

Manuscript version: Author's Accepted Manuscript

The version presented in WRAP is the author's accepted manuscript and may differ from the published version or Version of Record.

Persistent WRAP URL:

<http://wrap.warwick.ac.uk/179288>

How to cite:

Please refer to published version for the most recent bibliographic citation information. If a published version is known of, the repository item page linked to above, will contain details on accessing it.

Copyright and reuse:

The Warwick Research Archive Portal (WRAP) makes this work by researchers of the University of Warwick available open access under the following conditions.

Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRAP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Publisher's statement:

Please refer to the repository item page, publisher's statement section, for further information.

For more information, please contact the WRAP Team at: wrap@warwick.ac.uk.

Building an outreach culture for fairer access to higher education in Haryana, India: a 'bottom up' contribution to policy implementation

Ann Stewart, Nidhi Sabharwal & Renu Yadav

Abstract

This article is concerned with an institutional initiative designed to encourage the development of an outreach culture which can support fairer, more equal, access to higher education (HE) in India. The initiative constituted the final impact phase of a five-year research Fair Chance Foundation (FCF) project (2017-2022) which explored gendered pathways to fair access to HE in the northern Indian state of Haryana.

We present the methodology used to prepare a toolkit, named an Outreach Activity Resource (OAR), which enabled staff in government colleges in Haryana to plan and conduct pilot 'taster days'. The article provides an assessment of the outcome of these events. It argues that a practitioner as researcher methodology and a collaborative 'bottom up' research approach provides the basis for the development of contextually appropriate outreach activities to support fairer, more equal, access to higher education (HE).

We argue that the adoption of 'top down' initiatives, in very different economic, social and cultural contexts to the those where they were originated, may fail to address the way in which the local 'problem' presents itself and may hinder the development of a contextually informed outreach culture which will support fairer, more equal access to HE. In contrast, initiatives such as the one present here, can contribute essential locally informed expertise, built on contextually informed research, to national and international policy making in relation to widening access to HE in an era in which massification is extending across the globe.

Introduction

This article is concerned with an institutional initiative designed to encourage the development of an outreach culture which can support fairer, more equal, access to higher education (HE) in India. The initiative constituted the final phase of a five-year research Fair Chance Foundation (FCF) project (2017-2022) which explored gendered pathways to fair access to HE in the northern Indian state of Haryana. The first two phases focused on how students and their families made decisions relating to accessing HE.

The findings from these phases informed the third phase which shifted attention to the government colleges in rural and semi urban areas which the students had accessed. It explored the institutional awareness of, and response to, such decision making and whether there was an institutional outreach culture. This was 'tested' through the willingness of college staff to undertake an outreach event aimed at addressing issues of widening access.

'The widening (as distinct from merely 'increasing') participation agenda is predicated on the notion that particular social groups, defined perhaps by social class or ethnic background, are unfairly under-represented in higher education' (Gorard and Smith, 2006: 8). Outreach programmes range from 'low-intensity interventions addressing information barriers' faced by school students, through

‘personalized assistance to guide students during the steps of the enrolment procedures’ to ‘academic tutoring during upper secondary education’ (Herbaut and Geven 2020: np). The two ‘taster’ events in phase 3 primarily addressed information barriers.

We used the phase 3 research findings (and those from phases 1 and 2) to prepare a ‘toolkit’ (the outreach activity resource, OAR) to enable college staff to plan and conduct ‘taster’ days. Building on the project’s collaborative approach and our understanding of the local institutional context, we drew on the practitioner as research methodology to co-develop the toolkit. Unlike the phase 3 events responsibility to fund, plan and conduct the events rested solely within the HE institution. The OAR supported taster days were piloted in three government colleges – very successfully. This was at a time when college leaders were facing the most challenging of circumstances occasioned by the COVID 19 pandemic and therefore had every incentive to not proceed.

India’s national policy framework relating to access to HE is structured around a constitutionally mandated system of quotas – reservations - for specific groups supplemented by additional special provisions for others. The reservation system is implemented ‘top down’ via complex administrative procedures with which publicly funded HEIs are required to comply. More generally, at present, these HEIs have limited institutional autonomy. Government colleges are affiliated to and regulated by local universities and limited to providing undergraduate degrees. The government colleges who undertook the tasters days were providing HE not only for first generation entrants but also for students who were predominately covered by reservation policies. Thus, these colleges only need to apply the Federally prescribed access policy and as such could be seen as having little incentive to develop an institutional outreach culture.

Our contextually informed research project established *how*, within this ‘top down’ national framework shaped by reservations and additional special measures, *choices were being made about HE by young people and their families*. We found that, despite what might seem to be little institutional incentive to engage in outreach activities, college staff did have an understanding of the role that outreach could play in encouraging informed decision making by these young women and men and their families. We found that reservation and special provisions *provide the essential context* but *do not exhaust* issues of diversity and inclusion relating to accessing HE. Thus, local educational leaders recognised the contribution that the OAR and taster days could make.

The college principals and staff involved in the OAR supported taster days became advocates for such events sharing their positive experiences with other local educational practitioners and policy makers. This local educational practitioner support validated our research findings when shared with regional and then national educational policy makers. These national level policy makers endorsed the need to develop contextually informed institutional level initiatives to implement recommendations in India’s National Education Policy 2020 (MHRD, 2020).

