Demographic Dividend: How HE in South Asia is Reshaping the Future

The Sri Lankan Perspective

Dr. Athula Pitigala-Arachchi
Asia Pacific Institute of Information Technology – Sri Lanka

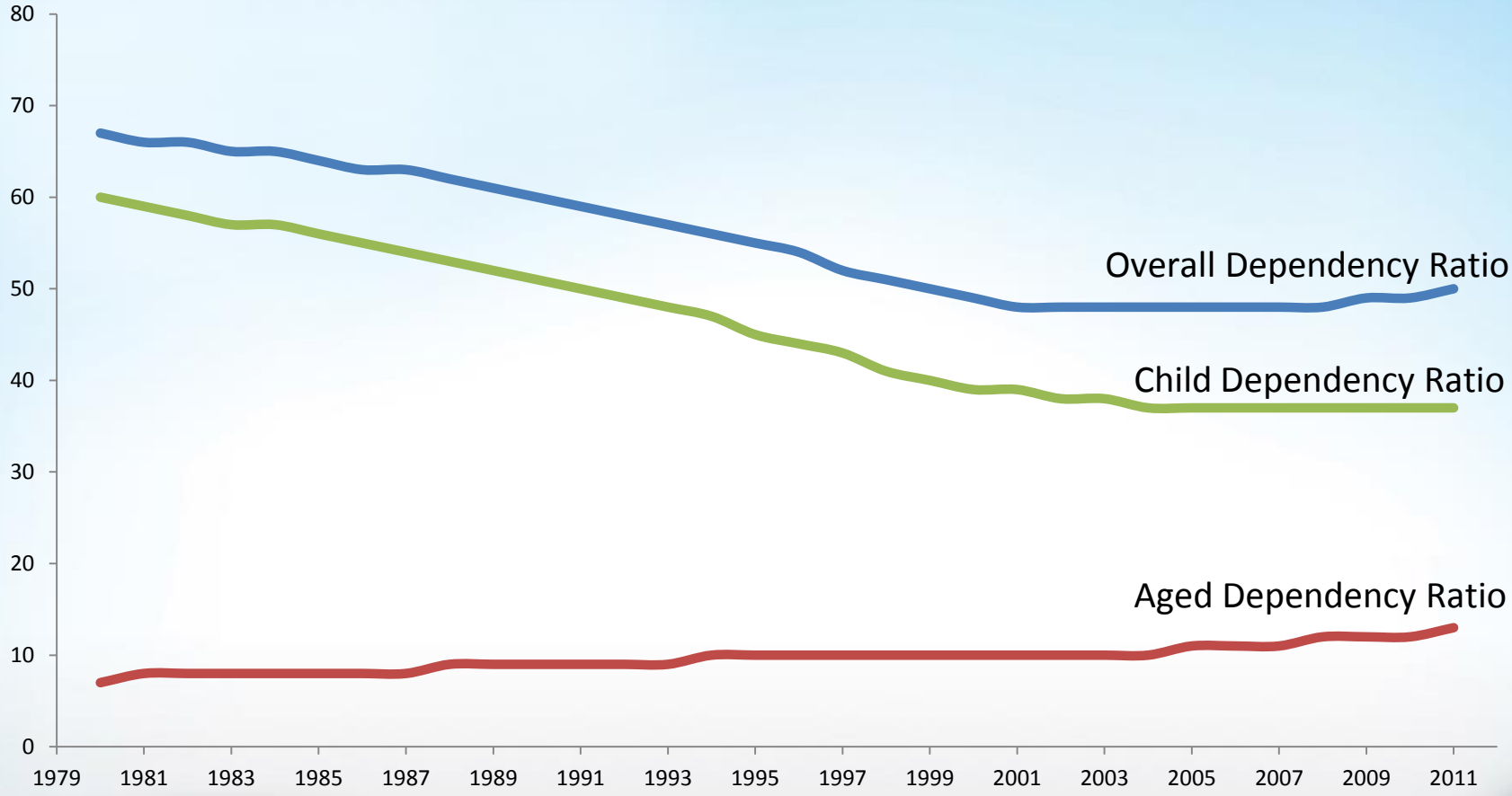
Sri Lanka-Microcosm of South Asia

- High population density
- Multi-ethnic , multi-religious social structure
- Education systems facing similar challenges

