



**Report of the Two- Day Dialogue on
Community Engagement and Social Responsibility in Higher Education**

***Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE)
Jain University, Bangalore
18th and 19th March 2015***

The two-day Dialogue on Community Engagement and Social Responsibility in Higher Education was organized at Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE), Jain University. The focus of this dialogue was a recently concluded study titled *Community Engagement with Higher Educational Institutions and Social Responsibility in Higher Education* by CERSSE in collaboration with the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Delhi. The purpose of this study was to assess the current activities and practices of community engagement in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Karnataka. The dialogue was organized to discuss the findings from Karnataka and to assess the possibilities of scaling up community engagement in the state. Various stakeholders linked to HEIs such as policy makers, teachers and students were invited along with Government and NGO representatives to share their experiences and take part in the discussion.

**Day 1: March 18th, 2015
Inaugural Session**

The two-day Dialogue on Community Engagement and Social Responsibility in Higher Education at CERSSE, started with a welcome address by *Dr. Mythili P. Rao*, Dean of Languages, Jain University. She began her address with a Doha of Kabir Das. *Dr. Sandeep Shastri*, Pro Vice Chancellor, Jain University welcomed everyone and expressed the hope that the event was fortunate to have the best people in town to speak on the matter at hand.

Setting the stage, *Dr. Rajesh Tandon*, Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education presented the backdrop of the dialogue by delineating the purpose of higher education and the importance of University-

Community relationship in both, the national and international context. Education forms a significant part of the ecosystem. He opined that the theme that is being addressed is not something new and connected it with the notion of Viswavidyalaya, the idea of global education. The speaker extolled the importance of *Nalanda* and *Takshila*, but admits that the purpose of higher education has been lost and has become less clear. He questioned the way in which institutions of higher education were working to prepare global citizens having professionalism. According to him, possessing a degree does not make one a professional. In reality, being a professional is an act of service to the society. Therefore, the principle of professionalism is to serve the society at various levels.

In many of the fields of study, universities have ignored the body of knowledge that lies outside universities. The speaker used the example of turmeric use in the context of explaining scientific versus superstitious knowledge. Once turmeric became a packaged material, it began to be largely used by all. He also raised the question of the control over certification of who can produce knowledge, and the importance of de-legitimizing the same. Dr. Tandon stated that there exists a harmful divide between practice and knowledge. Higher educational institutions need to look outside for innovation. He reflected on how a farmer should be able to become a professor in an Agricultural University as this would open the doors of higher educational institutions in a mutually supportive way.

He explained that community engagement is largely ghettoized in forms of National Service Scheme (NSS) or in specific disciplines such as Sociology, Social Work and the like. Community engagement should not be exclusive to the Social Sciences alone. Importance should be given to community engagement just like it is given to peer reviewed journals for professors seeking accreditation. There is a need to develop holistic education which is mutually supportive to Community Engagement and Higher Educational Institutions. This is largely referred as 'Third Lens'. According to him, wisdom as such should not reside only in higher educational institutions but attention must be paid on what can be learnt from the community. The talk ended with the speaker commenting that a state of play for social responsibility of higher educational institutions should be mapped out over the course of the dialogue.

During the inaugural address, *Dr. B. K. Chandrashekar*, Former Education Minister, Government of Karnataka explained the 'Humboltian' model of higher education where the core idea is a holistic combination of research and studies. He spoke on how research must be carried out to benefit the society. After Indian independence, there was much thought and recommendations made in view of research and society in higher educational institutions. Education, scientific temper and relevance of research formed core values of the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru. However, in the course of time, research also became

focused on employability. He opined that Science Shops must not be like incubation centres. According to him, learning from the community must be more important; but the central question that needs to be asked is – to what extent is it feasible? He strongly advocated against Academicians as Administrators. He explained the ill effects of state power over educational institutions. This has provided space for increasing corruption in the universities.



Pic 1: Dr B K Chandrashekar inaugurating the Dialogue. Dr N Sundararajan, Vice Chancellor, Jain University, Dr Rajesh Tandon, Unesco Chair PRIA, Dr Sandeep Shastri, Pro VC, Jain University are also seen.