Overall, the success of the piloted outreach events was, we argue, a result of our ‘bottom up’ contextually aware research and impact methodology which can be applied more widely. We are aware that we are presenting the results of a pilot study in one state. However, the methodology we adopted which engaged local educational policy makers and practitioners built a very solid foundation upon which to engage regional and national policy makers. We content therefore that contextually informed bottom up initiatives can enrich existing policy frameworks relating to access to HE particularly in countries like India which are undergoing the challenges presented by massification.

The rest of the article proceeds as follows. The next section will address the debates relating to global policy discussions relating to developing access to HE. It then explores the way in which

India's history continues to influence contemporary policy making in this area through a discussion of the National Education Policy 2020 proposals. The following section provides the background research upon which the OAR and taster day pilot was based. It demonstrates the way in which adopting an evolutionary and collaborative methodology supports a 'bottom up' theory of change. The rest of the article presents the methodology and findings relating to the institution based outreach activity which resulted from our research project. In conclusion we reflect more broadly on the role that local context specific initiatives like the one presented here can play in the future development of national and global HE policy making.

Locating the 'local' within globalised education and development policies

The relationship between 'top down' global policy and legal frameworks and national education policy development is much debated (Verger et al, 2012). World society theorists would argue that policies, including those relating to widening access to HE, can be 'adopted due to external and internal legitimisation reasons' rather than because they are relevant or workable, with more political and economic pressures on developing countries (Jakobi, 2012: np). National education reforms thus become embedded in a 'universalized web of ideas' (Verger et al, 2012: np). International political economy theorists emphasise the wider economic factors which provoke educational change such as the imperative to avoid capital flight through low rates of taxation which result in privatisation and decentralisation. Within this framework, education is understood as a positional good with the consequence that the pursuit of education equity becomes less central (Marginson, 2004). In any case, it is clear that state social policies are now framed and conditioned by a dense web of international legal and political obligations (Yeates, 2001).

These can be seen in relation to increasing accessibility to HE. The United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) (UNESA, nd) 4 seeks to ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university to eliminate gender disparities and to ensure equal access to all levels of education for vulnerable groups. In addition, the Education 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, nd) requires states to allocate at least 4-6 per cent of GDP and/or at least 15-20 per cent of public expenditure to education. SDG Goal 5 promotes gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls at all levels. It aims to end all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere. It calls on state parties to adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.

These international policy objectives sit alongside and complement the international human rights framework, which aims to protect the civil and political, economic, social and cultural rights of all persons including those relating to access to education. A right to education is also enshrined in a variety of international treaties, with the right to elementary education commanding the most recognition (McCowan, 2012). The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that, "higher education shall be equally accessible to *all on the basis of merit*" (Article 26) (italics added) reflecting just one of the conceptual as well as instrumental challenges presented by claims for a universal right to higher education (for further discussion see McCowan, 2012). This right is framed by a 'prevailing and largely unquestioned ideology of merit' and is 'reflected in the global preoccupation with participation rates, measurable academic performance and various forms of standardised testing that are used for granting access' (Wilson-Strydom, 2016: 146-147). Nonetheless, the value of increasing accessibility to HE is 'widely acknowledged at policy levels' (Wilson-Strydom, 2016: 146).

Contemporary global developments involving massification, (India is aiming for 50% in HE by 2035), internationalisation and privatisation/marketisation of HE, coupled with a much greater

understanding of the complex, multi-layered and intersectional ways in which disadvantage and discrimination are manifested, present challenges for educational policy makers and providers (Verger et al, 2012). These challenges have resulted in the development of a wide range of global education policy initiatives – under the rubric of ‘widening participation’ - undertaken by Higher Education Institutions (HEI) (Gorard & Smith 2006; Herbaut & Geven 2020; Hasan and Nussbaum, 2012; Morley and Leach, 2009; Kwiek, 2008; Moore et al, 2013; Petoukhov, 2013; Wilson Strydom, 2015). Such initiatives use a range of terminologies- fairness of access, equality of opportunity or affirmative action - reflecting, sometimes not that clearly, varying understandings of what constitutes equality with differing emphases on forms of intervention (in relation to England see Moore et al, 2013 and Wilson Strydom, 2015 in relation to South Africa).

The adoption of global education programmes such as these in relation to widening access to HE are often questioned for not taking sufficient account of ‘local’ social contexts and needs (Crossley & Watson, 2003). Verger et al (2012) identifies from the literature a range of reasons why re-contextualising global education policies can be so problematic, especially in developing countries. Material conditions may differ: many schemes assume well funded highly professionalized and well regulated systems. Political contexts may differ including government or professional ideologies which can lead to resistance. Differing cultural assumptions may prevail. For example, it is argued that despite the constitutional framework, the historically rooted elitism in India which makes it socially acceptable to not provide the same quality of education for all (Verger and Van der Kaaij, 2012) challenges the cultural assumptions which inform widening participation policies. Finally, the ‘problem’ which needs to be addressed may in fact be different.