Country	Population (million)	Area (Sq. Km)	Population Density
Pakistan	176.75	796,095	215
Sri Lanka	20.287	65,610	329
India	1241.49	3,287,263	412

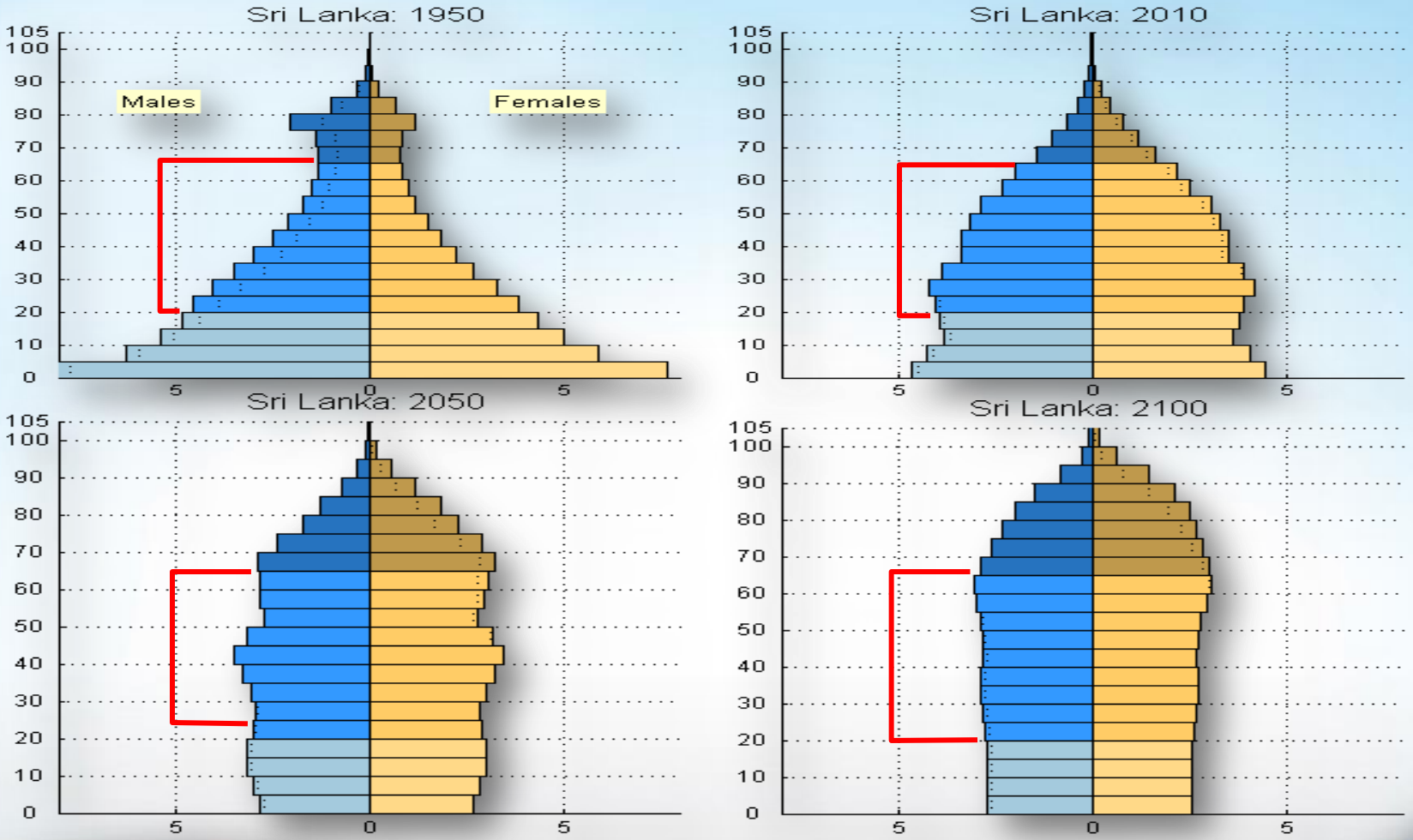
Source: United Nations (2013)

Sri Lanka - Dependency Ratio



Source: World Bank (2013)

Demographic Transition



Source: UNPD (2013)

Changing Role of Higher Education vis-à-vis the Demographic Transition

- Capacity ?
- Direction ?
- Pace of change ?