He described Vice Chancellors and other policy makers of universities as a kingdom unto themselves and how political leaders like governors should not be allowed to make academic decisions and that universities must have the freedom to make decisions within themselves. He also highlighted the rigid hierarchies that diminish decision making. According to him, universities do not have the power to decide on financial matters and they are on to the mercy of bureaucrats from the Education department. To improve the situation of higher educational institutions in India the recommendations of the subcommittee established by the Ministry of Human Resource Development is not sufficient. Some of the important and relevant questions to ask are who heads the university committees? Who heads the institutions? Who are the members of the syndicate? Who are the individuals that decide in the Board of Studies and Executive Council? Those recommendations have to be implemented in the Universities and higher educational institutions in order to see the impact and differences they make to the system. The ability to reflect upon our self and thinking free from any restrictions is missing in our universities. He expressed that the universities and higher educational institutions have to become the vehicles of social transformation and social justice.

In the Presidential address, *Dr. N. Sundararajan*, Vice Chancellor, Jain University stressed that Jain University gave utmost importance to community engagement; but across the state of Karnataka it is not as commendable as the institutions in Bengaluru. Higher educational institutions must be relevant to the neighbourhood and that social research must be relevant to the society. He used the example of Karaikudi village where a university in the area conducted research on physical deformities found in children of the area. The research team identified contamination of water as the cause for such a deformity, a report was prepared and sent to the government and once the government was alarmed and got involved; the problem could be eradicated. Another college in Odisha adopted a small village where the members of the village were addicted to alcohol. The college then started a fundraising event to provide for economic benefits and eradication of poverty among the village members. The speaker highlighted achievements of Jain University; the human networking academy of Jain university works for enhancing the capabilities of individuals and organizations through professional training, research and consultancy. He spoke about the cycle expedition to Kargil, the Rotaract club which planted more than 1000 trees, how Kanakapura was made cataract free zone, and free eye camps were organized etc. He also mentioned the initiative of the Department of Psychology called Kalarava, a counseling and Play therapy centre.

Plenary Session I- Trends in Karnataka

Sharing the findings of the Karnataka Survey

This session focused on sharing the data collected from the Higher Education Institutions in Karnataka regarding community engagement in the respective institutions. The session was chaired by *Prof. R.S Deshpande*, former Director of the Institute for Social and Economic Change. The Karnataka report was presented by *Dr. Reetika Syal*, Assistant Professor, Jain University and *Ms. Nayantara Kurpad*, Research Assistant, Centre for Research in Social Sciences and Education (CERSSE), Jain University. The initial comments on the Report were given by the Panel Members: *Dr. Indira M*, Professor of Economics, University of Mysore and *Dr. P.S Jayaramu*, former Dean and Professor of Political Science from Bangalore University.

The Karnataka Report on the findings of the survey contained detailed activities undertaken in the 10 HEIs covered as part of the study. The presentation started out by explaining the methodology adopted for the survey and went on to highlight the six lens through which community engagement was viewed as part of the project. The Karnataka findings were divided into these six sub topics and major contributions of each institution were discussed. The NSS and NCC activities and accomplishments of the HEIs were also highlighted. The presentation concluded by summarizing the discussion on the problems

and constraints that these HEIs faced while carrying out the community engagement activities.



Pic 2: Dr R S Deshpande, Former Director of ISEC chairing the session where the Report was presented and Dr P S Jayaramu, Former Dean of Arts, Bangalore University was a discussant on the Report



Pic 3: Panelists releasing the draft survey report for Karnataka

Comments from the Panelists

Dr M. Indira, stated that universities have to be socially responsible by engaging with the community. The speaker highlighted the importance of looking beyond quantity. She also spoke about the issue of the presence of external community engagement practitioners within the universities. The rigid structure of the curriculum has made the affairs of the universities very mechanical. The speaker raised the issue of not being able to get projects that engage with the community and the question of efficiency of allocation of resources. She also highlighted funding to such projects to be made exclusive and that the meaning of Community engagement must go beyond villages and rural areas. *Dr P.S. Jayaramu* stated that curriculum design and development is one of the major concerns in community engagement activities in Higher Education (H.E). He opined that in board of studies there is no invitation for civil society representatives and practitioners and therefore the activity of designing a curriculum needs to be decentralized. University heads and policy makers serving political positions must be decentralized as well. Engagement with the community must be a continuous engagement. He argued that there is a need to find what the society expects from higher educational institutions (HEIs) and just as teachers are evaluated in terms of the number of publications, they should also be evaluated in terms of community engagement services. Universities themselves must be allowed to draft acts related to universities. Teachers and students must be sensitive towards what society expects from their research projects and programmes; both teachers and students have to inculcate the habit of being open mind and flexible in their approach.

