



Managing
A Local
University with

International Standards

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How would you describe the unparalleled success NSBM has gained over the last five years?

Sri Lanka had a dire need for higher education opportunities where a limited number of students who sit for the Advanced Level Examinations entered the National University System while a vast majority of the remaining students had to look for different avenues to pursue higher education. NSBM Green University virtually identified this as an opportunity. I think that consumer need identification was vibrant and focused, and there was sufficient demand for higher education locally as well. This was the starting point of the University, and it is undeniable that NSBM started with the right thought and mindset. NSBM managed to identify the correct opportunity and the required educational dimension at an appealing value from the very beginning itself in order to effectively deliver its core activity. The synergizing effect of this fundamental planning process itself has helped NSBM to establish the sound path that we are operating in today.

NSBM has gone through a lot of brainstorming and this planning process starts from the mind of the founding Vice-Chancellor. He typically thinks 4-5 steps ahead of what we would traditionally think. So, when someone is working with a leader of that calibre, naturally, they also need to think at least 1-2 steps ahead of what a normal person would think. Without that, I don't think this journey would have been possible, and I believe we have always displayed this level of organizational commitment because

of the leadership. Our strategic plan for the University was never a nicely bound book that was kept on display. Instead, we always used it as our working document. And I believe that our top management truly inspired and guided us to achieve what we have achieved during the last 5 years.

Additionally, as an organization we have a culture where we believe that everyone should deliver and when everyone delivers, all of us will be collectively benefitted and that is a great factor that has helped us in our journey. NSBM operated with comparatively a smaller team from the very beginning and even amidst the growth of student numbers and programmes and the expansion in our staff cadre we are still comparatively a small team. Our teams have always delivered when and where needed. Be it junior staff, senior staff and academics, no one has been constrained by rigid rules and regulations which could hinder the thinking.

If you look at what we do as a university, almost every week we as a team do something of significance. This small team has managed to make this a project that is financially sustained despite an investment of over Rs. 10Bn and the reason as to why we were able to achieve this with a small team is because of our performance-driven culture. Everyone who works here has an organic feeling towards the University where they think of the institution as their own place or second home. In essence,

each one of our staff had to play a role in this success. Therefore, the teams' commitment has been very high and conversely our staff is also well taken care of especially if you compare the benefits and facilities offered for our staff to any other similar institution.

In addition to our human resources, NSBM Green University has also made timely investments in technological and other aspects that has helped us in delivering an optimal service to external and internal customers.

In business management, you got to deal with standard methods, procedures, practices, rules and regulations, circulars and so on. As an organization, we are never constrained by or considered any of these to limit achieving our fullest potential. I think we have also effectively capitalized on the high level of networks our top management has established over the years to successfully expedite several functions and initiatives that we do here at NSBM. Because of these efforts, we have managed to achieve much more than what we would have originally achieved if we let ourselves work in a confined bubble governed by a range of internal and external factors.

As a final point, I believe NSBM Green University as an organization naturally goes back to the basics here no matter what activity we engage in. Whenever we are going to do something, we always think of the impact we are going to create. We are very logical in that sense in our operations, and I believe that this



has been a huge positive for NSBM's remarkable growth and financial sustainability over the last 5 years.

NSBM is expanding its facilities with the construction of Phase 2. Would you like to give us a brief description of what Phase 2 would add to the University?

Since its inception, the entire NSBM Green University project was planned on 50 acres of land. In accordance with this plan, NSBM secured another 15 acres of land adjoining the current project from Urban Development Authority in 2019 for Phase 2 of the Green University project, which was initiated based on the further expansion requirements of Phase 1, prevailing market opportunities in

multiple new domains and in line with the holistic strategic plan of the University.

Phase 2 of the university intends to add three new faculties in the form of Faculty of Science, Faculty of Law and Faculty of Social Sciences along with a breath of new facilities and amenities for students including, a multipurpose conference hall with a capacity of 2,000 seats, a state-of-the-art sports ground with extended facilities for numerous sporting activities, an open air theatre with a capacity of over 500 seats, extended parking facilities for students, a hostel complex that can accommodate over 1,000 students and a vast natural water harvesting pond inclusive of its own recreational area and jogging path.

According to your opinion, what does the future look like for NSBM Green University?

The future is not something that we can miraculously create. I believe that what we do today will determine our future. We are a relatively young institution, and we still have a very long journey ahead of us. Even in the future, we will most definitely work towards making our key customers - our students and parents - happy and satisfied and financially sustaining the project. It is also important to be in line with industry demand and to maintain the quality of delivery that we need to work towards as well. For instance, we have looked at several emerging new areas and disciplines at a global and local scale and we are looking at introducing



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new programmes which will help us in creating a better portfolio of degree offerings in the future and deliver this dynamic job market what it really wants from a higher educational institution.

As an organization, we have challenges in balancing the financial sustainability of the project, but we need to keep on monitoring the incremental ROIs on certain new investments and certain decisions we have made. I hope our next 5-year strategic plan will help us to achieve it where academics that are performing the core service will be benefitted even further as well as students especially in terms of the new facilities and services that are currently in the pipeline as a part of the expansion of the University.

As a higher educational institution we have had a set of key objectives since the very beginning. Our prime consideration is to provide our students an unparalleled learning experience that is on par with international standards. Also we work towards saving the country's foreign exchange by retaining the students who are leaving the country to pursue higher education while bringing in foreign exchange to the country by becoming a knowledge hub in the region to attract foreign students. Therefore, regardless of what the future may present I believe we need to continue sustaining this core factor.

Finally, I would like to end this interview with a positive sentiment. In marketing there

is a theory which elaborates that a brand must strive towards achieving 'top-of mind' amongst its potential consumers. So, I think we as an institution need to work on making and sustaining NSBM Green University as the top-of-mind brand amongst the general population when it comes to the higher education sector in Sri Lanka. ■

By Janith Iddawela and Daupadee Gamage