HE in India has experienced a considerable expansion in recent decades and access has improved across all sections of society (Gross Enrolment Rate 27.1% (MOE, 2020)). The Gender Parity Index (GPI) is 1.01 indicating an overall parity in the number of young women and men enrolled in HE (MOE, 2020). Nonetheless, the system faces persisting challenges in equalizing access with significant regional variations (Varghese, 2015; Sabharwal and Malish, 2017). The GER is lower for marginalised caste communities and, as our research finds, the GPI masks persistent gender inequalities (Henderson et al, 2021).

India’s approach to addressing inequalities in access to HE is closely associated with its history. There is a constitutionally mandated framework for redressing group disadvantage through the provision of reservation (quotas) based upon caste (understood as endogamous and hereditary social group limited to persons of the same rank, occupation, economic position and having mores distinguishing it from other such groups) (Deshpande 2017; Deshpande and Zacharias 2013; Ovichegan, 2015; Sabharwal et al, 2014; Sabharwal, 2020; Galanter, 1984; Waughrey, 2022; Chanana 2017; Kannabiran, 2015). There are defined percentages for scheduled castes (SC 15%), scheduled tribes (SC 7.5%) and, more recently, other socially and educationally backward classes (OBC 27%) reserved in *public* employment, politics and education, including *public* HEIs (PIB, 2016; Varghese, 2022) (italics added). A 10% quota for the economically weaker sections has also been added (PIB, 2019) recently, reflecting the shift from caste to class. Reservation is understood as an essential, but not exclusive way, to remedy historical, structural group injustice - to right earlier wrongs inflicted through caste. Measures to tackle other forms of disadvantage sit alongside, and interact with, those relating to reservation. These include constitutional and legislative commitments to address discrimination based upon sex or disability, being a member of the transgender community or a veteran. Individual states can add to these Federal level measures. In the main, these quotas do not extend to private provision, although there is facilitation in the Constitution for such extension (GOI, 1950) and some individual States have introduced quotas in the absence of a Federal level requirement.

This national framework structures not only the way in which fair access is understood but also results in a highly centralised administrative system for implementation of access policies. As a result, institutional level outreach cultures have not developed within most publicly funded HEIs, particularly those drawing students from communities covered by reservation policies. In contrast, private sector institutions, particularly those who situate themselves within the global education market have incentives to adopt institution level initiatives which address issues relating to equitable access.

India's most recent National Education Policy (NEP 2020) frames HE as offering 'personal accomplishment' and 'productive contribution' to society (MHRD, 2020: 33 para 9.1.1.). The stated goal is a 'knowledge economy and society' with many more young people aspiring to HE. It also highlights the role played by HE 'in promoting human as well as societal wellbeing and in developing India as envisioned in its Constitution - a democratic, just, socially conscious, cultured, and humane nation upholding liberty, equality, fraternity, and justice for all' (MHRD, 2020: 33 para 9.1). While recognising the framework provided by the Constitution for understanding and addressing inequality, NEP 2020 clubs together gender identities, socio-cultural identities (SCs, STs, OBCs) 'minorities', geographical identities, disabilities, and socio-economic conditions under the rubric of socially and economically disadvantaged groups (SEDGs) (MHRD, 2020: 24 para 6.2). It seems, therefore, to be moving towards a more 'diversity' based conception of disadvantage. In this way, NEP 2020 is reflecting the global educational trends which use the terminology of inclusivity and diversity as the basis for designing policy initiatives (Waughrey, 2011; 2022).

Thus, NEP recognises the need for 'increased *access, equity, and inclusion* through a range of measures including greater opportunities for *outstanding public education*' (italics added) (MHRD 2020: 34 para 9.3) and that SEDG students 'require *encouragement and support to make a successful transition to higher education...*' (italics added) (MHRD 2020: 39 para 12.4). It indicates that there will be obligations on institutions to increase the involvement of SEDGs through reduced fee structures, provision of bridging programmes and offering counselling and mentorship services.

The NEP 2020 has, however, been critiqued for failing 'to specify a roadmap of how it will make sure that education is made accessible to these individuals' and 'implemented *at all levels*' (italics added) (Khan and Sahoo 2020). We argue that our 'bottom up' contextually informed initiative is a contribution to the development of an institutional level outreach culture.

Researching the local context: the background FCF project findings

This section demonstrates how our project findings supported the development of the OAR and its successful piloting at the institution led taster days. It begins by situating our research in Haryana before describing the evolutionary, change oriented methodology adopted. It also presents our key findings.

Haryana, in North India, is a relatively small and dense state with a population of approximately 25.4 million (COI, 2011) consisting of largely Hindus (87.46%) Muslims (7.03%) and Sikhs (4.91%). Its economic base is agricultural, although its proximity to the National Capital Region (of Delhi) has produced considerable industrialisation, with just over a third of the population now living in urban areas. The armed forces are a major source of employment. It has a low female sex ratio and a high incidence of various forms of violence against women (Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression, 2015, 2014; Ahlawat, 2012; Chowdhry, 2012) and against the Dalit community (Pal, 2018).

However, Haryana has a significantly higher GER (29%) (MOE, 2020) than the national average and numerical parity of enrolment of young women and men. Young women now outnumber young men in state universities and colleges. This is due in part to concerted state actions but also, as our research shows, to gendered assessments of the value (and purpose) of HE for young women (Henderson et al, 2021; Stewart et al, 2022).