Comments from the Chair

Professor R. S. Deshpande brought to attention how the domain of a university is different from the college domain in terms of community engagement, influencing the community, and the interface between the research and the community. According to him, college domain is more accessible for community engagement activities while the universities have a market oriented approach to research.

From among the participants, many issues were raised regarding how community engagement can be incorporated into the higher educational system. The issue of structural inequality in the universities and how research for the benefit of the community must be carried out through passion rather than as force from the curriculum was raised by *Dr. Meera Chakravarty*, Adjunct Professor, Jain University. *Dr. N.G. R. Iyengar*, Mentor, IIAEM, Jain University raised the question of the impact on the community and whether the community has accepted the services provided by the colleges and universities. He called for an impact analysis and a bottom up approach to view the issue at hand. *Dr. Cheriyan Alexander*, Department of English, St. Joseph's College urged for self-assessment of the

survey conducted. *Dr. Rajesh Tandon* opined that challenges such as lack of time for community engagement will be redundant if it is made a part of the curriculum. He also commented on a trend that seems to reflect analytical grooming of learners where both students and parents are demanding for relevance in higher education. A comment on the lack of infrastructure for doctors involved in community engagement was put across by *Ms. Bindu Subramaniam*, Director, Subramaniam Academy for Performing Arts.

Plenary session II- Forms and Structures of Community Engagement

This session was aimed at understanding the various institutional arrangements and support structures in place to promote and practice community engagement in HEIs. *Prof. K. Eresi*, former Dean of Commerce, Bangalore University chaired the session where representatives of three HEIs in Karnataka (*Dr. Sandeep Shastri*, Pro-VC, Jain University, *Mr. Johnny Joseph*, CSA Director, *Christ University* and *Dr. Sreedhar P.D*, NSS Head, Kristu Jayanti College) shared the experiences of their respective institutions. *Ms. Wafa Singh*, Program Officer, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi shared the findings from other states where the study has already concluded. *Dr. Cheriayn Alexander* from St. Joseph's College was the discussant for this session.

Sharing the experience from the states of Assam, West Bengal and Punjab, *Ms. Wafa Singh*, presented elaborately how higher educational institutions are an important factor in relation to the quest for sustainable solutions in these states. The findings from the three states focused on the student initiated projects, novel and innovative courses, community radio initiative, joint initiatives for promotion of horticulture, initiative of Christian colleges, joint research in agriculture, adoption of villages and action projects. The presentation also highlighted emerging trends, ambiguity on community and community engagement, and the ways forward.

While sharing the initiatives from Jain University, *Dr. Sandeep Shastri* highlighted the difference between forms and structure and focus and sensitivity. He made out a case for the sensitivity of the stakeholders to be taken into account and raised the point of doing what the community actually requires rather than doing what universities and colleges think the community needs. The focus of the universities towards community engagement should be incorporated at all times and not for a specific time or period. The efforts must be go beyond the classroom. He explained how the university had trained more than five thousand students through its various initiatives so that community based outreach activity can become the basis of participatory research. *Dr. Shastri* explained the Jain Vidyaniketan experience and how the university is involved in the life skill training programme. While discussing the learner centric pedagogical approaches and the capacity building initiatives of Jain University, *Dr. Shastri* highlighted that the activities were as

important as the learnings they generate for the participants and that community engagement has to be carried out with the purpose of empowerment, emancipation and enrichment.

Mr. Johny Joseph began the presentation by highlighting how moral responsibility and service to mankind stem directly from the core values of Christ University. He presented an overview of the Centre for Social Action (CSA), which is aimed towards social development and social responsibility. CSA has two wings: Students Programme (community engagement within the university) and Community Engagement (community activities outside the university). He spoke about the various community engagement initiatives of the university including their 'Educate a Child' program, rural camps, zero-waste campus, the university's collaborations and future initiatives. He explained the importance of integrating service into academics and ended his talk by highlighting what the university students' gain from the community experience.

Jayantian extension services were highlighted by *Dr. Sreedhar P.D.* from Kristu Jayanti College. The speaker commented on the institution's work through Centre for Social Action (CSA), Social Outreach Program (SOP), Rural Exposure Program (REP), National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC). He said that CSA majorly deals with the Bhavishya Jyoti, Vikas Kendra and Grama Samvedita. Youth Week is celebrated in association with NIPSAR, Sravanabelagola and the college also engages in sensitization and attitude change towards community engagement. He highlighted that research projects should be more village centric and also advocated teaching of life skills to the village community. He also opined on the need for multi departmental cooperation within the university for Community Engagement Programs.