Early Interventions

- Expansion through
  - Low cost Arts programmes
  - Low quality external degree programmes
    - Lowering of standards
    - Mismatch between training provided and training required
- Growth in private HE
  - Stifled by restrictive policy/legislative environment
  - Public attitude

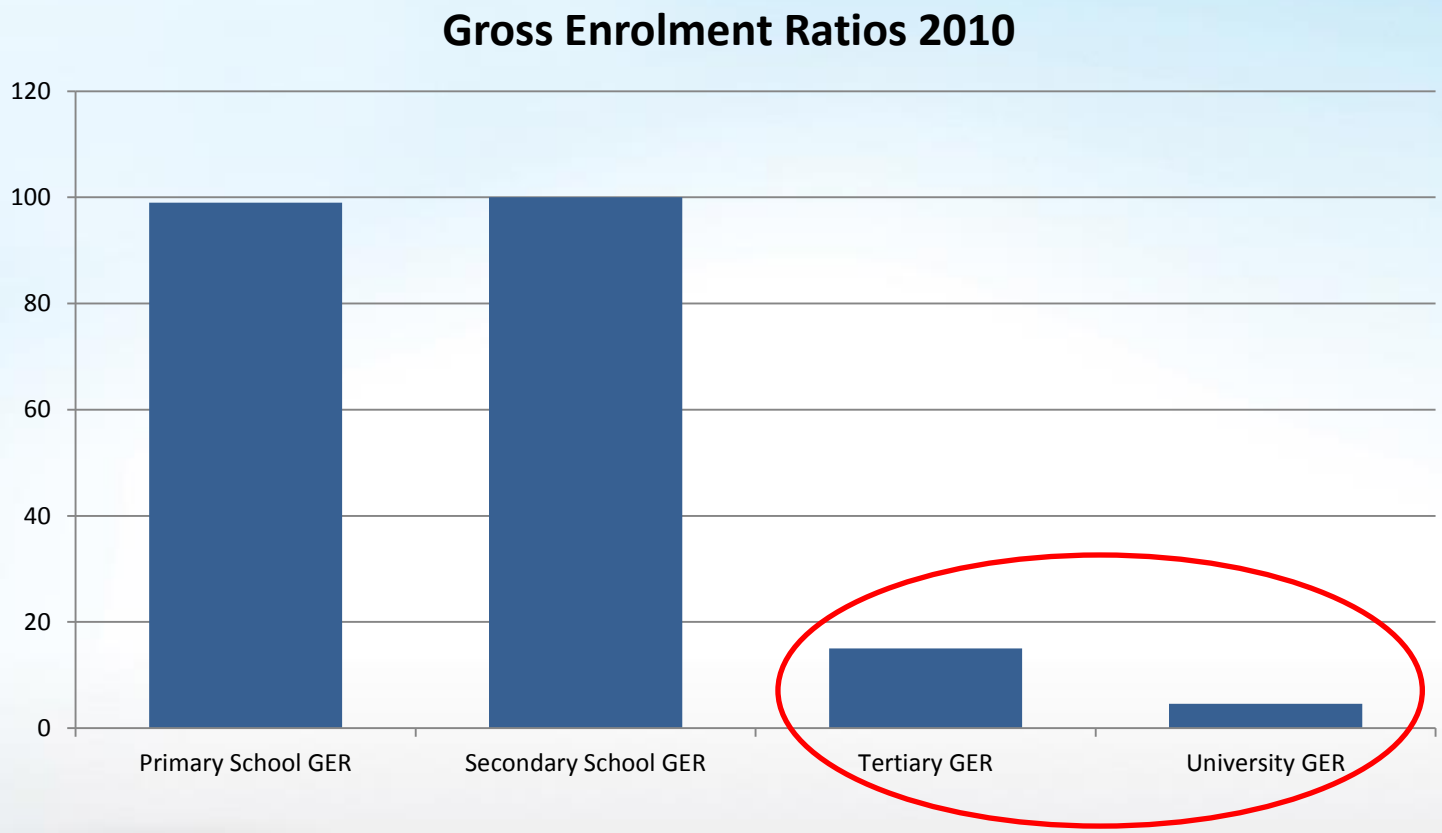
Course Correction (2000 onwards)

