



***Report on the Policy Dialogue on ‘Strengthening
Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions:
Lessons from around the world’***

Association of Indian Universities, New Delhi

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Prepared by:

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Higher Education***

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- *Institutions such as the Association of Indian universities (AIU), University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Human Resources Development (MHRD) must encourage the universities to submit their achievements in the field of Community Engagement (CE) as a compendium. This should then be sent to libraries of various institutions, from where other universities and colleges can emulate best practices in the field. Previously, National Assessment & Accreditation Council (NAAC) used to publish a document on 'Best Practices in CUE', a practice which was discontinued thereafter, and which needed to be revived. It was suggested that AIU could play a major role by disseminating experiences across Indian universities. AIU can integrate knowledge on the topic and have some quality materials published, as offered by Prof Furqan Qamar, Secretary General, AIU. It can also develop policy papers and organize workshops and events for dissemination of best practices. Further, development of papers/manuals on the subject would also help in standardization of the understanding of the concept of community engagement.*
- *Commenting on what can be done for proper documentation/marketing of CE ideas, Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Co-Chair & Founder-President, PRIA shared the South African (SA) case, and said that the Higher Education Council in SA expects an annual report on CUE, from universities/colleges they support. In this way, there is both the documentation of practices and also the marketing of ideas. Therefore, it is important to understand that 'it is not about the money, but the mechanism of engagement'. Further, the model of Canadian/US universities, mandating their PG level students to do project work with community clients, for securing their degrees, can be emulated in the Indian higher education system as well.*
- *It also emerged that whenever universities have created a structure/mechanism for undertaking such efforts, Community University Engagement (CUE) has been a runaway success, opined Dr Tandon. A major example in this context is the Science Shops, being run by several European universities. Further, the universities should focus on building sustainable partnerships with local stakeholders (communities, CSOs), for maintaining continuity in the process of community engagement, as a means to deal with the risk of mobile tenure of students. Another method of maintaining continuity was to engage at the level of the professors, rather than Vice-Chancellors who have a limited tenure of four years, opined Prof Qamar.*
- *Dr Budd Hall called for the 'need to opening ourselves towards the society, need to find new ways in our own lives, need to push harder'. He said that, 'we are confronted with the problem of tremendous scientific improvement and the growing gap between the rich and the poor, existing at the same time. Therefore, we need to think about this point, as to what degree, are we doing things differently, with respect to interaction with the community' and 'what impacts have we had on our society'?*

- *Students are usually enthusiastic about the usefulness of Community Based Research (CBR) methods for their own work. They also are excited about framing research topics and questions that are relevant for their communities. In this sense, it was recognized that the problem is not that students are not interested in CBR but that professors do not know how to guide them. Teachers need to be trained in skills, attitudes, knowledge to understand the importance of going to, and working with, the communities, opined Dr Manju Panwar, Assistant Professor, Bhagat Phool Singh Mahla Vishwavidyala (BPSMV), Sonapat. Citing his experience at BPSMV, Prof R R Singh, former professor, Delhi University, said that at the university, the 2-day orientation and refresher programs for teachers was divided in a way that, the first was spent in classrooms and university, while the second was spent with the community. He suggested that this model can be emulated for all such courses which are running in several universities. This point was re-iterated by Dr Pankaj Mittal, Joint Secretary, UGC, who called for CUE to be included in the orientation and refresher programs (for teachers) conducted by Human Development Centres of the UGC*
- *Prof N K Ambasht, former professor, Sokoto university, opined that on the lines of CSR, we should now focus on introducing the concept of 'Corporate Educational Responsibility (CER)' in universities, with the latter becoming an essential part of accreditation/affiliation. We should all call for a Government of India policy on CER, which mandates the universities to spend a fixed amount of their budget on achieving CUE. Calling for institutionalization of personal efforts, Prof Ambasht shared that "it is the commitment of universities coupled with an institutional mechanism", is what is required for achieving effective CUE in our universities.*
- *Dr Surajit Sarkar, Associate Professor, Ambedkar University called for motivated and personal efforts at the University for promoting community university engagement and which are not necessarily enforced by higher education regulatory bodies. If the university desires, it is very much capable of bringing about small changes which can help it achieve the desired objectives of CUE. However, having a scheme backed by the UGC itself, definitely helps to streamline activities, and bring the skeptical teachers in-sync with the broad objectives.*
- *There is a need to differentiate between the popular notion of 'extension' (as one of the functions of the universities) and 'engagement', as the two are often considered as being synonymous, opined Dr Sanjay Bhatt, Professor, Delhi University. Further, the universities need to step up their efforts towards reviewing and reviving their system, by way of reviewing their course curriculum, inclusion of community engagement in the regular course curricula, allowing for inter-disciplinarity in community engagement, etc. It is also important to understand that communities have enormous knowledge resources. The universities should devise ways to incorporate the learnings acquired from the community, into its curricula, and take advantage of these resources in its own teaching programs. Further, the universities should also be ready to commit their resources for achieving the desired change we all are aspiring for.*