After the presentations, the discussant, *Dr. Cheriyan Alexander* raised the issue of regional specificity and awareness creation in all pockets of life. He urged for awareness in the immediate neighborhood and questioned if corporate social responsibility can be harnessed in higher educational institutions in order to cope with resource constraints. He called for an energetic advocacy against gender stereotypes, human right violations, and poor delivery mechanisms of the government. He concluded by saying that there should be a humble learning from the community for a more comprehensive intra-community dialogue. Giving an example of his own institution St. Joseph's College, he explained how the students engaged in developmental journalism through volunteering; in collaboration with H. Strings. He opined that the curriculum must be diversified, for example, a chemistry student must be able to identify issues in their domain and engage in community services. He made a plea for a curriculum wide audit and also for reenergizing the institutional frameworks like National Service Scheme (NSS) and National Cadet Corps (NCC). He summoned for a call of alumni members who are corporate members to give back to the

society and concluded by saying that there should be a new paradigm in community engagement whose focus should be sustainable development.

Open discussion

During the discussion, *Dr. Sreedhar P. D.* was of the opinion that through internships with companies, community engagement can be strengthen and needs to be carefully designed so that internships and outreach programs for students can be intertwined with the curriculum. A credit system needs to be formulated commented *Dr. P. S. Jayaramu* and that students must give reports about the learnings from their community engagement experience. He also expressed that media should cover community engagement of colleges and universities and called for a formation of an audit of various community engagement programs. *Dr. Meera Chakravarty* raised the question of how hierarchies can be confronted and *Dr. Sandeep Shastri* responded that community engagement should not accept any hierarchies. *Dr. Shailaja Shastri*, Professor and Head, Department of Psychology, Jain University commented saying that universities must escape from the tyranny of the curriculum and that community and engagement cannot be mutually exclusive.



Pic 4: Participants at the conference

Comments from the Chair

At the end of the session, *Professor Eresi*, explained that it is not about profits alone, and that higher education has a social responsibility. There is a need for three major components; first social audit, second policies and programs and third performance. The chair explained about Companies' Amendment Act where two per cent of the profits must be given to social responsibility activities.

Panel Discussion I-Forms and Structures of Community Engagement: Experiences from Karnataka

The last session of the day was a panel discussion on 'Forms and Structures of Community Engagement: Experiences from Bangalore'. The focus of this session was to provide a platform to the representatives from HEIs in Karnataka where the survey was conducted, to highlight their institutions' activities in community engagement. The chair for this session was *Dr. M.K Sridhar*, Dean of Commerce and Management and Director Placement, Bangalore University. The speakers for this discussion included *Dr. B. C. Prabhakar*, Director, Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), Bangalore University, *Dr. Clement D'Souza*, Director, Internal Quality Assurance Cell (IQAC), St Joseph's College and *Dr. Basavaraja G.*, National Service Scheme (NSS) Coordinator, Tumkur University. *Dr. Meera Chakravarty* was the discussant for the session.

Dr. Sridhar began the session by saying that social responsibility must not be the exclusive privilege of companies but it has to be naturally done by all. He opined that experimentation in higher education is less compared to the same in primary and secondary level. He endorsed the idea that the most creative individual is the one who does not follow the framework and called for an informal culture and atmosphere in higher educational institutions. *Dr. Rajesh Tandon* mentioned the example of Living Knowledge Network through which Science Shops are established that cater to the demand of bridging gap between the universities and community.

The first presenter *Dr. B. C. Prabhakar*, from Bangalore University explained how higher education contributes in its own way, delivers the best through its students and society and how there are many ways in which one can bring in direct relevance to society. He provided the example of studying the impact of Mining activities; where researchers must address the problems in practicality and create awareness.

The concept of Institutional Social Responsibility was put forth by *Dr. Clement D'Souza* while highlighting the structure and functions of the outreach program at St Joseph's College. He explained how the college has market driven courses like Industrial Relations

and where students take up social responsibility leading to a change in the lifestyles. The objective of this social responsibility is developing social concern, social consciousness and public concern. Through Centre for Social Concern (CSC) the students are motivated and inspired to show concern and compassion towards the society at large.

A different perspective of community engagement was presented by *Dr. Basavaraja G.* from Tumkur University where he spoke about the impediments that community engagement activities, structures and coordinators face in higher education institutions. He stated that there must be a correlation between academics and community engagement. Though students are interested but the semester system does not allow for a comprehensive engagement with the community due to time constraints and academic pressure. He raised the issue of how science and commerce student are averse to community engagement and it is left only to the students from the arts stream to engage with the community. He argued for a complete structural change in the functioning of NSS. He opined that community engagement must be made a part of the finishing school component. Similarly teachers who engage in community based programs must be provided with incentives such as being provided with academic grade points. He mentioned that these practical constraints defeat the purpose of community engagement and instead of a long term commitment it becomes a limited-time activity and a formality.

