discussant in particular saying that a “taster day is a wonderful idea to boost college enrolment”.

Several discussants referred to the important role that family plays in HE decision making, confirming the need for a ‘family friendly’ approach to outreach within the OAR. It was suggested that colleges could hold webinars to speak to parents as they may not be able to come to the college campus. If the parents/students cannot come to the college, the college should come to them. Volunteers should identify these households, and the college can host a meeting in the villages.

Further suggestions were made based on the approach adopted by the OAR, which seeks to encourage colleges to think of the best ways to hold outreach activities within their local context. One participant confirmed a research finding that prospectuses were no longer published and therefore no reference to them in the OAR. They recommended that these should be restored by the government. Participants made very valuable suggestions on how to develop family friendly outreach activities in their particular contexts. One participant recommended that each college adopt 5-10 villages in its vicinity and help students and families make appropriate educational decisions. It could be made a regular practice to interact with the adopted villages to develop rapport and relationships of trust. For example, some of the discussants shared programmes within their colleges where they had a small botanical nursery or had developed organic fertilizers and manure and shared the products with villages in the vicinity as a form of outreach and recruitment activity. It was also suggested that outreach activities such as taster days could be organised in collaboration with students who participate in NSS (National Social Service) and NCC (National Cadet Corps) in Indian HEIs. Additionally, the alumni association of the colleges could also be engaged to support and fund outreach activities. Sports and cultural camps and activities were also suggested as outreach activities where school students and families could be provided with information. A speaker also said that their college could invite school students for visits and summer programmes.

Other suggestions linking the OAR to discussions of the Policy Brief included:

- Low fees, stipends, and bus passes can be helpful. Buses would also help with security concerns, especially dedicated bus service for girls.
- Coaching classes within colleges which help students prepare for public examinations could be useful for employment in public sector jobs, which are highly sought after.
- Evening colleges are needed in all areas because some students are the main breadwinners in their families.

- Principals of colleges need to have more autonomy which would allow them to plan, fund and facilitate outreach activities in their respective institutions.

It was very encouraging that the participants were engaged with the OAR and that many of the specific suggestions from discussants were supportive of the project's general findings which highlight the importance of family, transport, and community, and the link between HE subjects and employment post-graduation in accessing HE.

Invitation to Pilot the Outreach Activity Resource

Prof Ann Stewart – FCF project Principal Investigator, School of Law, University of Warwick

Prof Stewart thanked the discussants for their contributions in the workshop and briefly invited the college principals to reflect upon the discussions in the workshop and consider piloting the OAR in their respective HEI. She suggested that an additional meeting can be organised to discuss how each participating HEI could be supported by the FCF Project to pilot the OAR, share their experiences, and feedback their views.

Feedback and Suggestions

Dr Renu Yadav – Assistant Professor at CUH and Workshop Organiser, School of Education, CUH

Dr Yadav sought feedback from the discussants and guests about the workshop and ways in which the workshop could be improved. The overall response indicated that all the participants were satisfied with the way in which the workshop was conducted within the current post-pandemic circumstance.

Conclusions and Thank You

Dr Emily Henderson – FCF Project Co-Investigator, Education Studies Department, University of Warwick

Dr Henderson concluded the workshop by thanking everyone for the rich and helpful discussion. She particularly thanked the chief guest, the guest of honour, the chairs, and the discussants of the workshop. She said that the team had learnt a great deal from their participation and discussion within the workshop. The contributions would be used to develop further the policy suggestions flowing from the research. Dr Renu Yadav was specially thanked for organising and hosting the workshop. She also thanked all the faculty, students, and administrative staff at CUH for their kind and warm hospitality and efforts towards hosting the workshop.

Reflection: Post-workshop

The team was delighted with, and extremely grateful for, the very insightful contributions from all the workshop participants. The comments from the speakers have allowed the FCF Project to gain a more nuanced understanding of issues that young women and men from marginalised backgrounds face, particularly in the state of Haryana. The team also received feedback from participants after the event, further confirming the value of the workshop and the FCF Project's

work, as well as providing additional points to be considered for the Policy Brief and OAR. As an outcome of the workshop, four colleges in Haryana volunteered to take part in the piloting of the OAR.

This workshop will enable the FCF Project team to revise the OAR and Policy Brief based on all the comments provided by the discussants and attendees. In addition, the piloting of the OAR by the four colleges will allow the further refining of the document before its publication, thus providing Government Colleges with an additional resource for outreach activities in the Indian context. More directly, the outreach undertaken by the volunteer colleges has the potential to enhance informed decision-making that families from marginalised backgrounds engage in when making decisions about young people's HE options in Haryana.

These further developments will form the basis for the second impact workshop provisionally scheduled for January 2022. This will be hosted at Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya (Haryana's pioneering women's university - as indicated by Dr Verma) very kindly facilitated by Dr Manju Panwar (Chairperson for the Department of Social Work) who is a member of the FCF Project's Consultative Group.

The FCF Project also aims to further collaborate with its partners in India in order to host a national event exploring the value of the Policy Brief and OAR at the Indian national level.

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Accompanying resources for the project

In addition to this report, other resources about the project are available on the project website: www.warwick.ac.uk/haryana. This includes various Project Outputs such as project reports and presentations, as well as other information about the project and the people involved.

The project can also be found on Twitter and Instagram as @FCFHaryana.

The project Team can be contacted at fcharyana@warwick.ac.uk