

Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh: a concept paper

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Introduction

Bangladesh is a densely populated country where people are the main driving force for its development. Thousands of people of Bangladesh are working abroad and their remittances are contributing a significant role in our economy though most of them are not skilled enough. Skilled expatriate would have contributed more in national development and skilled manpower is also very much required for the development of the country too. Therefore, human development has to get priority and should be at the top of the government's priority list. Today's world is known as global village. The global village is very competitive, In the global village a group of people have to compete with another group of people on a regular basis for their socio-economic development. The society we are living now is knowledge based, very competitive and dynamic. The key to success and sustainability is nurturing own core competencies. In the competitive world we require knowledge about the past and present, contexts in which success and competencies can be developed and defined, and knowledge of how to apply competencies to deliver future sustainable success.

The people are now not only the citizen of a particular country alone, but they are world citizens too. The world needs motivated people who are ready to serve for the humanity and to work for saving the world from any threat. Today militarism alone cannot determine the fate of a country in world politics and development. Rather a nation where there is practice of appropriate information dissemination, knowledge and wisdom can influence others and eventually lead the world. Innovation, creativity, adaptability, etc. play an important role for the rising of a nation. In this regard, knowledge is the main driving force. The 21st century is being identified as a century of knowledge. Knowledge has been playing a pivotal role in every sphere of human life. Information gathering, organizing and disseminating, of course, are the important tasks in the knowledge society. At the same time brain storming with the available information is also a vital aspect for which national infrastructure and strong motivation are essential. Therefore, this is high time to design a road map for the knowledge sector of Bangladesh. A permanent Knowledge Commission will help the nation to design such road map and will ensure efficient and requisite evolution of knowledge society in the country.

Power of Knowledge

Samuel M. Makinda, an African, write in one of his article, "There is a correlation between knowledge, development and power. It is the states which control the fountains of knowledge that often exercise preponderant influence in world affairs". Ali Mazrui has pointed out, 'The entire international system of stratification has come to be based not on "who owns what" but on "who knows what"'.

The global structure of knowledge and ideas plays a very important role in determining the structure of political and economic power and influence. Societies that are rich in natural resources, but poor in knowledge and modern technology, may not succeed as well as those which have both knowledge and resources. Indeed, the states that are rich in knowledge and modern technology are likely to have greater global influence, even if they are poor in natural resources. This is one of the reasons why a natural-resource poor country like Japan is richer and globally more influential than a natural-resource rich country like Congo, which is poor in knowledge.

Strength of knowledge lies in its recognition of focused intelligent leadership that envisions knowledge being identified, nurtured and harnessed as well as its advocacy of providing the essential human infrastructure that is supported by the country infrastructure. The leadership infrastructure delivers the necessary skills to realize the

knowledge vision. This enables core competencies to be developed and transferred within the country that both uses and builds human capital through the way that people interact to generate and share knowledge. The country also needs to provide the people infrastructure to develop policies, procedures and processes that enable people to create and share knowledge for solving problems and delivering value that underpins the country's competitive position.

(Ideas borrowed mainly from Derek H.T Walker and Samuel M. Makinda)

Managing Knowledge

Concept of knowledge management formulated just two decades ago and yet evolving. The notion of managing knowledge is to manage an environment that supports and harnesses knowledge to deliver innovation that in turn delivers competitive advantage. Knowledge is sticky and difficult to transfer because knowledge is more than facts and even information. Knowledge is about context, the history, hidden inferences, and cause-and-effect loops that explain why something did or did not happen in a particular way. However, knowledge may be acquired through books, journals, the internet, educational institutions, research centers, internships, workshops and conferences. The Western world dominates the global structure of knowledge through various means, including journals and books that promote Western-generated knowledge. (Ideas borrowed mainly from Derek H.T Walker and Samuel M. Makinda)

Necessities of Knowledge Commission

The 21st Century has been acknowledged worldwide as the 'Knowledge Century'. Every nation now finds itself operating in an increasingly competitive and globalised international environment where the information infrastructure, research and innovation systems, education and lifelong learning, and regulatory frameworks are crucial variables (NKC, India, 2009). We need to take our preparation for joining in the race for social and economic development by establishing a knowledge-oriented paradigm of development. With this broad task in mind a Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh should be established.