PROCEEDINGS

The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education, in partnership with the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) organized a policy dialogue on '**Strengthening Community Engagement in Higher Education: Lessons from around the world**' on April 25, 2016. The dialogue witnessed participation by senior academics, representatives from higher education regulatory bodies, international experts, civil society organizations etc.

The **objectives** of the dialogue were:

1. *Sharing of experiences in the field of community engagement from India, Canada and Japan.*
2. *Dissemination of the findings emerging from the study on 'Training the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers' (A UNESCO Chair initiative).*
3. *Round-table discussion on methods and strategies for promoting community engagement in Indian Higher Education system.*
4. *Producing key recommendations that can be taken forward for practice (by universities, civil society) and advocacy purposes (with the government).*

The session was inaugurated by Prof Furqan Qamar who welcomed the delegates, on behalf of AIU and the UNESCO Chair, and invited Dr Rajesh Tandon to give his presentation and also moderate the session.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon welcomed the participants and highlighted the role of Participatory Research (PR) in enabling the excluded in India to access their rights. He emphasized that Community-University Engagement (CUE) has to be brought into the Indian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) because unless universities and communities are connected, no teaching or research is meaningful.

Dr Tandon narrated the brief history of Participatory Research (PR), and also how PRIA began to partner with the academia. Some of the main points he shared are:

- In the early days, people often confused the work done under PR, as being equivalent to community development/social mobilization. Also, there was no serious engagement between NGOs and academia in the 1980s.
- It was only in the 90s, that academia started taking interest in this area, and it was 1992-93 when international development agencies like World Bank, SIDA, etc. began investing in this area, that PRA tools and methods began to gain some notice.

- Gradually, universities & its departments also started taking interest in this methodology. This was also the time when PRIA engaged with the academia in a number of joint endeavours such as student internships, conduct of inter-professional dialogues and execution of joint research projects.

Citing this experience of PRIA, as a positive one, Dr Tandon mentioned that PRIA's engagements were designed in a manner to bring together researchers and policy-makers, and create opportunities for the training of the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers. In this light, PRIA (between the years 2002-2006) convened 5 national dialogues on '*Citizenship & Governance*', involving academics and practitioners in different parts of India. Workshops were held in cities like Varanasi, Jaipur, Siliguri, Hyderabad and Delhi. In these consultations, practitioners, CSOs, local government officials would come together on the same platform with academics to present joint views on how '*governance can become a people centric effort*'.

During 2006-07, PRIA did a survey on about 300-400 universities for identifying as to how PR was being taught in the academia. What emerged was that '*although there was a mention of PR in the research methodology course, what was not clear was how to teach it, and what to do with it*'. PRIA started its distance education programs (through the PRIA International Academy (PIA)), of the total 2300 students so far, about 40% of completed the course on '*International Perspectives in Participatory Research*', which was designed specifically for the purpose of teaching and training young students and practitioners.



Pic 1: Dr Tandon sharing about his experience as the UNESCO Chair, history of PR and work of PRIA with respect to CUE.

Dr Tandon went on to share the experience of how he and Dr Hall became the UNESCO Co-chairs in 2012. During the preparation of the 12th Five Year Plan, a sub-committee on '*Strengthening Community Engagement in Higher Education*' was set up. The general conception of Community

Engagement (CE) was being understood as merely a sub-set of activities which fell under the NSS domain. The argument put against this conception was that true community engagement was not something that can be ghettoized in the NSS domain, and that it needs to be integrated in the core functions teaching and research in Higher Education. At the state level, efforts need to be directed towards incorporating the principle of social responsibility in our respective domains (adapted to the local contexts), and move it forward.