As a discussant *Dr. Meera Chakravarty* spoke about the ill effects of commodification of courses. She mentioned that value must be ascribed to the cause and it should not just be perceived as an activity. The cause must be to fulfill social justice.

Open Discussion

Dr. B. C. Prabhakar mentioned that currently there is a loss of moral, ethical and social concern among the students in the higher educational institutions. They are technology savvy but they have lost that human touch and relations. The curriculum in the universities need not be monolithic and should provide for a space to conduct curriculum wide audit of each discipline. By engaging students and teachers in the community one can transfer the expertise and pick up research problems that are relevant to the current times. *Dr P. S. Jayaramu* mentioned that the community engagement in the higher educational institutions occur from two levels. One is from the level of academicians and teachers and second from institutional arrangements. He suggested that higher educational institutions must involve community based practitioners into University Syndicates, Board of Education, and Board of Studies. There must be representation from the community in the boards of these higher educational institutions. *Dr. S. Pushparaj*, Head, National Service Scheme (NSS), Madurai Kamaraj University mentioned that the discussion brought out by *Dr. B. C. Prabhakar*, *Dr. Clement D'Souza* and *Dr. Basavaraja G* have converged from different point of views making

higher educational institutions socially relevant. A social context has been established by involving faculty and curriculum in the ambit of community engagement.

Comments from the Chair

Closing remarks by chair of the session *Dr. M. K. Sridhar* were that while thinking of higher education the social relevance is more at the higher levels. When higher education and institutional framework are taken as a whole, the kind of experiments and innovation that takes place is very less. There is a need for more and more experiments and innovations in the field of higher educations. Further *Dr. Sridhar* was of the opinion that in order to bridge the gap between higher educational institutions and community engagement students have to be exposed outside of the class framework. If not, then the students will not develop the capability to face challenges in their due course. He said that one must allow certain kind of 'indiscipline' and 'unrest' among students within the higher educational institutions and that to make a difference in the community one needs an informal atmosphere. Students must be allowed freedom to think, innovate, act, experiment and thereby build dynamism within them.

Day 2: March 19th 2015

Panel Discussion II- Student Experiences on Community Engagement in Higher Education

The second panel discussion was the sharing of experiences of students who have been a part of the community engagement activities through their respective educational institution. Having heard the discussions on the previous day, student volunteers were invited to speak about their experiences. The session was moderated by *Ms. Bindu Subramaniam* and the student speakers included *Mr. Vinayak N. Rao* from Jain University, *Mr. Sainborlang M.* from St. Joseph's College and *Ms. Umme Ayman T.* who is a student of Jain University and has her own NGO. At the beginning of the session, the moderator gave a brief background of how students are important stakeholders in the community- HEIs dialogue.

Mr. Vinayak N. Rao spoke on Yuva, a students' initiative towards social concern. He informed the gathering that Yuva is involved in three major activities i.e. Shiksha (Education), Swasthya (Health) and Samaj (Society). The group conducts various events in collaboration with different forums and organisations who share similar kind of sentiments for the society. Yuva regularly organises free eye checkup camps and health camps across the city at various places. The speaker was of the opinion that there is a need for students

to actively take part in community activities and that instead of waiting for an opportunity; the key is to create one.



Pic 5: Students participating in the Dialogue

Mr. Sainborlang M. spoke about his experience being a part of the community engagement initiatives through his college. He recollected his experiences by running the audience through various photographs of the activities that he had been a part of. Students of St. Joseph's College take part in a variety of activities that encompass community engagement. For instance, the students were part of the rehabilitation and resettlement of slum dwellers in Ejjipura who the Garuda Mall owners had forcibly evicted. Similarly, students from various associations and departments were part of annual rural camps, visited orphanages and old age homes, stood in solidarity with the victims of torture and Human Rights violation etc. At another occasion, various students organised a musical event by highlighting the plight of children in Syria and Gaza due to the ongoing civil war there. Furthermore, they also conducted sensitisation programs for the especially abled, third gender, visually challenged and jail inmates. The speaker was of the view that instead of waiting for someone else to engage, we need to step up and extend a helping hand. He also emphasized that it may be important to be intelligent, but it is more important to be a good human being.