Scope of Work of Knowledge Commission

In the meantime, India has formed a National Knowledge Commission which is first such effort in the world. We may borrow some ideas from them. Their Knowledge Commission has focused five operational areas which can also be considered by our Knowledge Commission too.

However, for the convenient of proposed commission briefly described below some focus areas of Indian NKC with some notes on Bangladesh perspective where necessary:

Access to knowledge: Providing access to knowledge is the most fundamental way of increasing the opportunities of individuals and groups. Therefore, it is essential to regenerate and expand the reach of knowledge in society. The commission may work on areas such as Right to Education, libraries, language, translation, Knowledge networks, Health Information Network, Portals, etc.

Education: Access to quality education is a prime issue of development and minimum necessary condition for any progress towards knowledge society. All educational centers need adequate information infrastructure to evolve themselves as knowledge institutes. The knowledge commission will make detail recommendations for all sectors of education of Bangladesh.

Libraries play a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge and are extremely important in building a knowledge economy. There is a need to formulate and create mechanisms and institutions which will bring about a paradigm shift in the libraries and information system (LIS) scenario. In today's context, libraries have to play two distinct roles - to serve as a local centre of information and knowledge, and be a local gateway to national and global knowledge. To fulfill this potential, the entire LIS needs to be

revamped – existing libraries must modernize their collection, services and facilities, become more pro-active and collaborate with other institutions and agencies. The commission may look into – Management and quality of libraries, LIS Education and Research, ICT base of libraries, ICT skills of library personnel, Collaboration among the libraries, Funding of libraries, etc. Recently Union Information Centers (UIC) were established at every union of Bangladesh. The library service may be given through these UICs. The Commission will make detail recommendations.

Language: In the current scenario an understanding and command over the English language is a most important determinant of access to higher education employment possibilities and social opportunities. The Commission may focus on the pedagogy of English language teaching and the use of all available media to supplement traditional teaching methods.

Portals: The commission may suggest to create at national level web based portals on certain key sectors such as Water, Energy, Environment, Teachers, Climate change, Health, Agriculture, Employment, and Citizens Rights etc. The portals would serve as a single window for information on the given sector for all stakeholders and would be managed by a consortium consisting of representatives from a wide range of stakeholders to ensure that they have a national character.

Development of Knowledge Concept: Knowledge concepts are organized and disseminated through the education system. Education is the key enabler for the development of an individual and for altering the socio-economic landscape of a country. Therefore, the commission may focus on revamping the education sector. The areas may get concentration: School Education, Vocational Education and Training, Higher Education, Appointment of Heads of Institutions, Legal Education, Medical Education, Management Education, Engineering Education, Open and Distance Education, Open Educational Resources, More Talented Students in Mathematics and Science, More Quality PhDs, etc.

Creation of Knowledge: Producing new knowledge and protecting existing resources is critical for a nation to compete in the global knowledge economy. This makes it important to consider all activities that lead to the creation of knowledge directly or help in protecting the knowledge that is created. The commission may examine issues such as innovation systems in the country, science and technology activities and the regime of Intellectual Property Rights. Additionally, the commission may concentrate on: Research institutes/organizations of the country, Framework for Public Funding for Research, Entrepreneurship, etc.

Intellectual property rights (IPR) have emerged as an indispensable strategic tool in today's knowledge economies and societies, particularly in the context of economic globalization. An entity's ability to compete in the global market depends to a large extent on its capacity to generate new ideas through innovation in science and technology. IPR, by conferring exclusive monopoly rights to its owner for a limited duration, has emerged as a significant factor in creating incentives for innovation and generation of economic value. An effective IPR system is also a constituent of a reliable legal environment, which in turn becomes an important factor for decisions on foreign investment and technology transfer.

Applications of Knowledge: Knowledge can be productively applied to promote technological change, enhance quality of life and facilitate reliable and regular flow of information. This requires significant investment in goal-oriented research and development along with delivery models that can simplify processes within an industry. Initiatives in the areas of agriculture, labor and traditional knowledge can demonstrate

that knowledge can be very effectively applied for the betterment of the community. Libraries and UIC can play vital role to help people in their application of knowledge.

