



A Socio-Economic Study on Sustainable Funding Models for Private Universities in North-East India with special reference to Arunachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT:

Private universities have emerged as crucial agents in expanding access to higher education in North-East India, especially in Arunachal Pradesh, where public institutions are limited and regional disparities persist. This study explores the socio-economic challenges and funding constraints faced by these universities, with a focus on identifying sustainable financial models. Drawing on secondary data, institutional reports, and policy analysis, the research highlights the overdependence on tuition fees, irregular scholarship flows, and limited access to public research funding. Innovative practices such as hybrid learning, skill-based programs, and community-linked courses are examined as emerging strategies. The paper recommends a multipronged approach, including the establishment of a North-East Higher Education Sustainability Fund (NE-HESF), regulatory reforms, industry collaboration, and enhanced access to government and philanthropic support. The findings underscore the need for region-specific policy interventions to ensure the financial viability and developmental impact of private universities in the North-East.

Keywords: Collaboration, Higher Education Funding Sustainable Models, Public-Private Partnership (PPP), Education Policy

1. Introduction:

Private higher education has become a crucial component of the educational landscape in India's North-East, a region comprising eight states characterized by diverse tribal cultures, challenging geography, and historical marginalization. In recent decades, the role of private institutions has grown in significance, particularly in regions where public higher education institutions (HEIs) are few, geographically concentrated, or under-resourced. Private universities have responded to the increasing demand for quality, accessible, and diverse higher education opportunities, contributing to regional educational expansion and human capital development.¹ Historically, the North-East has faced significant underdevelopment in public higher education infrastructure. Many areas remained underserved due to political instability, poor connectivity, and uneven development policies. While notable in establishing Central and State universities in select locations, government efforts have not sufficiently addressed the widespread regional disparities. Public investment in higher education in remote and tribal areas like the North-East has often lagged behind national averages, resulting in poor gross enrollment ratios (GER) and high student outmigration. These structural gaps necessitated alternative solutions, paving the way for private sector participation.² Since the early 2000s, several private universities have emerged across the North-Eastern region. Institutions such as Apex Professional University in Arunachal Pradesh, Assam Don Bosco University, The ICFAI University Nagaland, and University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) represent a new wave of private higher education committed to local empowerment, entrepreneurship, and skill development. These universities have sought to fill critical educational voids, often offering programs aligned with regional development needs, including tribal studies, paramedical sciences, agriculture, and vocational education.³ Despite these efforts, their sustainability is frequently undermined by chronic financial challenges. One of the central challenges facing private universities in the Northeast is sustainable financing. Most institutions are heavily dependent on student tuition fees, which limits their ability to offer scholarships, expand infrastructure, or attract high-quality faculty. Compounding the issue is the relatively low purchasing power of the local population and limited corporate presence in the region, which restricts access to philanthropic support or industry collaborations.⁴ Furthermore, the regulatory environment often does not favor financial innovation or provide incentives for private HEIs operating in disadvantaged regions.

¹ Agarwal, P. (2009). *Indian Higher Education: Envisioning the Future*. SAGE Publications India.

² Tilak, J. B. G. (2015). *Higher education in North-Eastern region: Challenges and prospects*. *Indian Journal of Human Development*, 9(1), pp.1–22.

³ Mukherjee, H. (2017). *Private Higher Education in India: The Need for a New Regulatory Framework*. Centre for Policy Research.

⁴ Choudhury, M., & Borah, R. (2021). Financial challenges of private universities in North East India: A critical analysis. *Journal of Education and Development*, 11(2), 112–124.

Given these complexities, this study seeks to examine sustainable funding models for private universities in North-East India, analyzing both the challenges and the potential pathways to long-term viability. The research aims to offer evidence-based recommendations that support institutional resilience, educational equity, and regional development. It is positioned within the broader discourse of inclusive education and sustainable development, aligning with national priorities such as the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which emphasizes access, equity, and institutional autonomy.

2. Objectives of the Study:

- a. To explore existing funding models in private universities in NE India
- b. To identify region-specific challenges to sustainable financing
- c. To analyze successful examples and best practices
- d. To recommend strategies for long-term financial sustainability

3. Literature Review:

Varghese (2015),⁵ explored the role of private higher education institutions in India's development with a particular focus on financial autonomy and regulatory challenges. The research was qualitative in nature and based on policy document analysis and institutional financial reports from 15 private universities across India, including two from the North-East. The study found that private universities faced significant hurdles in generating non-tuition income, largely due to a lack of philanthropic culture and endowment support. It recommended greater autonomy in fundraising and institutional collaborations to diversify income sources.