Ms. Umme Ayman T. spoke about her own Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called A Soul for a Soul (ASFAS) that operates from Mysuru. Ms. Umme had been a member of the Rotaract Club in her school and was a part of many community engagement activities. The NGO was started by her a few years ago, without monetary support from her family members. AFSAS organises at least one event per month such as teaching children from underprivileged families, visiting orphanages, and assisting in the activities of ashrams. The

NGO keeps a record of all the students they teach, so as to check their overall progress. Similarly, she mentioned that they have also carried activities with regard to environment and ecology, tree plantation etc. Ms. Umme spoke about how her classes, friends and teachers at the Post Graduate Department of Psychology at Jain University help her connect classroom studies with day to day events and also talked about plans of opening another NGO in Bengaluru.

Questions to Speakers and Open Discussion

The student panelists answered questions on the type and source of infrastructure they are provided with to carry out their services and also the connection between their curriculum and the social work they engage in. *Mr. Sainborlang* felt that in order to attract more students towards community engagement activities, college authorities can provide a participation certificate and recognise their contribution towards the society.

Dr. Sandeep Shastri put across a question to the panelists that can teachers be the only facilitators with regard to community engagement or is 'Peer Influence' a much more effective motivator. *Dr. Meera Chakravarty* mentioned the initiative of 'Manushi' where they engage in providing education to children of domestic helpers. She further expressed that various multinational companies can be a part of educating children from underprivileged sections through their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives. *Dr. Rajesh Tandon* asked a question about the relationship between community engagements with the curriculum that is being currently taught to the students? He further enquired if there was any connection between the content and the practice, and how does community engagement relate with the studies in classroom? *Mr. Vinay K. C.*, Assistant Project Officer - Volunteer Programme, Centre for Social Action (CSA), Christ University highlighted the importance of 'Service Learning' which analyses the capacity of different students in regard to understanding grassroot relations with community engagement. Students, teachers with the help of practitioners engage in community based activities. He elaborated that Service Learning is moving beyond or taking a step forward from volunteering.

During the open discussion many important point were raised by *Dr. Shailaja Shastri*. According to her, community engagement cannot take place as long as there exists a dichotomy between those helping, seeing themselves as "we" and the community as "they". Adding to that she opined that psychology lessons cannot be taught in classrooms alone; Empathy and other virtues need to have practical lessons. *Dr. Shailaja* was of the opinion that HEIs needs to build a service culture which takes a long period of time and community engagement should be budgeted into the curriculum. The speaker also opined that higher education is most resistant to change. However, deemed and private universities have more freedom to bring about changes. Community engagement has to be integrated with

higher educational institutions and thus is not just about bringing changes in the policies but changing the mindsets.

Plenary Session III- Policy Implications

The third plenary session of the dialogue was on the theme Policy Implications which aimed to focus on two important issues related to community engagement: policy implications and ways forward. The session was to look at ways in which community engagement could be brought into the mainstream with the support of academia, policy makers and civil society actors. The three speakers for this session included *Prof. Shireen Nedungadi, Principal, National College, Basavanagudi, Ms. Pinky Chandran, Radio Active, Bengaluru and Prof. S.S Meenakshisundaram, Vice- Chairperson, Myrada and former IAS* represented all the sectors mentioned above. The session was chaired by *Dr. Jayagopal Uchil, Director, Planning and Academics, Jain University*, and the discussant was *Dr. Shailaja Shastri*.

Professor Shireen Nedungadi, while sharing her experience of community engagement in her college to engage with the community, raised the point that when syllabi is redesigned the goal is to make it better, so that community engagement could have a place and a voice which would lead to creating a knowledge society. Karnataka has heterogeneous students coming into universities and to meet this demand, the higher educational institutions need to continuously assess and reassess their functioning and should avoid having a uniform policy. She spoke on Karnataka Universities Innovation Bill 2007 that called for a greater flexibility in higher education and connect the curriculum to the community through greater autonomy and higher flexibility in interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary curriculum. She expressed that both the teacher and student have to come together and that HEIs are the most important link towards creating a knowledge society. Efforts should be made for moving towards total integration of community engagement in higher educational institutions and in every class by every teacher; it should not be seen as an addition and there should be total engagement. She also shared that since National College consists of more students from suburbs and rural areas they are better placed with regard to connecting with the community engagement activities. Being a principal, Prof. Shireen acknowledged the time constraints in a semester system but also wished that research in HEIs could bring a change in society to integrate indigenous knowledge with the elitist knowledge.