Our research project was concerned with access to state government colleges in rural and semi-urban Haryana offering basic undergraduate degrees. These institutions are affiliated to state universities which regulate the courses they provide and as such they have little institutional autonomy. They are often poorly resourced in terms of staff and facilities. Nonetheless, these colleges are on the front line in the expansion of HE for first-generation entrants to HE and as such they are playing a key role in the massification of HE. Their student body is drawn from very proximate rural and semi urban areas and from socially and economically disadvantaged families. They are predominately serving the groups that are covered by reservation policies. The vast majority of the students come from families with no experience of HE and where the education of parents, particularly mothers, is also often limited. Government colleges are enabling young women, in particular, to enter HE, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. What we were concerned with, in the FCF research, *was how choices were being made about HE by young people and their families*. We focused on the way in which gender intersects with caste and class-based disadvantages, and how local colleges understood family decision making.

The methodology was change oriented, evolutionary and participative. It involved four phases: *three research and one impact phase*. Each phase was developed collaboratively with project partners and a wider group of academics and educationalists and built on the findings from the previous phase. The project adopted a 'bottom up' theory of change. This model 'takes into consideration the specific context in which the change must occur and presumes that changes in attitudes, values and skills, precede changes in practice (Chin and Benne, 1985)' (Roach and Salisbury, 2006: 280). Phase 1 provided the evidence upon which to build the further phases. We surveyed students within 3 government colleges; undertook focus groups with selected students; and key stakeholder interviews in the colleges. It aimed to better understand the personal and educational backgrounds and trajectories of the young people who had accessed HE in these colleges (Henderson et al, 2021). Phase 2 involved an in-depth study of the way in which gendered decision making was undertaken within the families of first generation students. It found that young women were obliged to negotiate their way through the complex challenges that arise in the gender conservative culture of Haryana (Thomas and Henderson, 2022). In addition, we found that young women saw positive utility in accessing HE to postpone marriage while young men question its utility to produce jobs (Stewart et al, 2022; Henderson et al, 2021; Thomas and Henderson, 2022).

We established that families with access to very little social and cultural capital played a pivotal role in decision making. Fearful of the effect on a young woman's social reputation and the dangers associated with public transport, they wanted local 'respectable' colleges. Families did not have access to formal HE provided information upon which to base choices and little knowledge of admissions procedures which are now conducted completely online. They resorted to the support offered in their neighbourhoods such as in cyber cafes or family members. Choices about HE were being made without access to sufficient or accurate information.

The Phase 3 research focused on the *institutional context* provided by the colleges. It assessed the way in which widening participation was understood by college staff, given their position as frontline providers for the massification generation. It explored whether the colleges recognised any need to undertake institutional level 'outreach' activities which took account of the challenges in negotiating access and informed decision making faced by potential students and their families. It questioned

whether there was any outreach culture within the institution (Osborne, 2003; Gorard and Smith, 2006) and whether there was any appetite for and ability to undertake any institution based initiatives which would support more informed, less gendered, decision making among students and their families.

The researcher who had previous expertise in conducting outreach activities with Indian HEIs worked with key college staff colleges (based in the 3 locations where the earlier phases of the research were conducted) to plan and conduct a 'taster' event (Samanta et al, 2022). This third phase research established that the event helped school students understand admissions procedures and encouraged them to consider application. The colleges found the events were valuable in improving informed decision making among these disadvantages groups (Samanta and Stewart, 2023). There was some evidence of increased take up of places after the events (Samanta and Stewart, 2023). Importantly, staff who often engaged in informal outreach in their own time saw the value of a formal institution based initiative.

A contextually informed outreach initiative: methodology and findings

The culmination of all 3 research phases led us to a fourth impact phase (Stewart et al, 2023) which forms the focus for the rest of this article. The FCF empirical context specific methodology supported by the 'bottom up' theory of change was used to build policy support for the development of a family friendly, gender aware outreach culture within government colleges. It was informed by the methodology adopted by Bensimon et al 'for conducting research that is intended to bring about institutional change' (2004: 105). In this 'practitioner as researcher' model, 'stakeholders produce knowledge within a local context in order to identify local problems and take action to solve them' (2004: 105).

Our methodology rooted change within the local institution. We knew that the potential for our research finding to inform policy making nationally would be greatly strengthened by local and regional endorsement. Building on what had been learned at the Phase 3 taster events and informed by our FCF research findings, we worked with our local collaborators to co-design *an outreach activity resource pack* (OAR) which provided a step by step guide to preparing and conducting an *outreach event*. Thus, the OAR crystallised the researcher expertise and findings from phase 3 into a user friendly, family oriented, and context specific pack. Unlike the phase 3 event, colleges were to take full responsibility for financing, planning and conducting the taster events.

Thus, the objective was to 'test' the level of local institutional support. If the resource pack was indeed used to hold an outreach event, it would result not only in activities within individual colleges (local level) but could also result in recommendations to HE policy makers in Haryana (regional level) and beyond. Backed by local and regional endorsement, their endorsements of our research and the OAR could contribute to the implementation of the 2020 National Education Policy (the national level) which, as we have seen, seeks to develop local institutional initiatives designed to increase diversity and to tackle exclusion.