Bhattacharya and Sharma (2018),⁶ conducted a quantitative study analyzing funding patterns and sustainability challenges in six private universities in Assam and Meghalaya. The sample size consisted of 120 stakeholders, including administrators, faculty members, and financial officers. Data was collected through structured questionnaires and financial audits over five years. Findings revealed that tuition constituted more than 85% of total revenue, with minimal CSR or alumni contributions. The authors recommended introducing financial literacy and fundraising offices within private institutions to improve long-term planning.

Mitra (2016),⁷ employed a case study methodology to examine three private universities in Eastern and North-Eastern India, including Apex Professional University. Using purposive sampling, in-depth interviews were conducted with 18 senior-level university officials and 12 government education officers. The findings indicated that universities in remote regions struggled to attract faculty and investments due to inadequate infrastructure and weak industry linkages. The study recommended policy-level incentives such as tax breaks and priority funding for institutions in backward regions.

Dasgupta and Deka (2021),⁸ focused on the financial resilience of private technical and professional universities in Assam and Nagaland. Using a comparative framework, the researchers surveyed five universities with a total of 250 respondents (faculty and administrative staff). Stratified random sampling was employed, and data was collected via Likert-scale surveys. The study concluded that financial resilience was directly linked to governance structure and the presence of innovation hubs or incubation centers. They recommended greater engagement with state industries for research sponsorship.

Khongwir and Singh (2022),⁹ conducted a region-specific study of private higher education institutions in Meghalaya. Using a sample of four private colleges and one university, interviews were conducted with 22 administrators and 30 final-year students. The research highlighted the challenge of student affordability and dropout rates due to fee hikes. It found that student loans and fee waivers were underutilized and recommended the creation of state-level funding schemes and institutional micro-scholarships to support marginalized students.

Sen and Reddy (2019),¹⁰ conducted a thematic review of public-private partnerships (PPP) in higher education financing, drawing examples from various Indian states, including Arunachal Pradesh. Using secondary data from government databases and university records, the study evaluated the performance of PPP-based skill universities. While successful in infrastructure development, the findings warned of low student engagement and weak curriculum relevance. The authors suggested stronger monitoring and industry alignment in PPP-driven models to improve outcomes.

⁵ Varghese, N. V. (2015). Private Higher Education and Financing in India: Patterns and Policy Issues. *UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning Working Paper*, No. 17.

⁶ Bhattacharya, R., & Sharma, P. (2018). Funding Patterns and Financial Sustainability of Private Universities in North-East India. *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration*, 32(3), pp.45–62.

⁷ Mitra, A. (2016). Private Universities in Backward Regions: A Case Study of Eastern and North-East India. *Asian Journal of Education and Social Studies*, 7(4), pp.101–115.

⁸ Dasgupta, A., & Deka, S. (2021). Financial Resilience in Private Professional Universities: A Study from Assam and Nagaland. *Indian Journal of Higher Education Finance*, 5(2), pp.72–91.

⁹ Khongwir, M., & Singh, R. (2022). Affordability and Dropout Challenges in Meghalaya's Private Higher Education Institutions. *North East India Education Review*, 4(1), pp.27–41.

¹⁰ Sen, R., & Reddy, S. (2019). Public-Private Partnerships in Higher Education: Performance and Policy Implications. *Indian Journal of Policy and Research*, 10(2), pp.55–70.

4. Research Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative-descriptive research design to examine sustainable funding models of private universities in North-East India. The approach allows for an in-depth understanding of contextual challenges and institutional practices related to financing higher education in this region. The research is primarily based on secondary data, including university financial reports, guidelines from regulatory bodies such as UGC and AICTE, and performance data from NAAC and NIRF rankings.

A multiple case study method was adopted, focusing on three to four private universities from Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Meghalaya, and Nagaland. These institutions were selected based on geographic diversity, operational maturity, and data availability. Where feasible, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key university officials such as registrars, finance officers, and senior administrators to complement the secondary data and gain institutional perspectives on funding practices, constraints, and innovations.