- Improving Relevance and Quality of Undergraduate Education (IRQUE) Project
- Distance Education Modernization Project (DEMP)
  - National Online Distance Education Service (NODES)
  - Capacity expansion of the Open University
- National Qualifications Framework
- National Subject Benchmarks
- Higher Education for the Twenty First Century (HETC) Project

Present Status of HE

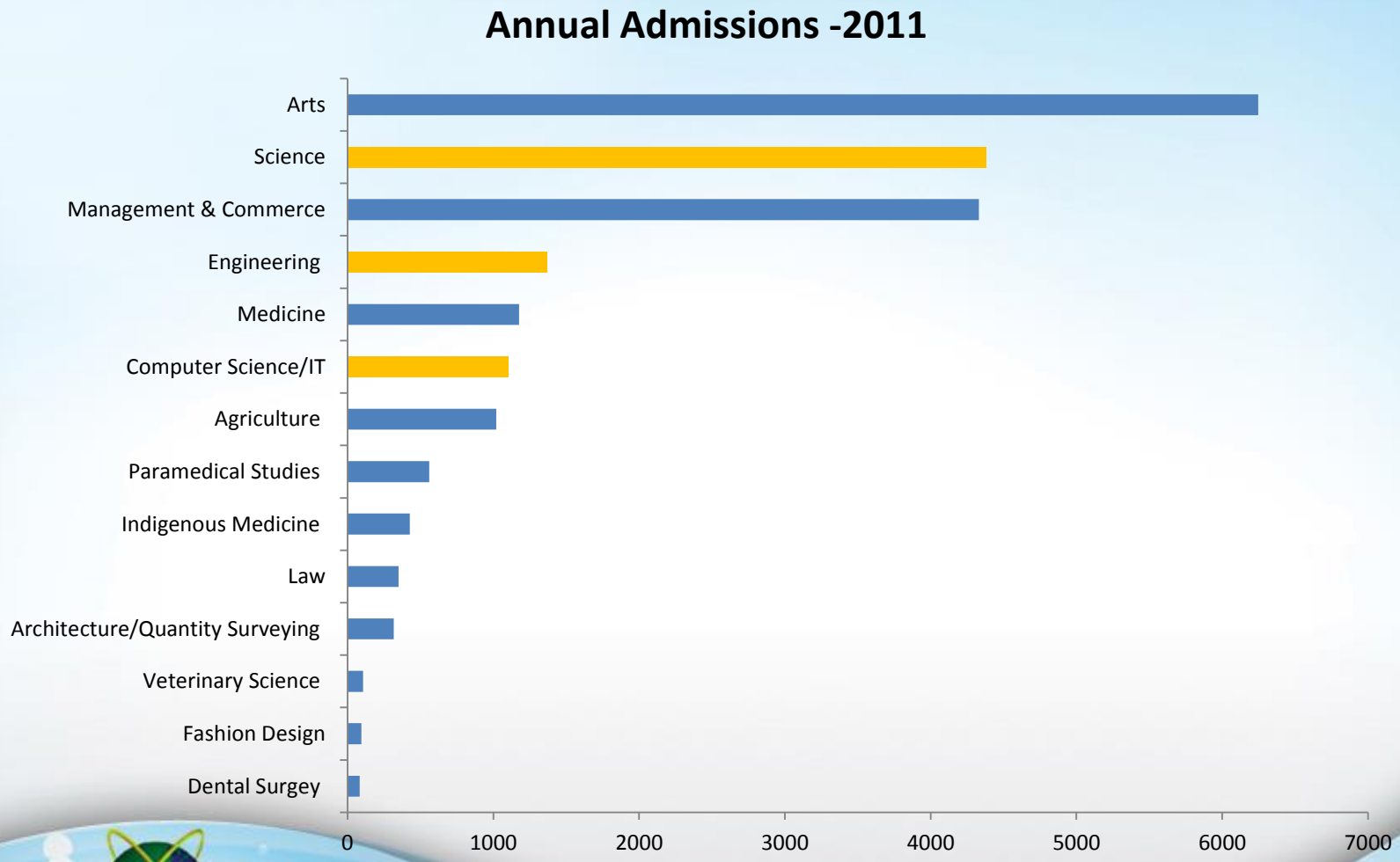
- Limited capacity-GER 4.6%
- Poor relevance
  - Unemployment/underemployment of graduates
- Absence of private universities/ small private HE sector
- Inadequate focus on STEM disciplines