The *initial process*, reflecting our theory of change, was designed to build the necessary 'buy-in' by *co-designing the materials* for the OAR with local HE practitioner/stakeholders and thus adding their local contextual knowledge relating to the family decision making. We then *presented a draft* of the OAR at the *first workshop* hosted by Dr Yadav, one of our key project collaborators, at the Central University of Haryana, Mahendergarh, Haryana to seek further endorsement. We shared the academic rationale for the OAR through presentation and discussion of our draft policy brief with Principals from local government colleges, regional HE policy makers and academics (Stewart et al, 2022). The key session involved the detailed review by pre-selected colleges principals of the pre-

circulated draft OAR. The outcome was that regional policy makers thought that the OAR, backed by the FCF research evidence, could make a useful contribution to contextually informed institutional level outreach initiatives (Thomas and Mansuy, 2021).

The *second process* involved *college practitioners using the OAR* to prepare for and conduct an outreach event. The workshop had established that there was enthusiasm among government colleges to ‘pilot’ the OAR. Three colleges opted to pilot the OAR by conducting taster events. Colleges took *their own initiative* to use the OAR in the very challenging Covid 19 pandemic circumstances. Nonetheless, three colleges in different districts in Haryana offered, once they were able to hold in person activities, to undertake to pilot the OAR and conduct an outreach event (the number we sought).

The outcomes from this process, summarised in Tables 1 and 2 below, were presented at a *second regional workshop* which was hosted by another local collaborator at the BPS Women’s University, Sonipat, Haryana. It brought together a wide range of academics with interests in HE and outreach. The aim was to assess whether the OAR had ‘worked’. To our delight, and despite the overwhelmingly difficult odds, all three colleges had held very successful events, bringing to their colleges a total of over 1000 school students who were introduced to the campus, its courses and activities and generally provided with information and advice to support their admissions process. It had only been possible in the particular context to include parents in one college event.

Table 1: Summary of Phase 4 OAR supported outreach activities

College	Attendance	Organisation	Activities
1 Semi-urban	Government schools 3 Students 250 Teachers 10 Parents 20	College contacted schools; encouraged to attend Set up college committees to organise event & route map for tour College hired 2 buses	Campus tour highlighting smart class rooms; computer room; sportsground Facilitated by college staff and student volunteers PPT about college, quality of education, minimal fees Cultural programme Refreshments
2 Semi-urban	Government schools 24 Students 660 Teachers 61 Parents 0	District education officer (DEO) invited all schools in area District office hired buses & campus security	2 hour campus tour Facilitated by college staff and final year students Sessions by Military Digital information pack (CD) provided for students and put on website Deputy Commissioner of District attended

3 Rural	<p><i>Government schools</i> 4</p> <p><i>Students</i> 164</p> <p><i>Teachers</i> 9</p> <p><i>Parents</i> 0</p>	<p>College contacted schools</p> <p>Set up a college committee to plan the event and college tour</p> <p>College managed the transport</p>	<p>Tour of large campus and small building</p> <p>Presentation</p> <p>International wrestlers present</p> <p>College Principal responsible for 3 other colleges attended</p>
---------	--	--	--

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Thomas and Mansuy, 2022

Table 2: Summary of responses to Phase 4 OAR supported outreach activities

College	Context Awareness	Challenges Faced	College Comments	Outcome
1 Semi-urban	Student alumni of schools attending stimulated interactions	<p>Logistical</p> <p>Event repeated 3 times on same day for each school to enable students and parents to reach home at socially appropriate time</p> <p>Transport limited only 2 buses</p> <p>Motivational</p> <p>College staff initially reluctant not government requirement</p>	<p>More resources needed including buses</p> <p>Better to spread over 2 days</p> <p>Produce paper-based materials for those unable to attend</p>	<p>Staff convinced of value</p> <p>Hold similar events annually</p>
2 Semi-urban	<p>Time for informal interactions</p> <p>Provision of favoured career options much appreciated</p>	<p>Logistical</p> <p>Parents unable to attend because organised by DEO</p> <p>Transport financing a problem</p> <p>Large turnout – limited time for individual interaction</p>	<p>Possible options-</p> <p>Organise collaborative HE Fair for all colleges (but no problem with individual visits)</p> <p>Twin with individual schools to target students & parents from disadvantaged groups and communities</p> <p>Smaller events better (100-150)</p>	<p>College and staff keen to organise similar events in future</p>
3 Rural	<p>Very interactive with staff- much appreciated</p> <p>Sport favoured career option much appreciated</p>	<p>Logistical</p> <p>Transport major challenge</p> <p>Motivational</p> <p>Difficult to convince schools to attend because of Covid</p>	<p>Produce paper based information booklet to help students make informed decisions</p>	<p>College enthusiastic about organising similar events in future</p>

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Thomas and Mansuy, 2022

All wanted to repeat these activities and to recommend their utility to regional policy makers. We learned from the practitioners as set out in Table 2 what worked; where improvements could be made; the challenges in terms of allocation of resources, both human and financial; and the need to

develop a supportive institutional/governance framework (see Thomas & Mansuy 2022). In this way the practitioner principals provided the endorsement necessary to obtain national level endorsement for the OAR and institution level outreach activities.