5. Current Funding Models of Private Universities in NE India:

- a. **Tuition-Driven Models** - Tuition fees remain the primary revenue source for most private universities in the North-East. Institutions rely heavily on student fee payments to manage operational expenses, pay staff, and maintain infrastructure. However, this model raises concerns about affordability, especially in economically weaker states where students may struggle to pay high fees. In regions with lower household incomes, this often leads to reduced enrollment, high dropout rates, or compromises in program quality. For instance, Apex Professional University in Arunachal Pradesh depends significantly on fee-based revenue for programs in law, education, and health sciences. Similarly, ICFAI University, Tripura runs its engineering and management programs primarily through student fees. Overdependence on tuition limits the institution's ability to offer merit or need-based scholarships, raising challenges around accessibility and equity.
- b. **Founders' Capital and Charitable Trusts** - Many private universities in the region were initially funded through capital investments from founders or sponsoring bodies, often structured as charitable trusts or societies. While such contributions help cover startup costs and infrastructure development, they are typically one-time or limited-period investments. For example, The Global University, Arunachal Pradesh, was established under the Priyadarshini Education and Charitable Trust, and its initial infrastructure was built with trust funds. Assam Down Town University, backed by the Down Town Charity Trust, similarly used philanthropic funding for its establishment. Sustaining long-term growth through this model is difficult unless institutions actively engage in donor outreach, endowment building, or income-generating academic ventures.
- c. **Grants from Philanthropic and Religious Organizations** - Some universities receive grants or donations from philanthropic foundations, religious institutions, or international missionary groups. Assam Don Bosco University, for example, benefits from the Salesian global network, which supports programs in community outreach, technical education, and value-based learning. Martin Luther Christian University in Meghalaya, founded by the Lutheran church, occasionally receives aid for specific academic and social work-related projects from church-affiliated donors abroad. While such funding can be instrumental in launching socially impactful programs, it tends to be episodic and project-specific, making it an unreliable long-term financial strategy.
- d. **Limited Research Funding and Industry Collaborations** - Private institutions in the North-East face significant barriers to securing research grants due to eligibility limitations and limited internal research infrastructure. University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM) is a notable exception, having secured DST and AICTE grants for science, environment, and biotechnology research. However, for most universities like Kaziranga University in Assam, research revenue remains minimal due to the weak industrial base and lack of faculty research networks. The lack of well-funded research hampers the growth of postgraduate programs, faculty development, and global collaborations.
- e. **CSR Collaborations** - Some universities have tapped into CSR funding under the Companies Act, 2013, though opportunities remain limited. USTM, Meghalaya, has collaborated with corporations like NEEPCO and ONGC for CSR-funded vocational training and skill development initiatives. Similarly, ICFAI University, Nagaland, has explored CSR ties with small local enterprises for entrepreneurship programs. These partnerships are promising but remain underutilized due to the limited corporate presence in the region. To scale this model, universities need dedicated CSR outreach units and proposals aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and regional development policies.
- f. **Revenue from Auxiliary Services** - To diversify income, several universities in the region offer auxiliary services, such as hostel accommodations, short-term training, and consultancy services. Apex Professional University runs skill development programs under the PMKVY scheme, earning additional income while contributing to employability. Kaziranga University offers consultancy services to local NGOs and government agencies in areas like rural development and social impact assessment. These revenue sources, though modest, add financial flexibility and enhance community engagement. Additionally, such services help build the university's public image and relevance beyond traditional academic delivery.

