Participatory Action Research for Community Development in South Asia

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About UNESCO Chair

• Unique Chair based in a Northern University and Southern Civil Society Organization

• Supports North-South-South and South-South partnerships, enhancing ‘knowledge democracy’

• Strengthens engagement between communities, civil society & academia

• Promotes discourse on Social Responsibility in Higher Education

• Renewed for second term till 2020

UNESCO Co-Chairs
Prof Budd Hall and Dr Rajesh Tandon
Chair’s focus areas

Knowledge production

Policy Advocacy

Capacity Enhancement

BUILDING KNOWLEDGE SOCIETIES
We live in challenging times!

- Challenges of contemporary times

- Co-existence of prosperity & poverty; democracy & exclusion; industrial development & degradation of natural resources

- Challenges of illiteracy, unemployment, inequality, etc.

- Important implications for the South Asian sub-continent

- Presence of both challenges and opportunities for the South Asian region, makes today’s discussion even more pertinent
Building Knowledge Societies

- UN System universally adopted the SDGs in 2015
- Beacon for social economic & ecological development
- Agenda 2030 establishes 17 goals universally applicable in all countries
- Each country has been developing benchmarks and indicators for achieving SDGs
- Particularly relevant in the context of South Asia
What do we do?

- Status quo is unsustainable; time to shift to ‘new ways of thinking and doing things’
- Relevant education/educative practices and new forms of knowledge are required
- Increasing expectations from Universities, as the sites for knowledge creation
- Global debates on ‘social worthiness and responsibilities’ of universities
- GUNi Higher Education Report 5 & 6 places particular emphasis on this aspect
Role of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

- Historically recognized as ‘public institutions for public service’
- Demand for public accountability growing
- Opportune moment for HEIs to demonstrate social ‘relevance’
- Opportunity to make a difference in society, through their missions, and ‘research’ in particular
Increasing expectations from research

- Innovation is the key for all transformations liked to SDGs
- Can no longer afford a business as usual approach; call for innovation & ‘new ways of working’ from all sectors
- Of particular importance, is the increasing expectations from ‘research’
- Expected to provide ‘new solutions, through appreciating and incorporating alternative perspectives of knowledge’
- This calls for strengthening societal contributions of research, making it more ‘engaged’
Nuances of Engaged Research

- Framing locally usable research
- Building knowledge in partnership
- Learning new competencies
Lessons from around the world

Science Shops
Institutional structures promoting responsible research

Research question based on the community aspirations and needs

Responsible Research & Innovation (RRI)
Key action of Swafs program of European Union’s Horizon 2020 initiative

Aims to assess societal expectations and foster sustainable research practices
Participatory Action Research (PAR)

- Apt manifestation of ‘Engaged Research’

- Amidst increasing calls for research which is community-based, rather than community-placed; PAR emerges as an important approach

- Based on the principles of inclusion, participation, action, reflection and sustainability

- Respects and acknowledges alternate knowledge forms, thereby resulting in the production of ‘new knowledge systems’
Tenets of PAR

- Variant of ‘Action Research’
- Focus is on ‘action’ for ‘improving a situation’, using Participatory Research as a mode of engagement
- Uses participation and popular knowledge to democratize knowledge production
- Ultimate aim is the ‘empowerment of oppressed’ to partner in social change
PAR for Community Development

- PAR claims that research is ‘with’ the people, rather than ‘on’ the people

- Active participation facilitates the process of capacity building enabling communities to be the ‘driver’ of social change

- PAR leads to mainstreaming of ‘community voices’, in ways that allow communities to lead the processes that impact them

- Results in ‘development’, which is inclusive and sustainable
The region’s growing contribution to world economy and development has important implications.

Calls for sustainable community development processes, built on authentic and responsible knowledge production processes.

Here PAR for community development holds special significance.

This holistic development process can in turn have important implications on a global scale.

Recently released SDG report shows hope for South Asia; need to carry on and consolidate efforts.
K4C: A step forward in this direction

A UNESCO Chair in CBR Initiative

International Training Consortium for building capacities in ‘Community-Based Research’

Involves partnerships between HEIs & CSOs for co-creation of knowledge, linked to UN SDGs

Reinforces UNESCO Chair’s commitment to participatory approaches to research
K4C Goals

- Develop an internationally accredited gold standard curriculum for CBR training
- Offer a 21-week Mentor Training Program
- Create 8-10 hubs across the world to develop research capacities in local contexts
- Co-generation of knowledge for societal transformation
- Influence policies & practices in implementation of SDGs
K4C: Forthcoming plans

- K4C kick starts in January 2018, with a 21-week MTP
- Participating countries: Colombia, India, Indonesia, Italy, South Africa
- Future prospective partners for later cohorts (in 2018 & 2019): Spain, Uganda, UK, Canada, Japan
- Final objective is popularizing the practice of CBR, as a approach for research for social change
Closing reflections

- Current challenges demand a holistic approach; coming together of different knowledge systems, research & academia in particular

- Research needs to feed into developmental processes & perspectives

- For this to happen, a deviation from the status-quo is required

- PAR presents a model approach through which the ‘desired change’ can be achieved

- South Asian region, by nature of its expanse, geo-politics and development can leave a footprint on global development processes
Publications

- Strengthening Community University Research Partnerships: Global Perspectives
- Institutionalizing Community University Research Partnerships: A user's manual
- Knowledge and Engagement: Building Capacity for the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers
- Training the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers
- Higher Education and Community-Based Research: Creating a Global Vision
- Higher Education in the World 5: Knowledge, Engagement & Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change
- Higher Education in the World 6: Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local

Building Knowledge Societies
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