Tertiary/Higher Education – The Bottleneck



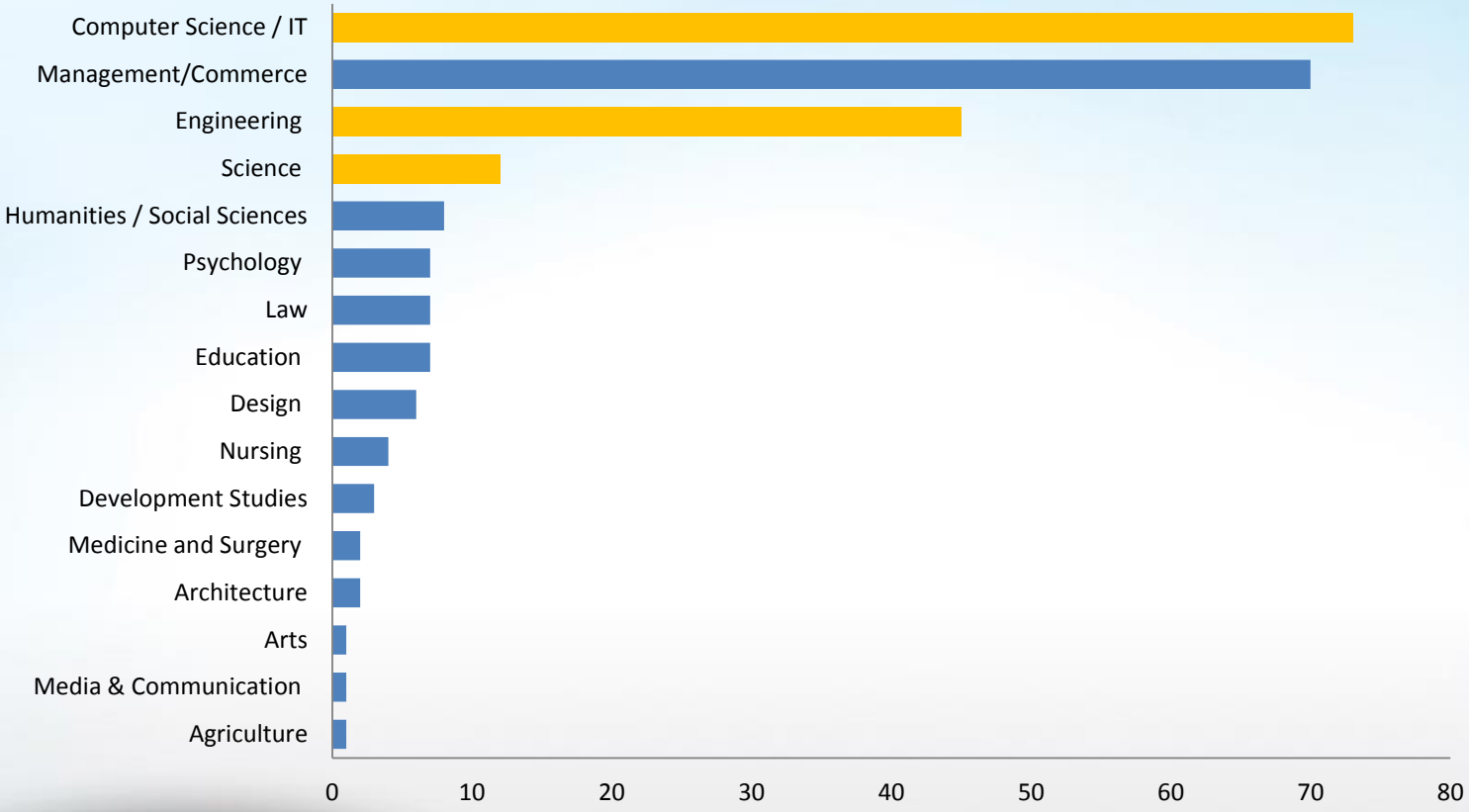
Source: World Bank (2013)

