



*International Conference*

*On*

**Reimagining Higher Education for  
Sustainability:**

**Quality and Innovative Financing Practices in India and The  
Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries**

*Organized by*

**CENTRE FOR WEST ASIAN STUDIES**

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## **Introduction**

In the 21st century, higher education systems are recognized as pivotal engines for sustainable development, economic resilience, and social transformation (UNESCO, 2022). However, in rapidly evolving contexts like India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, ensuring the quality and sustainability of higher education remains an enduring challenge (Altbach & de Wit, 2020). Pressures such as demographic shifts, fiscal constraints, digital transformations, and demands for global competitiveness require institutions to reimagine how higher education is financed and delivered (Marginson, 2016).

India, with its vast and diverse higher education landscape, and the GCC nations, with their ambitious visions to diversify knowledge economies, share a common imperative: to design innovative financing models and quality assurance mechanisms that align with sustainable development goals (SDGs) and national priorities (Al-Jardani, 2021; Agarwal, 2009). This conference provides an interdisciplinary platform to explore policy directions, institutional innovations, and research trends that can shape sustainable futures through higher education reform.

## **Background of the Conference**

India's higher education system is the second-largest in the world, offering diverse opportunities for millions of students across its universities and colleges. The government has made commendable efforts to expand access to education, promote digital learning, and improve research output. Yet, challenges such as regional disparities in quality, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient funding models, and the need for greater collaboration with the global academic community continue to impact educational outcomes.

Similarly, the GCC countries—comprising Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates—have made significant investments in transforming their higher education systems. With a focus on economic diversification, innovation, and knowledge-driven economies, these countries have introduced progressive policies aimed at enhancing research output, internationalization, and aligning their educational institutions with global standards. However, the GCC nations also face hurdles such as limited local academic talent, the reliance on expatriate faculty, and the need for more sustainable financing mechanisms.

Both India and the GCC countries share several common challenges: a need for better governance in higher education, sustainable funding models, alignment between industry demands and academic outcomes, and improving quality standards. The rising demand for higher education, coupled with shrinking public budgets, places immense pressure on both regions to find innovative solutions that ensure financial sustainability without compromising the quality of

education. Additionally, both regions are increasingly looking towards international partnerships, exchange programs, and collaborative research to strengthen their higher education systems.

Internationally, there is increasing recognition that achieving sustainability goals demands robust higher education ecosystems that not only impart knowledge but also cultivate critical thinking, research capacity, and civic responsibility (UNESCO, 2022). Financing and quality assurance have emerged as the twin pillars of sustainable higher education reform (Salmi, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic further accentuated vulnerabilities in traditional funding structures, highlighting the need for diversified, resilient financing practices (Marginson, 2020). In India, higher education faces multiple systemic constraints, including underfunding, high student-to-faculty ratios, and uneven quality across institutions (Tilak, 2019). Although public expenditure on higher education in India has improved over decades, it still remains below the UNESCO-recommended 6% of GDP for education as a whole (Agarwal, 2009; Tilak, 2021). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 emphasizes the need for strategic public investment while encouraging innovative private and philanthropic participation to enhance institutional autonomy and quality (Government of India, 2020).

GCC countries—such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—have prioritized higher education as part of their knowledge-based economic diversification agendas (Wiseman, 2010; Romani, 2009). Significant investments have been made in developing world-class universities, international collaborations, and research ecosystems (Wilkins, 2017). Yet, questions persist about long-term sustainability, reliance on state funding, and the need for diversified income streams and partnerships (Mazawi, 2010; Romani, 2009).

Emerging research indicates that innovative financing mechanisms—such as public-private partnerships (PPPs), income-contingent loans, research commercialization, and cross-border education ventures—can support expansion while ensuring equitable access and quality (Salmi, 2020; Johnstone, 2006). Simultaneously, robust quality assurance frameworks, accreditation mechanisms, and outcome-based performance models are necessary to balance expansion with accountability (Sanyal & Martin, 2006; UNESCO, 2022). Recent scholarly discourse also emphasizes aligning financing and quality assurance with sustainability principles, including social inclusion, environmental responsibility, and community impact (Sterling, 2010; Filho et al., 2015). In both India and the GCC, policy directions increasingly highlight the need for integrating SDGs into institutional missions, curricula, research agendas, and governance structures (UNESCO, 2022; Al-Jardani, 2021).

