USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening Activity

INTERNATIONAL SUMMIT
SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN
JUNE 10-12, 2024 | ISLAMABAD
Educate | Innovate | Elevate

International Summit on
Shaping the Future of Higher Education in Pakistan
10-12 June 2024
National University of Technology (NUTECH)

Concept Note

Introduction

The USAID's Higher Education System Strengthening Activity (HESSA) is providing technical assistance to 16 Pakistani universities in improving their institutional and technical capacities in delivering market-driven education and research with the primary objective of enhancing the employability potential of their graduates. To mark the third year of HESSA's engagement with universities, the project proudly announces organization of an International Summit on "*Shaping the Future of Higher Education in Pakistan*" from 10-12 June 2024 at the National University of Technology (NUTECH) in Islamabad. The summit is designed to address a spectrum of socioeconomic and knowledge-sharing objectives. The summit will feature a dynamic agenda comprising thematic sessions, case studies, and the showcasing of the best academic and governance practices. We are privileged to host international and national higher education thought leaders, who will share their expertise and ideas to chart the course for a more robust and responsive higher education landscape in Pakistan.

Summit's Theme

The theme of this year's summit is "*Shaping the Future of Higher Education in Pakistan.*" It addresses urgent concerns surrounding access, quality, and relevance in higher education. In Pakistan, disparities in access persist, quality standards are declining, and the sector is losing competitiveness globally. While advancements in higher education are swift worldwide, Pakistan's education system often struggles to keep pace.

Also, despite its pivotal role in socioeconomic development, higher education frequently fails to garner the attention it deserves in national socioeconomic development agenda. For example, in recent years, the sector has encountered significant budget cuts, while the number of universities have increased irrationally, often without sufficient consideration for essential components required to align higher education institutions with 21st century needs. Therefore, by focusing on this theme, the summit aims to emphasize the significance of higher education and advocate for increased investment and prioritization at the national level. With a new government having recently taken office, the summit offers an ideal platform for policymakers to engage in substantive discussions on higher education policy issues.

The summit also aims at showcasing the impactful efforts of USAID in supporting Pakistan's socioeconomic development through higher education initiatives. In summary, this summit is set to be a pivotal event in shaping the trajectory of higher education in Pakistan.

Goal and Objectives

The Summit will facilitate strategic collaboration and knowledge exchange among key stakeholders in the higher education sector, with the aim of driving transformative reforms, enhancing educational quality, promoting inclusivity, and fostering innovation to meet the evolving needs of society and national development objectives. To this end, the Summit will focus on the following three objectives.

- To bring together leaders and decision makers from universities, industry, and government to hold a dialogue on trends that continue to shape the future of higher education locally and globally.
- To foster knowledge sharing and partnership building opportunities among attendees from diverse backgrounds.
- To showcase success stories and exemplary academic and research practices triggered by HESSA's capacity-building interventions within partner universities.

Organization of Work

The proposed summit is scheduled to span two and a half days, from 10-12 June 2024. A tentative agenda is provided at the end of this document. To enhance ownership and relevance of the summit and its outcomes, partners and instructors affiliated with HESSA and partner universities will assume responsibility for organizing and managing sessions pertinent to the work they are already implementing as part of the HESSA work program. The organization of work will adhere to the following general principles.

- Each partner will be responsible for organization and management of session assigned to them – it will involve lining up speakers/moderators/chairs and creating structure of the session but ensuring that technical scope aligns with the summit's overall objectives.
- Flexibility will be key to successfully navigating unforeseen changes and challenges. All partners should be adaptable and willing to adjust plans as necessary to ensure the success of the summit.
- The summit should strive for excellence in all aspects, including speaker selection, session organization, technical arrangements, and overall participants' experience.

A brief overview of the proceedings over the three days is given below.

Day 1 (Monday), 10 June 2024

The Day 1 program will comprise three sessions, along with an opening session. The opening session will commence with the formal inauguration of the summit, during which the hosts will deliver welcoming remarks, setting the tone for the conference. Subsequently, remarks will be offered by esteemed guests of honor – a minister, the HEC Chair, and a US representative – who will highlight the importance of reforming higher education systems to confront emerging socioeconomic challenges.

Session 1. Positioning Pakistan's Higher Education for Tomorrow aims to delve into forward-looking approaches that will shape the future of higher education in Pakistan. To this end, speakers will discuss the challenges and opportunities in leveraging technology for learning, strengthening industry-academia collaboration, improving quality standards and accreditation processes, reforming curriculum to meet market needs, and forming international partnerships, among others. Together, these discussions will pave the way for a robust and progressive higher education landscape in Pakistan, poised to meet the demands of tomorrow's world.

Session 2. Optimizing Faculty Workload: Challenges and Policies will delve into the various challenges associated with effectively managing faculty workload within universities, and exploring the complexities of balancing teaching, research, administrative duties, and other responsibilities encountered by faculty members. Additionally, it will discuss potential policies and strategies aimed at optimizing faculty workload to enhance productivity, job satisfaction, and overall institutional effectiveness.

Session 3. Fostering Entrepreneurship Culture in Higher Education Institutions will spotlight transforming the university culture to promote entrepreneurship. It will discuss strategies for creating an environment that nurtures entrepreneurial spirit, focusing on initiatives beyond curricula such as fostering a supportive ecosystem, encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration, and providing resources for aspiring student entrepreneurs. Participants will explore how cultivating an entrepreneurial culture at universities enhances students' employability by fostering innovation, resilience, and adaptability.