Inadequate Focus on STEM



Source: UGC Sri Lanka (2013)

Degree Profile-Private HE



Source: LIRNEasia (2012)

The way forward

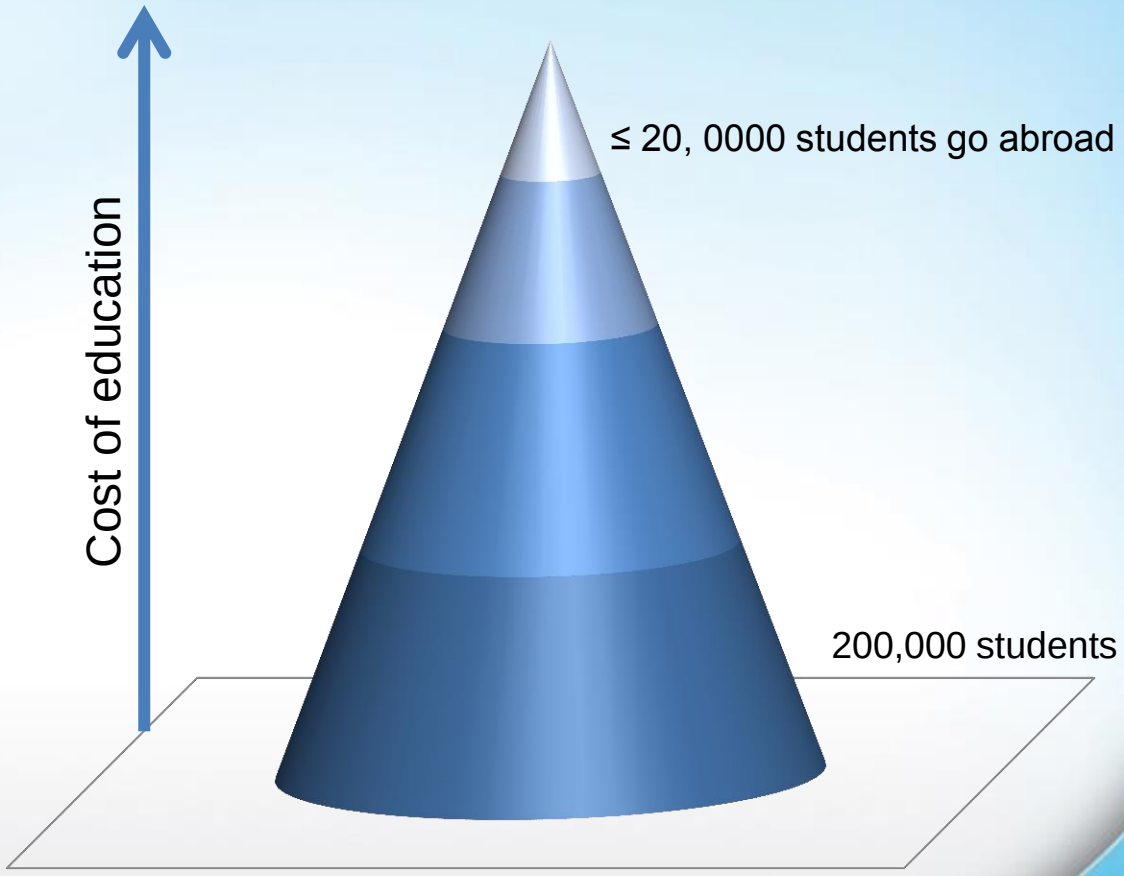
- Policy Reforms
- Expansion of the state sector
- Improvement of quality and relevance
- Private investment
- Internationalisation

Current Government Policy

- Continuous development of state Higher Education
  - Quality Assurance Council
  - Focus on STEM disciplines
  - Upgrading of selected universities to world class status
- Promotion of private investment in Higher Education
  - Private universities act
  - Low tax regime
  - Financial assistance to institutions
  - Financial assistance to students
- Invitation to foreign universities to establish their presence in the country
  - Branch campuses
  - Collaborative provisions

Private investment in HE

- A must to increase capacity and meet the demand
- Innovative models required to ensure affordability, access and quality.



Internationalisation

- Transplant international best practices
- Adopt modern technologies
- Improve quality & standards

Catapult the higher education system to global standards

THANK YOU