Dr. Budd Hall, as the UNESCO Co-Chair shared his international experience in the field of CE/CBR, and other ongoing efforts across the world. He began his speech by outlining the four main meanings of CUE:

1) *Experiential learning (e.g., service-learning/engaged learning; community-engaged learning)*: This refers to the student element of the concept of CUE.

2) *Knowledge mobilization/Knowledge impact*: This applies to the function of Higher Education and the process of making sense that all research (participatory/conventional) gets out into the world at appropriate places, where necessary actions can be taken.

3) Policy element (tenure and promotion policies in HEIs): It is important to focus on the policies of career advancement, because if the indicators of the latter were narrowly understood, many scholars would be reluctant in being involved in CBR/PR.

4) Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR): Research which is not done in the communities, but with the communities

Dr. Hall summarized the main findings of the Next Gen project undertaken by the UNESCO Chair to increase access to high quality training in participatory research for the next generation of community-based researchers around the globe. He shared that, *'we discovered that although many people (students/community organizations) were interested in learning more about CBPR, however, opportunities both inside and outside the universities did not match the demands'*. He also shared about the four thematic case studies (on water governance, participatory citizenship, asset based community development and Indigenous people and perspectives), the findings which emerged from the global survey, undertaken on the 'CBR training opportunities available in CSOs and HEIs globally:

- Over 50% of respondents have not had any formal training experience in CBR, while the most common way of acquiring CBR capacities is through learning-by-doing
- CBR provided at HEIs usually offers *little practical exposure* to real life experience and community problems. HEI-based training continues to be taught in traditional classroom-type approaches for the most part, while learners are calling for experiential opportunities (e.g., community actions) to develop CBR capacities.

- Importance of putting the *emphasis on praxis* and improving the existing CBR fieldwork. Field experience is the single most useful learning approach to CBR.
- *More training* is needed not only on participatory research methodologies and theories, but also on knowledge mobilization and dissemination, consultation and community engagement, research ethics and equity in interdisciplinary partnerships.

Apart from the thematic reviews and global survey, the study also included 21 case studies of institutions providing CBR training from all across the world. Some of the findings which emerged from them are:

- CBR training is being administered singularly; either by a university, a civil society organization or an independent research collective. *Collaborative training efforts are still missing.*
- Countries demonstrating a strong *research ethic culture via national code of conduct* (e.g., New Zealand and Canada) results in the training institutions paying more attention to this aspect.
- Much emphasis was on '*partnership/relationship building*' with the community, through field exposures; rather than developing a deeper understanding of *power differentials and structure* present within a community.
- Most of the training providers use a *combination of cognitive and affective modes of enquiry*; with action based modes being practiced in field immersion activities in HEIs and the training administered by CSOs.

Finally, Dr Hall outlined the five pedagogical principles that should ideally serve as the benchmark of all CBR training programs. They are:

- *An orientation towards research ethics & values*
- *The development of a deep understanding of power & partnerships*
- *The incorporation of multiple modes of enquiry*
- *Participation in learning CBR and balance between classroom /theory & field/practice*
- *The role of the researcher as CBR facilitator.*

Further to Dr Hall, **Dr Nidhi Sabharwal**, Associate Professor, National University Educational Planning and Administration (NUEPA) shared her experience in the domain of CE by way of her research study on 'civic learning'. She shared that three most important attributes in a university-community equation are:

- Reflective teachers
- Educational leadership
- Commitment of the administration

Dr Sabharwal shared the findings of the study conducted on '*Use of student diversity in higher education to enhance civic learning*'. The study which was conducted in 6 states, and involved 11 HEIs and 3200 students, focused on research questions, such as '*who is engaging? What are they doing; and why are they engaging?*'. It was found that mostly, it were the undergraduate students (more boys than girls) who were engaging in this process. They were into activities such as campus cleaning, waste management and awareness campaigns. The reason behind such engagement emerged that the students felt a sense of comfort in being with their own community, and this also served as a root for the creation of the students union.