Day 2 (Tuesday), 11 June 2024

Session 4. Navigating Tomorrow: Cultivating Higher Education Online and Micro-Credentials in Traditional Landscapes will address the increasing importance of integrating online platforms and micro-credential initiatives into Pakistani higher education institutions. While recognizing the necessity of adapting to structural, technological, and cultural changes for launching effective online programs, it emphasizes the benefits and rationale behind such initiatives. Using the example of the technical assistance provided by HESSA to NUST, the session aims to showcase recent developments as inspiration for other institutions.

Session 5. Climate Responsive Water Governance within the context of Sustainable Development is designed to foster dialogue on the critical intersection of climate dynamics, water management, and sustainable development. The session aims to explore the evolving patterns of climate change and their direct impacts on water availability, quality, and distribution, particularly affecting vulnerable segments of society. Drawing from a recent US State Department Project being implemented by the University of Utah in three Pakistani Universities as an example, speakers will highlight efforts to integrate climate change into curricula and reshape the research agenda to address climate-induced water challenges. By emphasizing the essential connections between climate-responsive water governance and the attainment of relevant SDGs, this session aims to inspire actionable solutions for a more resilient and water-secure future.

Session 6. Leadership and Governance Crisis in Pakistani Universities will explore a multitude of issues critical to addressing the challenges faced by Pakistani higher education institutions. These include examining the extent of institutional autonomy and the impact of political interference on decision-making processes, ensuring transparency and accountability in governance structures, addressing gender and diversity disparities, understanding the legal and regulatory framework, and fostering stakeholder engagement. The session will identify solutions and strategies for promoting effective governance, institutional excellence, and innovation in Pakistani universities.

The program includes the organization of three distinct showcasing sessions. These sessions aim to spotlight the successful experiences catalyzed by the HESSA project in academic, research, and governance practices. For instance, the session 7 on *"Enhancing Students' Success through Integrated Support Systems"* will reflect on how the partner universities have started to reform their students support services to enable students to excel academically and navigate their future paths effectively. Similarly, the session 8 titled *"Innovations in Teaching and Learning for Higher Impact"* will present innovative pedagogical approaches, effective teaching methodologies, and successful learning strategies that have begun to flourish in partner universities due to training provided under the HESSA project. Session 9 will spotlight the invaluable experiences and emerging best practices derived from the implementation of the *Women Leadership Capacity Building Program*, while session 10 encompass various aspects critical to *Registrar Roles*, such as overseeing academic administration processes, managing faculty and student records with precision, ensuring adherence to regulatory requirements, and actively participating in institutional governance structures.

Day 3 (Wednesday): 12 June 2024

Session 11. The Importance of University-Industry Linkages for Pakistan's Economic Growth aims to comprehensively examine the diverse dimensions of students' needs, aspirations, and demands within the higher education sector. The session will discuss and examine an analysis of student expectations and experiences; alumni perspectives on industry partnerships and how universities can collaborate with employers to ensure graduates are adequately prepared for the workforce, including discussions on internships, skill development initiatives, and strategies for bridging the academia-industry gap. Finally, the session will explore various approaches to engaging students in decision-making processes within higher education institutions, emphasizing transparency, responsiveness to students' feedback, and fostering a culture of inclusivity in governance structures.

Session 12. Addressing Capacity Building Needs of Higher Education Faculty will identify key areas for capacity development, including how to improve faculty pedagogical competencies. This encompasses curriculum development, innovative teaching methodologies, and strategies for engaging students, all aimed at fostering dynamic learning environments conducive to critical thinking, creativity, and knowledge acquisition. The session will also explore methods to strengthen faculty research capabilities, encouraging scholarly inquiry. Recognizing the importance of digital

literacy and online teaching pedagogies in today's world, these aspects will be integral parts of the discussion on how to design an effective faculty's professional development program.

Closing Session: The closing program will feature several components, including the presentation of the outcome document summarizing key findings and recommendations derived from the discussions and deliberations throughout the summit. Moreover, invited guests will deliver speeches or remarks, offering their perspectives on the outcomes of the summit and the path forward. Finally, a vote of thanks will be extended to all participants, speakers, organizers, and sponsors for their valuable contributions and support in making the summit a success.

Participants

Overall, 150 attendees are expected to participate in this three-day summit. This will encompass leadership and faculty from HESSA partner universities, international and national experts, thought leaders, instructors from various HESSA training cohorts, policymakers, media representatives, NGOs, and delegates from USAID and other donor organizations. Media presence throughout all three days will be essential.

Summit Website

A summit website has been developed and is accessible at the following link: https://hessa.utah.edu/summit/. It will feature essential programmatic and administrative information, including the titles of different presentations and speakers in each session, along with their bios. Additionally, separate concept notes for each session (currently under preparation) will be posted on the summit website. This process will remain a work in progress as we continue to refine and update the content leading up to the event.

Summit Outcomes

- A summit declaration will encapsulate the significant policy recommendations arising from various sessions. These recommendations will be disseminated to all stakeholders, including the policy organs of the Federal and Provincial Governments.
- Guidelines aimed at refining the scope of the HESSA work program and its implementation strategy for the next two years, with a particular focus on sustaining the impact of interventions made thus far.
- Partnership opportunities for Pakistani academia and institutions to collaborate with peers both within Pakistan and with US universities.

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