This *webinar*, our third event, was jointly organised and coordinated by the Principal Investigator and project partner Nidhi S. Sabharwal, at the Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education at the National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration New Delhi (NIEPA) (Sabharwal and Stewart, 2022). It brought together key national educational and academic policy makers who reviewed, through their presentations, our research findings. The Principal of the college which piloted one of the taster events, presented his assessment of the value of such an event, adding the endorsement by a front-line local HE practitioner.

Their responses were very favourable and involved a commitment to consider our research suggestions and the outreach initiative in the implementation of NEP 2020 (Samanta and Stewart, 2022). Subsequently we received further endorsement from the present Secretary General at Association of Indian Universities who suggests that she will now adopt the concept of a 'taster' event in her discussions relating to HE outreach initiatives focusing on access.

Conclusion

This article has presented the outcome of piloting an outreach activity in three government colleges in Haryana, north India. The OAR and piloting were the impact outcomes of the FCF research project. The aims, and the outcomes presented here, could be seen as rather modest. First, we wanted to see whether colleges had the institutional commitment and capacity to organise a taster day. Secondly, based upon their experiences of organising such an event, using the OAR as a guide, we wanted to know whether they saw value in repeating such an activity. Thirdly, we wanted to see whether they might become advocates for the development of institutionally organised and contextually informed outreach initiatives. As indicated above, the colleges held successful events in very challenges circumstances and were keen to repeat the activity in future years. Their support provided the basis for very positive engagements with regional and then national policymakers, greatly enhancing the overall policy impact of our research findings.

The design we adopted for this final impact stage of our project involved close collaboration with educational policy makers over the development of the OAR and practitioner led piloting of the taster days. It was an extension of the FCF research project approach which involved active engagement with government colleges in each of the previous stages. This methodology encouraged those organising the taster day outreach events to use our research findings relating to the young women and men who were likely to access their colleges to shape the way in which they planned and organised the taster days as set out in Table 1 above. Their suggestions for how to improve the events set out in Table 2 above indicated that they were aware of their responsibilities of being front line providers of education for this new generation of young people and their families.

Our approach recognized that practitioners with local understandings were best placed to initiate and develop their institution's outreach culture. Thus, these practitioner organised events provided institutionally based information which countered the range of informal sources upon which families usually relied. They were informed by a recognition that the gendered assumptions prevailing in local communities underpin choices relating to accessing HE. They understood the importance of providing buses and scheduling events within times that recognised local perceptions of acceptable times for travelling. They were designed to provide an opportunity for young women and men, and family members, to experience the reality of a college environment: to reassure them that it was a culturally safe environment. The colleges recognised how the presence of sports and military

personnel would attract young women and expand choices. At the same time they encouraged young men to see the relationship between HE and local job prospects. Thus, those conducting the events were able to start to counter the gender based presumptions and anxieties about undertaking HE that prevail particularly in rural and semi- urban Haryana.

The taster events provided a glimpse of the way in which an institutional outreach culture, suited to the particular context, could develop to support fairer access for disadvantaged young women in particular. It is important to remember that such a culture generally does not exist at an institutional level within public HEIs particularly those serving disadvantaged communities. We have seen why. India has tackled deep seated socio cultural community based injustices based upon caste through its constitutional commitments to reservation in public education and employment. The centrally mandated policy framework is not understood in the global policy language of widening participation or increasing inclusion and diversity. The reservation system has not led to institutional level initiatives which are based upon this understanding.

However, the NEP 2020 is recognising there is a need to develop such initiatives to encourage the development of this type of outreach culture which take account of the range of factors which can deter non traditional entrants such as those from the massification generation identified in our study. Our pilot study shows that there is a recognition at an institutional level that reservation and special provisions *provide the essential context* but *do not exhaust* issues of diversity and inclusion relating to accessing HE. Our research shared with the colleges established *how*, within this 'top down' national framework shaped by reservations and additional special measures, choices were being made about HE by young people and their families. We found that, despite what might seem to be little institutional incentive to engage in outreach activities, college staff did have an understanding of the role that outreach could play in encouraging informed decision making by these young women and men and their families. We were thus able to work with them to develop an institutional level response.

We have drawn on the outcome of this pilot study, supported by the wider underpinning research findings, to argue that contextually appropriate outreach activities initiated at a local institutional level are essential to achieve fairer, more equal, access to higher education (HE). They must inform national and international policy making in relation to widening access to HE in an era in which massification is extending across the globe.

We argue that the adoption of 'top down' initiatives, in very different economic, social and cultural contexts to the those where they were originated, may fail to address the way in which the local 'problem' presents itself and may hinder the development of a contextually informed outreach culture which will support fairer, more equal access to HE. We are aiming ourselves to contribute to these developments through our four year follow on project which is exploring institutional level outreach culture within government colleges across India as a whole.

(The project, [A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana](#) was funded by the Fair Chance Foundation; UK Economic and Social Research Council Impact Acceleration Award; and University of Warwick.)

REFERENCES

Ahluwat, N. (2012). The Political Economy of Haryana's" Khaps". *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(47/48), 15-17.

Bensimon, E. M., Polkinghorne, D., Bauman, G., & Vallejo, E. (2004). Doing Research that Makes a Difference. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 75 (1), 104-126.

Census of India (COI) (2011). *Census of India 2011*. Government of India. Accessed at <https://www.census2011.co.in/states.php>; <https://www.census2011.co.in/religion.php>

Chanana, K. (2017). Gendered access and participation: Unequal subject choices in Indian higher education. In K. Kumar (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Education in India: Debates, Practices, and Policies*. Routledge India.