Pic 6: Dr Uchil presiding over a session discussing policy implications. Dr Meenakshisundaram, IAS (retd) Vice Chairman, Myrada, Dr Sheerin Nedungadi, Principal, National College and Ms Pinky Chandran from Radio Active were the panelists.

Ms. Pinky Chandran, from Radio Active, a community radio station in Bengaluru discussed about the initiative that had been established with the help of Jain University. Radio Active is a space for activists, students, volunteers and citizens and the speaker highlighted partnership between community and campus that is reflected by such a medium. Radio Active is involved in democratizing the knowledge production through community engagement activities. They have incorporated domestic workers who teach mathematics and other subjects in the form of drama and storytelling. Radio Active is also involved in the various clean-up drives across the city and were one of the major partners to come up with the concept of ‘segregation at source’ with regard to solid waste management. They involve various stakeholders through ‘participatory research approach’. Finally *Ms. Chandran* highlighted that Radio Active is also involved in community learning programmes, incubation centres, community campus partnership, collaborations and networking. She also mentioned the need for an inclusive and sustainable policy framework to be designed by the HEIs.

In his presentation, *Dr S. S. Meenakshisundaram* projected a picture of the issue from a civil servant’s point of view. He highlighted that higher education is not a priority of the government of India; unlike primary and secondary education. The formulation of curriculum is left in the hands of the university. He explained that community engagement is not a practise but a duty and mentioned that leaving it to the option of the individual was not a good idea. There is also a clear cut difference and absence of relationship between

academicians and civil servants and supported the formation of an advisory group to bring community engagement into the perspective of HEIs. According to him, one has to ultimately work for the society and it can be done mostly by involving people through institutions.

As a discussant, *Dr. Shailaja Shastri* commented on how change could be brought about in education as a whole by connecting the various dots that had been voiced so far. She mentioned that instead of focusing on barriers, the need of the hour should be solution oriented. She raised the following important points in order to bring about change in higher educational institutions.

- Integrating community engagement into the curriculum.
- Bringing in credits for Community Engagement.
- There must be peer learning opportunities to share experience with each other.
- To recognize community engagement done by the students and give extra credit to those students at the time of admission, who have engaged with such activities.
- Budgeting research from the school days till undergraduate and postgraduate level.
- Teaching and learning are not isolated terms as teachers are also practitioners and researchers too.
- Another mode of community engagement is sharing of resources between community and university. For instance the Department of Sports at Bolton University, United Kingdom shares sports equipments with the general public.
- Providing guidelines for young researchers towards the concepts of funds and partnering with various other forums.
- She endorsed the idea put forth by Dr M. K. Sridhar, that university libraries should be open for the general public
- There should be a change in mindset over change in policy

Concluding remarks by the Chair

Dr. Jayagopal Uchil brought the attention of the gathering to the Yashpal Committee 2009 which emphasized on placing community engagement in the curriculum of HEIs. He suggested that students can engage in community activities probably by having certain core papers, elective papers and choice based credit system which are both inter-departmental as well as intra-departmental. Further Dr. Uchil mentioned that economic, social, political, psychological, and ecological problems are not same but different due to the regional differences. There is a need to involve community leaders from different walks of life who could in turn suggest to the universities the areas of concern and characteristics of the demands that are urgent and important in the current scenario. He also suggested that higher educational institutions must also involve local government through 'Public Private Panchayat Partnership' (PPPP). Thus region specific community engagement could

be established where research could be carried out from rural to semi urban to metropolitan areas. Among other things, he also mentioned the need of a larger scope and opportunity for 'University - Industry collaboration', proposals to establish community colleges, involving Public Private Partnership (PPP) model and devising various other means so as to meet the demands and the expectations.

Dr. Rajesh Tandon seconded Dr. Uchil's views by saying that a part of the curriculum in universities must be regional specific. The syllabus must be formed in such a way that it has a relationship with the community. Similarly in order to bring about a change in our curriculum and syllabus universities need to involve the local community individuals.

Dr. S. Pushparaj brought to the notice of audience that the Department Council is responsible for framing syllabus and curriculum in the state universities and colleges affiliated to state universities. Additionally these higher educational institutions suffer due to poor financial allocation by the respective state governments.