She put forth some **recommendations**:

(i) *National policy on civic learning, with autonomy to institutions to devise and practice.*

(ii) *CE should be an integral part of study programmes.*

(iii) *Student evaluation and assessment should give credit to their involvement in CE activities.*



Pic 2: Dr Nidhi Sabharwal sharing her perspectives on CUE

Picking up from what Dr Sabharwal shared, **Dr Surajit Sarkar**, from Ambedkar University, presented before the audience certain practical lessons which emerged from his university with respect to CE/CUE. He shared his experience on a 'digital story telling' course at his university,

wherein the students were asked to visit the *ghats* of the Yamuna river and the communities staying nearby. What emerged from this was that the students got a sense of how vast community's perceptions can be, and how their knowledge about their surroundings surpassed perceivable boundaries.

As Dr Sarkar also mentioned about the 4-credit project based course, which was included in the university curriculum, without a large framework or guideline behind it. Mentioning about the PG courses at his university, Dr Sarkar said that here, the field based activities have taken a more gratifying turn. He cited the example of the course on '*culture and hierarchy differences*', under which the students visited museums and galleries, and presented write-ups on the lessons they learnt. The result of such initiatives was that, '*suddenly, research and community engagement came together in ways which we could not have imagined earlier*'.

Dr Sarkar shared that the university has also partnered with a local CSO (PRADAAN), for offering field based project experience to MPhil & PhD students. Another fresh perspective shared by Dr Sarkar was that, it emerged that the students are now deeply interested to do CUE, whether it involved credits or not. When delving into the reasons behind this, it was found that students find it as a means of career advancement, getting visibility in local media, utilizing their summer holidays and enhancing their CV.

EMERGNG TRENDS IN JAPANESE HIGHER EDUCATION

Dr Kusago, from Kansai University, shared his Japanese experiences, on why '*community based action and learning was needed and is important*'. Dr Kusago began his presentation by outlining some of the major issues that the Japanese higher education is facing in present times. Some of them are; *depopulation, overcrowded universities, and competition coming from the global world*. He mentioned that these were some of the major issues, which called for new strategies in education and research in the Japanese higher education.

He further, shared about the 'carrot and stick' approach adopted by the national government, which categorized national universities in three types: firstly, the ones who were excellent in teaching and research, secondly, ones with specialized field based and excellent in teaching and research, and thirdly, locally based and excellent in teaching and research. He shared that such universities were mandated by the government to do CE, and the allocation of subsidies to them depended on the CE strategies they shared, which automatically resulted in an increase/decrease in their budget amount.

Commenting on Japanese public universities (including all 3 types), Dr Kusago shared that the latter include '*local-based or local-oriented teaching and research*' as a core strategic activity. Some of the issues which are taken up for collaborative research include local problems such as reconstruction, ageing problems, community development etc. The private universities, faced with fierce

competition are also involved in devising '*new teaching methods which are practical and reflective*'. Some of them have also set up an office or a centre for locally-engaged and socially-engaged collaboration.

Citing his experience at Kansai University, Dr Kusago shared about the Centre for Community Collaboration, established in 2005, which was set to promote collaboration with the community. He shared that, '*the target of this center is to build a collaborative relationship with the community in various fields of education, culture, industry, and so on. To realize its purpose, the center has already concluded comprehensive agreements with several local governments and companies. Through these actions, it aims to enrich education and research programs that are inclusive of community interests, such as regional welfare and economy*'. The centre has also signed MoU's with prefectures, cities, rural towns, shopping district, hospitals, etc. The centre also undertook collaborative research projects, involving faculty members, students and local communities. Some of such projects were:

1. *Project on life history of local people* (undertaken by the faculty of business and commerce, along with the communities, to understand varied views on the ageing society).
2. *Project on community revitalization through residence based exchanges* (undertaken by the department of architecture, faculty of environment and urban engineering, in partnership with the communities for designing whole houses).

Dr Kusago also mentioned about the community based action learning and research initiatives undertaken by Kusago Lab, based at the Social system design of Faculty of Sociology. Here, the graduate students are connected to local communities for joint research projects, to the extent that some of the thesis topics of the graduate students focus on community issues. Some of the other on-going initiatives in Japan include:

- (i) *Community Life Process Evaluation Method*, in which graduate students engage in community-initiated revitalization action research;
- (ii) *Community Mapping with Jimotogaku method* (also operational in Bhutan, Nepal), which involves blending knowledge and insights from local community with classroom knowledge.