Chowdhry, P. (2012). Infliction, Acceptance and Resistance: Containing violence on women in rural Haryana. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 47(37), 43-59.

Crossley, M., & Watson, K. (2003). *Comparative and international research in education: Globalisation, context and difference*. London Routledge Falmer.

Deshpande, S. (2013). Caste Quotas and Formal Inclusion in Indian Higher Education. In S. Deshpande, & U. Zacharias (Eds.), *Beyond Inclusion: The Practice of Equal Access in Indian Higher Education* (1st ed., pp. 13-47). Routledge India.

Deshpande, S. (2017). Caste quotas and formal inclusion in Indian higher education. In K. Kumar (Ed.), *Routledge Handbook of Education in India: Debates, Practices, and Policies*. Routledge India.

Galanter, M. (1984). *Competing Equalities: Law and the Backward Classes in India*. Oxford India.

Gorard, S. & Smith, E. (2006). *Review of widening participation research: addressing the barriers to participation in higher education*, A report to HEFCE by the University of York, Higher Education Academy and Institute for Access Studies. University of York, Higher Education Academy, and University of Staffordshire.

Government of India (GOI) (1950). Article 15(5) in The Constitution of India 1950. Government of India.

Hasan, Z., & Nussbaum, M. C. (Eds.) (2012). *Equalizing Access: Affirmative Action in Higher Education in India, United States, and South Africa*. Oxford University Press.

Henderson, E. F., Thomas, A., Mansuy, J., Sabharwal N. S., Stewart, A., Rathee, S., Yadav, R., Samanta, N. (2021). *A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Educational Success in Haryana: Phase 1 Findings Report*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick. https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/rlaaa3083/output/fcf_phase_1_findings_report_final.pdf

Herbaut, E. & Geven, K. (2020). What works to reduce inequalities in higher education? A systematic review of the (quasi-) experimental literature on outreach and financial aid. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 65 100442.

Jacobi, A. P. (2012). Implementing Global Policies in African Countries: Conceiving Lifelong Learning as Basic Education. In A. Verger, M. Novelli, & H. K. Altinyelken (Eds.), *Global Education Policy and International Development: New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (pp. 119-140). Continuum.

- Kannabiran, K. (2015). *Tools of Justice Non-discrimination and the Indian Constitution*. Routledge India.
- Khan, J., & Sahoo, N. (2020). *Equitable and inclusive vision in the National Educational Policy 2020: A Critique*. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/equitable-and-inclusive-vision-in-the-nep-2020/>
- Kwiek, M. (2008). Accessibility and equity, market forces, and entrepreneurship: developments in higher education in Central and Eastern Europe. *Higher Education Management and Policy*, 20(1), 1-22.
- Marginson, S. (2004). Competition and Markets in Higher Education: A “glonacal” Analysis. *Policy Futures in Education*, 2 (2), 175–244.
- McCowan, T. (2012). Is there a universal right to higher education? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 60 (2), 111-128.
- Ministry of Education (MOE) (2020). *All India Survey on Higher Education 2019-2020*. Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/statistics-new/aishe_eng.pdf
- Ministry of Human Resource Development (MRHD) (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Government of India. https://www.education.gov.in/sites/upload_files/mhrd/files/NEP_Final_English_0.pdf
- Moore, J., Sanders, J., & Higham, L. (2013). *Literature review of research into widening participation to higher education: Report to HEFCE and OFFA by ARC Network*. ARC Network. <https://www.offa.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Literature-review-of-research-into-WP-to-HE.pdf>
- Morley, L., Leach, F., & Lugg, R. (2009). Democratising higher education in Ghana and Tanzania: Opportunity structures and social inequalities. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 29(1), 56-64.
- Osborne, M. (2003). Policy and practice in widening participation: a six country comparative study of access as flexibility. *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 22(1), 43-58.
- Ovichegan, S. K. (2015). *Faces of Discrimination in Higher Education in India: Quota policy, social justice and the Dalits*. Routledge.
- Pal, G. C. (2018). Caste–gender intersectionality and atrocities in Haryana: Emerging patterns and state responses. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 4(1), 30-50.
- Petoukhov, K. (2013). Recognition, redistribution, and representation: Assessing the transformative potential of reparations for the Indian residential schools experience. *McGill sociological review*, 3, 73-91.
- Press Information Bureau (PIB) (2016). Reservation for SC/ST and OBC. Ministry of Personnel, Public Grievances & Pensions. Government of India.
- Press Information Bureau (PIB) (2019). Economically Weaker Sections (EWS) Bill. Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment, Government of India.

Roach, V., & Salisbury, C. (2006). Promoting Systemic, Statewide Inclusion from the Bottom Up. *Theory Into Practice*, 45 (3), 279-286.

Sabharwal, N. S. (2020). Managing Student Diversity in Indian Higher Education Institutions: Achieving Academic Integration and Social Inclusion. In Varghese N.V., & Malik G. (Eds.), *Governance and Management of Higher Education in India: India Higher Education Report* (pp. 315-345). Sage.

Sabharwal, N. S., & Malish, C. M. (2017). *CPRHE Policy Briefs on Diversity and Inclusion in Higher Education*. Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National University of Educational Planning and Administration.