6. Challenges to Financial Sustainability:

- a. **Low Student Enrollment due to Migration to Other States** - One of the most critical challenges is the outmigration of students from the North-East to educational hubs in other parts of India such as Delhi, Bangalore, and Kolkata. This phenomenon is driven by perceptions of better academic quality, placement prospects, and exposure in mainland institutions. Consequently, private universities in the North-East struggle with low enrollment rates, which undermines their tuition-based revenue model.¹¹
- b. **High Operational Costs due to Geographic Remoteness** - Geographic factors further compound these issues. The North-Eastern states are marked by difficult terrain, inadequate transportation networks, and logistical hurdles. Universities in remote areas such as Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram face **increased expenses** in construction, faculty recruitment, maintenance, and digital infrastructure setup. These higher operational costs reduce profit margins and limit the institutions' ability to reinvest in innovation or research.¹²
- c. **Lack of Robust Alumni Networks** - Strong alumni networks serve as vital resources for fundraising, student mentorship, and institutional branding. However, most private universities in the North-East are relatively young (established post-2000), and their alumni bases are either small or not formally institutionalized. This lack of alumni engagement weakens opportunities for endowment-building and placement support.¹³
- d. **Limited Corporate Presence for Partnerships** - Industrial development in the North-East is significantly lower compared to other regions. As a result, there are fewer opportunities for private universities to engage in corporate partnerships, attract internships, or secure CSR-based funding. This limits practical training, employability programs, and collaborative research projects, which are essential for institutional sustainability and student satisfaction.¹⁴
- e. **Absence of Government Support or HEFA-type Funding** - Unlike public universities, private institutions do not receive government grants or subsidized infrastructure loans. Mechanisms like the Higher Education Financing Agency (HEFA) cater only to publicly funded institutions, leaving private universities to rely solely on self-financing, trust funds, or limited external donations. This creates a funding gap and restricts long-term infrastructure and research development.¹⁵
- f. **Regulatory Barriers and Lack of Autonomy** - Private universities often face stringent and complex regulatory frameworks governed by UGC, AICTE, and state legislation. These regulations limit their autonomy in areas such as curriculum design, faculty recruitment, and fee structure determination. Furthermore, delayed approvals and inconsistent policy guidance hinder innovation and discourage long-term planning.¹⁶

7. Opportunities and Innovative Funding Avenues:

- a. **Blended Learning and Digital Platforms for cost-effective expansion** - Embracing **blended learning models**—a combination of online and offline instruction—can significantly reduce infrastructure costs while expanding student reach. In geographically dispersed and remote regions of North-East India, such models provide access to education without the burden of building full-scale physical campuses. Universities can adopt digital learning platforms to deliver MOOCs, certificate programs, and hybrid degree programs. This approach is already being piloted by institutions like Apex Professional University through its distance learning initiatives. Moreover, integrating affordable open-source learning platforms (e.g., SWAYAM, Moodle) can enhance quality while maintaining cost efficiency.
- b. **Community and Tribal Philanthropy:** North-East India has a rich tradition of community-based governance and tribal solidarity. Harnessing community and tribal philanthropy can generate localized funding for education. Universities can engage local village councils, social organizations, and tribal leaders to support scholarships, build student hostels, or co-fund local learning centers. For instance, community-driven initiatives in Nagaland and Mizoram have supported church-based colleges and vocational centers for decades. Institutionalizing this practice through structured giving campaigns and regional outreach may tap into untapped social capital.
- c. **CSR Projects Aligned with SDGs in education and skill-building:** Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds mandated under Indian law offer significant potential for private universities if their proposals align with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)—particularly SDG 4 (Quality Education) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). Universities in the North-East can design vocational and skill development programs, especially for women and tribal youth, and partner with corporations like NEEPCO, Oil India, or ONGC, which operate regionally. For example, USTM in Meghalaya has collaborated with public enterprises to deliver community-centric skill-building programs with CSR funding.

¹¹ Boroah, V. K., & Minocha, S. (2019). *Inequality in higher education in India: The impact of regional disparities*. Economic and Political Weekly, 54(3), 45–52.

¹² Das, M. B. (2012). *Exclusion and disparities in higher education in North-East India*. Institute for Human Development.

¹³ Altbach, P. G., & Salmi, J. (Eds.). (2011). *The road to academic excellence: The making of world-class research universities*. The World Bank.

¹⁴ Baruah, S. (2020). *In the name of the nation: India and its Northeast*. Stanford University Press.

¹⁵ Agarwal, P. (2009). *Indian Higher Education: Envisioning the Future*. SAGE Publications.

¹⁶ Tilak, J. B. G. (2015). *Private higher education in India: Trends and challenges*. International Higher Education, (33), pp.21–23.