Knowledge Services: For the creation of a true knowledge society, the availability of efficient knowledge services for citizens is critical, especially for enhancing citizen-government interface. Technology provides us with an opportunity to ensure accountability, transparency and proficiency in government services. E-governance is one of the ways in which citizens can be empowered to increase transparency of government functioning. In the meantime Bangladesh government has taken initiative to disclose citizen charter through the respective organization's website.

Objective of Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh

The aim of the Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh would be to enable the development of knowledge society in Bangladesh to make its citizen world class.

Organization of Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh

The Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh may consist of five to six members with a Chairman at the apex. Note that Indian NKC's organization is also almost same.

- A small technical support staff in discharging the duties of the member
- The commission will be free to co-opt experts to assist in the management of its tasks
- The Planning Commission will be the nodal agency for the Knowledge Commission for planning and budgeting purposes and handling parliament submission, but initially it starts its work under the aegis of Access to Information Program of Prime Minister's Office.

Terms of Reference of the Proposed Commission

Followings may be the Terms of Reference of the proposed Knowledge Commission (Indian NKC has almost same TOR):

- Build excellence in the educational system to meet the knowledge challenges of the 21st century.
- Increase Bangladesh's competitive advantage in knowledge.
- Promote creation of knowledge in Science & Technology Institutions and laboratories.
- Improve the management of institutions engaged in Intellectual Property Rights.
- Promote knowledge applications in all spheres.
- Identify and priorities the areas for knowledge application and suggest government to support.
- Promote the use of knowledge capabilities in making government an effective, transparent and accountable service provider to the citizen and promote widespread sharing of knowledge to maximize public benefit.

To achieve the above mentioned TOR the Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh will engage simultaneously with diverse stakeholders, such as experts from the government, academia, industry civil society, media, librarians and others, to build a groundwell of favorable opinion and assist preparation of implementation strategies at the grassroots through transparent, democratic and participative process.

Working Method of Knowledge Commission

The Commission may first review the focus areas mentioned above and study the Indian NKC recommendations for detail. Focus areas selection will be within and outside government. Working groups of specialists and practitioner are needed to be constituted after the identification of the focus areas. Working groups consisting of five to seven experts will meet after three or four months for preparation of report. These group reports will be the inputs for the commission during deliberations to frame its

recommendations. Moreover to get a wide point of view workshops and seminars need to be held periodically in consultation with experts and stakeholders.

For the convenient of the proposed commission given below some activities they may perform:

- Identification of key focus areas
- Identification of diverse stakeholders and understanding major issues
- Constitution of Working Groups and organizing of workshops/seminars, extensive consultations with concerned experts and stakeholders
- Consultation with administrative Ministries & the Planning Commission
- Discussion in the Commission to finalize recommendations in the form of letter to the PM from the Chairman
- Letter to PM containing key recommendations, first steps, financial implications etc. supported by the relevant explanatory documents by the Commission
- Dissemination of recommendations to Governments, civil society and other stakeholders
- Initiating the implementation of the recommendations under the aegis of the Prime Minister's Office
- Coordinating and following up implementation of proposals

Conclusion

Knowledge is the source of further knowledge, knowledge helps to think about new information, knowledge improvises thinking process and helps to solve problems, and knowledge strengthens institutional capacity, and so on. A country can be better positioned practicing its indigenous and new knowledge and effectively transferring that knowledge throughout the country. At the same time it can provide a healthy and intellectual environment for the talented people to learn and share existing knowledge to make a better Bangladesh. Knowledge can help a country to populate its various units with highly talented and motivated people, a key aim for any learning country with aspirations for performance of excellence and export skilled manpower. It is the source of energy that will provide the means to realize a country's competitive advantage through its unique knowledge sources that help delivering better service to world and create new values—this will make a country highly developed, sustainable and leader of the world. Country has to carry on regular programs for capacity building of institutions and human resources. Successful states like Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan stress on capacity building. Creation of the Knowledge Commission of Bangladesh is necessary particularly for the young generation of the country. This commission will identify the challenges and opportunities in the days ahead and will keep its eye on the transformation of knowledge society in Bangladesh.