Dr Kusago also outlined the basic tenets of *Collaborative Action Research*. These are:

- Linking research to community practice, involving participatory research, done at the graduate level.
- Mutual collaboration (one which is not enforced by government or experts), which follows a trans-disciplinary approach and focuses on action research.

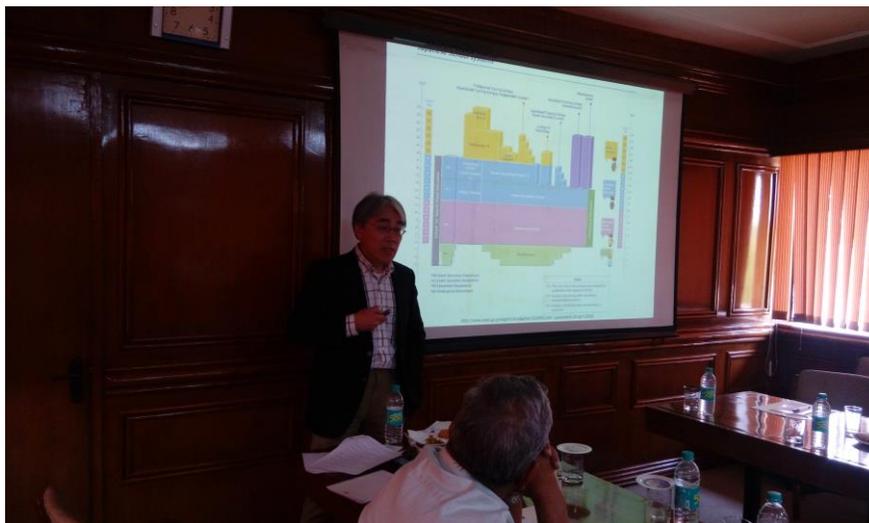
Dr Kusago also outlined the impacts of having successful community collaboration, on both the students and the university:

(i) Real, concrete and deeper understanding of the course work

(ii) Development of skills

(iii) Influence on job selection

(iv) Reputation of being a good university.



Pic 3: Dr Takayoshi Kusago, sharing experiences from Japan

WAYS FORWARD FROM UGC & AIU

Dr (Mrs.) Pankaj Mittal, Additional Secretary, University Grants Commission (UGC)

- *We can devise a mechanism whereby which some marks can be allocated to faculty's contribution towards CUE, in deciding their API (Annual Performance Index) score.*
- *There is a need to effectively market CUE practices, along with developing/publishing papers on Community Based Research/Participatory Research.*
- *If we have course content on CBR handy, we can recommend it to the universities to include it in the course on 'Research Methodology', to be taught to MPhil/PhD students.*
- *There needs to be a document to popularize the idea/methods of introduction of CBPR into the existing curriculum.*

- *UGC has Human Resource Development Centres in several universities across India, which conducts orientation and refresher program for teachers. In such courses, one lecture on CUE can be made compulsory.*

Prof Furqan Qamar, Secretary General, Association of Indian Universities

- *We need to integrate the varied literature on CBR and CUE, and come up with a policy document which categorically mentions as to what is CBR/CUE and what is not. Further, such a document must also touch upon the varied methods of engagement and how universities can go about it.*
- *Although it is easy to say that things can be done without resources, it is important to understand that in order to make a process sustainable and university wide, having resources at disposal is a must.*
- *Rather than focusing on creation of more structures, we should instead pay attention on integration of CUE within the curriculum, by way of departmental projects.*
- *A compendium/manual/policy brief on the topic needs to be developed, keeping universities as the prime focus.*

NOTE FROM THE UNESCO CHAIR

The UNESCO Chair would like to extend its gratitude towards the participants of this policy dialogue. We take this opportunity to let you know that you all have been and continue to be our valued colleagues and we appreciate your continued interest in partnering with us for achieving our objectives. The Chair remains committed to take forward and follow up on the suggestions/action points that have emerged from this dialogue, together with all of you. Heartfelt thanks to every one of you, once again.

Sincerely,

UNESCO Chair team