Sabharwal, N. S., Thorat, S. K., Balasubramanyam, T., & Diwakar, D. (2014). *Diversity, academic performance, and discrimination: a case study of a higher educational institution*, IIDS working paper 8(4). Indian Institute of Dalit Studies (IIDS).

Sabharwal, N. S., & Stewart, A. (2022). *Concept Note: Webinar on A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to HE Access and Choice*. Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration and University of Warwick, UK.

<http://cprhe.niepa.ac.in/webinar-fair-chance-education-gendered-pathways-he-access-and-choice>

Samanta, N., & Stewart, A. (2023). *Report of the Webinar on 'A Fair Chance for Education: Gendered Pathways to Higher Education Access and Choice' on April 5, 2022*. The University of Warwick, UK.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/phase_3_report_-_active4research_final.pdf

Samanta, N., Thomas, A., Mansuy, J., Stewart, A., Henderson, E. F., & Sabharwal, N. S. (2022). *Fair Chance for Education Outreach Activity Resource for Higher Education Institutions: Organising a College Visit 'Taster Day' for Potential Higher Education Applicants*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/fair_chance_for_education_outreach_activity_resource_published.pdf

Stewart, A., Henderson, E. F., Sabharwal, N. S., Thomas, A., Samanta, N., Mansuy, J. (2022). *Supporting Gender-sensitive Higher Education Access and Choice in Haryana, India: Policy Brief*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/policy_brief_published.pdf

Stewart, A., Mansuy, J., & Samanta, N. (2023). *Phase 4 Report: The Contribution to Educational Policy Development of the Fair Chance for Education Research on Gendered Access to Higher Education*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/phase_4_-_active4research_final.pdf

The Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 2016, Act No. 49.

https://www.indiacode.nic.in/bitstream/123456789/2155/1/A2016_49.pdf

Thomas, A., & Henderson, E. (2022). *Phase 2 Report: The Role of Families in the Gendered Educational Trajectories of Undergraduate Students in Haryana, India*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick. <https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/>

Thomas, A., & Mansuy, J. (2021). *A Fair Chance to Access Higher Education: Collaborative Workshop to develop a Policy Brief and Outreach Activity Resource on 28th September 2021* (Workshop Report). Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/workshop_report_final.pdf

Thomas, A., & Mansuy, J. (2022). *A Fair Chance to Access Higher Education: Collaborative Workshop to Develop a Policy Brief and Outreach Activity Resource on 28th January 2022: Workshop Report*. Fair Chance Foundation, The University of Warwick.

https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/research/projects/r1aaa3083/output/workshop_report_22.06.20.pdf

United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNESA) (nd). The 17 Goals.

<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

UNESCO (nd). Leading SDG4- Education 2030. <https://www.unesco.org/en/education2030-sdg4>

UNESCO (2022). *Right to higher education: Unpacking the international normative framework in light of current trends and challenges*. UNESCO and Right to Education Initiative.

Varghese, N. V. (2015). *Challenges of Massification of Higher Education in India* (CPRHE Research Paper 1). Centre for Policy Research in Higher Education, National University of Educational Planning and Administration.

Varghese, N. V. (2022). Directions of Change in Higher Education in India: From Massification to Universalization. In S. Chattopadhyay, S. Marginson, & N. V. Varghese (Eds.), *Changing Higher Education in India* (pp. 23-46). Bloomsbury.

Verger, A., Novelli, M., & Altinyelken, H. K. (2012). Global Education Policy and International Development: An Introductory Framework. In A. Verger, M. Novelli, & H. K. Altinyelken (Eds.), *Global Education Policy and International Development: New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (pp. 3-32). London Continuum.

Verger, A. & Van der Kaaij, S. (2012) The National Politics of Global Policies: Public-Private Partnerships in Indian Education. In A. Verger, M. Novelli, & H. K. Altinyelken (Eds.), *Global Education Policy and International Development: New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (pp. 245-266). London Continuum.

Verma, Vidhu. (2019) A Crisis of Representation: Interests, Identities and Politics. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*, 1-18.

Waughrey, A. (2011). India and the Paradox of Caste Discrimination. *European Yearbook of Minority Issues Online*, 8 (1), 413-452.

Waughray, A. (2022). *Capturing Caste in Law: The Legal Regulation of Caste Discrimination*. Routledge.

Wilson Strydom, M. (2015). University access and theories of social justice; contributions of the capabilities approach. *High Educ*, 69, 143-155.

Wilson-Strydom, M. (2016). A Capabilities List for Equitable Transitions to University: A Top-down and Bottom-up Approach. *Journal of Human Development and Capabilities*, 17 (2), 145-160.

Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS). (2014). *Speak! The Truth Is Still Alive: Land, Caste and Sexual Violence against Dalit Girls and Women in Haryana*. A report by women Against Sexual Violence and State Repression. WSS. <http://feministlawarchives.pldindia.org/wp-content/uploads/wss-haryana-report-compiled.pdf>

Women against Sexual Violence and State Repression (WSS). (2015). Rape as atrocity in contemporary Haryana. *Economic & Political Weekly*, 50(44), 47-56.

Yeates, N. (2001). *Globalisation and Social Policy*. Sage.