Given these converging challenges and opportunities, it is timely to bring together policymakers, scholars, institutional leaders, and practitioners from India and GCC countries to deliberate on contextually grounded solutions for sustainable, high-quality higher education ecosystems. This conference aims to stimulate collaborative research, foster South-South dialogue, and generate actionable insights for policy and practice.

## Objectives of the Conference

The conference aims to critically examine the role of higher education in advancing sustainability goals within the contexts of India and the GCC region. It further seeks to explore innovative and context-appropriate financing models that can strengthen access, equity, and quality across diverse higher education systems. A key objective is to analyze best practices and emerging trends in quality assurance mechanisms that are adaptable and relevant for institutions operating under varied policy and economic environments. The conference will also facilitate academic dialogue and knowledge exchange between Indian and GCC universities, enabling participants to share insights and lessons on financing models that promote sustainability in higher education. Another goal is to identify significant research gaps and collaborative opportunities for future studies that address the complexities of sustainable higher education reforms. Finally, the event aims to develop a set of actionable policy recommendations and institutional strategies that integrate sustainability, enhance quality, and promote innovative financing solutions tailored to the evolving needs of higher education systems in both regions. Specifically, the objectives can be listed as-

1. To critically examine the role of higher education in advancing sustainability goals in India and GCC.
2. To explore innovative and context-appropriate financing models that can strengthen access, equity, and quality in higher education.
3. To analyze best practices and emerging trends in quality assurance mechanisms suitable for diverse educational systems.
4. To facilitate academic dialogue and knowledge exchange between Indian and GCC institutions on financing sustainability in higher education.
5. To identify research gaps and collaborative opportunities for future studies on sustainable higher education reforms.
6. To develop a set of policy recommendations and institutional strategies for integrating sustainability, quality, and financial innovation in higher education.

## Themes and Subthemes

- **Policy Innovations and Regulatory Frameworks-**Evolving higher education policies in India and GCC
- **Innovative Financing Models and Practices-** Public-private partnerships (PPPs); philanthropic models; research commercialization; income-contingent loans; alternative revenue streams
- **Quality Assurance, Accreditation, and Ranking Systems-** Institutional and national accreditation frameworks; international benchmarking; performance-based funding models.

- **Digitalization and Technology Integration-** Role of EdTech in improving quality and cost-efficiency; digital learning ecosystems; implications for financing.
- **Equity, Inclusion, and Access-** Financing inclusive higher education; policies for underrepresented groups; gender equity in India and GCC institutions.
- **Sustainability Research and Green Campuses-** Campus sustainability initiatives; integrating sustainability into curriculum and research; green financing models.
- **Cross-Border Education and International Collaboration-** Transnational education models; international branch campuses; collaborative research networks between India and GCC.

## Call for Papers

We are pleased to invite scholars, researchers and academicians to submit paper proposals for the upcoming international conference *entitled REIMAGINING HIGHER EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABILITY: QUALITY AND INNOVATIVE FINANCING PRACTICES IN INDIA AND THE GCC* organized by the Centre for West Asian Studies, Jamia Millia Islamia, to be held on

## Guidelines for Submission:

- The soft copy of the abstract and full paper should be submitted through the Google Form Link provided\_latest by **10 May 2026**.  
<https://forms.gle/iBRt5vxeBkqdjTKs6>
- Abstract acceptance confirmation will be sent by **15 May 2026**.
- Full Paper submission deadline is **15 June 2026**.
- The abstract must not exceed 300 words and should be attached with a brief bio note of the Author.
- Research papers should be formatted as per APA Style (7<sup>th</sup> Edition) and should be sent as MS Word Document (Font: Times New Roman 12; Word Limit: 6000-7000)
- Selected papers will be published in an edited volume from a reputable publication house.
- For further updates or queries, participants may contact us at [ascseminar@gmail.com](mailto:ascseminar@gmail.com)

**Prof Anisur Rahman**  
**Centre for West Asian Studies**  
**Conference Convener**