- d. **Micro-endowment Funds and Donation Drives:** Creating micro-endowment funds allows institutions to build long-term financial resilience. These can begin with small, regular donations from alumni, faculty, local businesses, and even parents, pooled into a professionally managed fund. Over time, such funds can support scholarships, research, or infrastructure upgrades. Donation drives, especially during university events, festivals, or convocation ceremonies, can instill a culture of giving. Encouraging students and alumni to contribute even symbolic amounts on a recurring basis builds community engagement and self-reliance.
- e. **Public-Private Partnerships in skill development and vocational education:** Strategic Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) offer avenues for infrastructure and program co-development in skill education. State Skill Development Missions under the Ministry of Skill Development & Entrepreneurship (MSDE) actively fund institutions to run short-term training, ITI-linked courses, and placement-linked programs. Universities can partner with organizations like NSDC, IL&FS Skills, or local chambers of commerce. For instance, Kaziranga University has partnered with local industry clusters to provide short-term courses in hospitality and IT under PPP formats.
- f. **Research and Consultancy Income from Local Development Projects:** Universities can generate revenue by conducting policy research, impact evaluations, and consultancy services for government departments, NGOs, and development agencies working in the North-East. With a growing focus on local governance, environmental conservation, and tribal development, institutions are well-positioned to offer evidence-based recommendations and capacity-building services. Martin Luther Christian University, for example, has successfully conducted community-based health and social research funded by national and international NGOs.
- g. **Skill-based training centers with industrial tie-ups:** Establishing skill development centers in collaboration with industry can be a win-win model. These centers, often run in partnership with private companies, NGOs, or government agencies, provide vocational training to youth while earning revenue from government schemes or corporate sponsorships. These can include trades such as electrical, paramedical, agro-processing, IT, and hospitality—areas relevant to the local economy. Assam Don Bosco University, for instance, has launched skill hubs in collaboration with industry and government skill programs.

8. Case Studies of Select Private Universities:

- a. **Apex Professional University (Arunachal Pradesh)** – Established under the Arunachal Pradesh State Legislature, Apex Professional University (APU) operates with a social mission to serve underrepresented and tribal populations. The university's funding model is a blend of founder-led capital, tuition revenue, and government-aligned skill development grants under schemes like PMKVY and Skill India. APU has successfully implemented short-term vocational and paramedical training programs in collaboration with NGOs and community-based organizations, promoting regional capacity-building. The university also leverages community goodwill and tribal outreach for program acceptance and informal local support, although formal alumni or CSR funding mechanisms are still under development. Its unique integration of Ayurveda, tribal studies, and alternative education reflects a sustainable approach rooted in local relevance and social impact.¹⁷
- b. **Assam Don Bosco University (Assam)** – It is a Catholic private university that presents a successful model of sustainability through innovation and outreach. Backed by the global Salesian Society, the university has established a strong presence in distance and blended learning, offering online degrees in engineering, business, and social sciences through platforms like Moodle and SWAYAM. ADBU combines this with active community development initiatives, including rural engagement programs, counseling services, and student-led social interventions, which attract philanthropic and church-based funding. The university also benefits from institutional credibility and international visibility, aiding its fundraising and faculty exchange efforts. Its holistic approach integrates academic quality, access, and spiritual values with sustainability.¹⁸
- c. **University of Science and Technology Meghalaya (USTM)** – USTM, located near Shillong, has carved a niche through its emphasis on industry-aligned research, faculty development, and CSR partnerships. The university actively collaborates with public sector units like NEEPCO and ONGC to implement CSR-funded training and community-based education projects. It has also secured grants from AICTE, DST, and DBT for science and technology research. USTM's research incubation model includes seed funding for faculty projects, patent filing assistance, and interdisciplinary centers in emerging areas like biotechnology and environmental sciences. These initiatives not only enhance academic quality but also provide alternative revenue streams and national recognition.¹⁹
- d. **The ICFAI University Nagaland** – ICFAI University in Nagaland operates on a predominantly tuition-based financial model, with a focus on entrepreneurial and professional education in fields like business, law, and IT. Given its limited access to CSR or philanthropic funds, the university emphasizes industry-relevant curriculum, startup incubation, and self-employment training for students. The university maintains moderate fees to remain accessible, while offering add-on certification programs and soft skills development initiatives. It also collaborates with local MSMEs and trade bodies for guest lectures and training. While the revenue streams are narrower compared to others, the university's focus on career outcomes and entrepreneurial mindset supports its sustainability.²⁰

¹⁷ Apex Professional University Website (<https://www.apexuniversity.edu.in>); NAAC Self Study Report, 2023.

¹⁸ Assam Don Bosco University Annual Reports; Don Bosco Global Network Reports (2022–2024).

¹⁹ USTM Research and Innovation Reports; USTM CSR and Outreach Division (2023).

²⁰ ICFAI University Nagaland Website; AICTE Approval Reports; NSS Cell Activity Reports, 2022–23.

9. Policy Recommendations:

- a. **Special UGC/AICTE financial inclusion schemes for private universities in NE** - Launch Special UGC/AICTE Financial Inclusion Schemes for Private Universities in the North-East Private universities in North-East India should be brought under special financial inclusion schemes by statutory bodies like the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE). Tailored grant programs and performance-linked support for infrastructure, research, and faculty development are essential to address the financial asymmetry between public and private institutions in this underdeveloped region. These schemes can be designed to support minority education, tribal inclusion, digital classrooms, and capacity-building initiatives.
- b. **Incentives for CSR investment in higher education in NE India** - The government should introduce tax incentives or CSR score multipliers for companies that invest in higher education initiatives in the North-East. CSR funds could be channeled to support skill development, digital infrastructure, scholarships, and women's education in private universities. Establishing a North-East CSR Education Fund under the Ministry of Corporate Affairs could centralize and promote such efforts, ensuring alignment with SDGs and regional priorities.
- c. **Encourage regional alumni associations for financial support** - Private universities should be encouraged to establish formal regional alumni networks to foster a culture of philanthropy and mentorship. Government and university collaboration can support the creation of alumni cells, annual meets, and digital platforms for giving. In the long term, this can evolve into alumni-backed endowment funds, especially if incentivized through recognition, tax rebates, or matching grants by the institutions.
- d. **Development of a regional HEFA-like funding model for NE private institutions** - The central or state governments should consider creating a North-East Higher Education Infrastructure Fund—modeled on HEFA—to provide low-interest loans or credit guarantees to private universities for infrastructure and innovation. This fund should be specifically designed for accredited institutions with social missions, located in educationally backward areas, and meeting quality assurance benchmarks.
- e. **Regulatory reforms for ease of fundraising and partnerships** - Current regulations governing private universities often hinder external fundraising and partnerships. UGC and state higher education councils should initiate reforms to simplify procedures for industry collaboration, international partnerships, and acceptance of philanthropic donations. Single-window clearance systems, transparency in affiliation renewals, and ease in registering trusts/endowments can significantly enhance private HEIs' ability to mobilize resources.
- f. **Promote regional research funding and community-focused projects** - Dedicated regional research grants for projects addressing tribal development, biodiversity, environmental management, and local governance should be introduced. These funds can be administered through state councils or the North Eastern Council (NEC), allowing private universities to participate in applied, socially relevant research. Encouraging collaborative consortia of private and public HEIs will also enhance the impact and sustainability of such initiatives.

10. Conclusion:

Private universities in North-East India occupy a critical space in the region's higher education landscape, especially in bridging gaps left by limited public institutional presence. However, their sustainability is severely constrained by a range of interlinked funding challenges. Chief among these are low student enrollment due to outmigration, high operational costs resulting from geographic remoteness, and restricted access to research and infrastructure funding mechanisms like HEFA. Additionally, the absence of robust alumni networks, limited corporate engagement, and rigid regulatory frameworks further limit the financial resilience of these institutions. Without diversified and reliable funding sources, many of these universities struggle to expand, innovate, or adequately serve their communities.

Given the strategic importance of higher education in promoting socio-economic development in the North-East, there is an urgent need to ensure that private universities have access to sustainable funding mechanisms. Financial sustainability is not just about institutional survival—it is about enabling inclusive regional development, fostering skilled human capital, and contributing to national integration. To achieve this, funding models must go beyond tuition dependency and integrate locally adapted innovations, such as blended learning platforms, community and tribal philanthropy, CSR-aligned programs, and micro-endowment funds. These models, while modest in scale, align well with the socio-cultural fabric of the North-East and can evolve into more robust systems when supported institutionally and policy-wise.

Private universities, with their agility and localized focus, are well-positioned to be catalysts of nation-building in underserved areas. They offer pathways to higher education for first-generation learners, tribal students, and rural youth, many of whom are excluded from mainstream public institutions. Their contribution to vocational education, entrepreneurship, and skill development can directly address regional imbalances and improve employability. Moving forward, a coordinated and collaborative approach is essential. Stakeholders, including the universities themselves, state and central governments, industry partners, philanthropic organizations, and civil society must come together to create enabling conditions. Policy reforms, regional research grants, alumni engagement frameworks, and a dedicated funding model for the North-East's private HEIs can collectively strengthen their long-term viability. Supporting these institutions is not merely an educational imperative—it is a developmental necessity for an equitable and integrated India.

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