Concluding Session: Ways Forward

The concluding session was mainly focused on summarizing the deliberations of the two-day dialogue and suggesting the ways forward. *Dr. Rajesh Tandon* was the session moderator and a summary report was presented by *Dr. Rajani Jairam*, Director IQAC, Jain University. The valedictory remarks were given by *Mr. B.G Nandkumar*, I.A.S, Commissioner of Collegiate Education, Govt. of Karnataka. The session began with Dr. Rajani Jairam summarizing entire dialogue. Dr. Rajesh Tandon put forth very important questions to the audience asking for the various steps which each of the members in the gathering could take to foster and strengthen community engagement.



Pic 7: Mr Nanda Kumar, IAS, Commissioner for Collegiate Education, GOK at the Valedictory.

Open discussions

Dr. Reetika Syal mentioned that in order to bring in a concrete policy perspective we need to involve each and every stakeholder who is associated with community engagement and HEIs. This particular study analysed the perspectives of teachers and management of the institutions while students who were the main participants, were not considered. The study would become more concrete, comprehensive and complete with the inclusion of students and their views with regard to community engagement and higher educational institutions. *Ms. Pinky Chandran* mentioned that community of practice is lacking and various institutions and forums are unable to create a network. There is a need for convergence of interest and this convergence is not to be seen only among institutions but also within the institutions. Universities can collaborate with various individuals, groups, Non-Government and Non Profit Organisations in order to create a larger network. *Dr. Sreedhar P. D.* stated that through Social Outreach Programmes (SOP) teachers should also be involved in the community engagement activities. Those teachers who take part in such activities must be provided with certain weightage in relation to promotion or increment and so on.

Dr M. Indira stressed the point that community engagement has to be made mandatory for all the stakeholders involved in the higher educational institutions. Similarly the proposed research centres by twelfth five year plan have greater role to play in fostering and strengthening community engagement. *Mr. Vinayak N. Rao* was of the similar opinion that community engagement be made compulsory. Further he added that the universities can allocate certain marks for those students who are involved in community engagement. *Dr. Shailaja Shastri* mentioned that the higher educational institutions can adopt points of integration by training young teachers and providing opportunities and space for innovations. Various spheres of influence have to be integrated with community engagement.

Concluding Comments from Chair

Dr. Rajesh Tandon was of the view that there is a need for fostering social responsibility and integrating community engagement in higher educational institutions. He added that we need to overcome the 'we' and 'they' attitude as community engagement is not a one way traffic; instead it is mutual learning, mutual teaching and mutual impact. Engagement with the community need not be limited to certain disciplines or subjects of study but must encompass from all the faculties and every area of study. Probably universities can create such a platform where there is interaction between the community and the research activity being undertaken. The community can bring in larger questions related to society that need to be studied thereby creating a network. Further *Dr. Tandon* emphasized on the need of alliance for community engagement by bringing together various stakeholders through information sharing by suggesting that preliminary baseline studies could be taken up so as to determine a kind of starting line which will create assessing mechanisms. These studies need not be only for reporting but for assessing the real impact and enabling mutual learning between and among the higher educational institutions. *Dr. Rajesh Tandon* flagged a very important point that studies across the country have ascertained that the public and state universities imagine less flexibility in institutional structures and working compared to deemed and private universities; but the flexibility of an institution in many ways depends upon how much the flexibility is imagined.

Valedictory Remarks

While giving the valedictory remarks, *Mr. B. G. Nandakumar*, argued that ninety per cent teachers do not know anything beyond the papers that they are supposed to teach. The society and university should work together and one cannot forget about society and work alone. But do our higher educational institutions have any such interactive sessions? The HEIs demand greater autonomy but what is it ultimately used for? The HEIs end up working in isolation instead of focusing on the welfare of the society and working together

with the society. He gave instances of Czech Republic, where the community is involved and is part of Higher Education Council and Board of Studies. Similarly in Switzerland 80 per cent of the population opt for vocational courses at a bachelor's level. He emphasized that practical knowledge is very important and this cannot come only by sitting inside the classrooms. All the stakeholders must think about society and contribute towards it and opportunity must be provided by HEIs to conduct research and innovation and thereby improve quality in higher education. As a concluding point he encouraged the participants to prepare policy recommendations and send to him, so that he could look into it and process it appropriately through the government mechanism.

At the end of the session, the themes of the two day dialogue were reiterated by *Dr. Sandeep Shastri*. He stressed on the importance of the positive use of autonomy and the involvement of multiple stakeholders for community engagement. He also mentioned that universities and HEIs do not to operate in their own enclaves and that they have to interact with the community at every stage. He concluded by saying that it is the responsibility of each and every individual to give back to the society and Jain University will be happy to provide the platform for any such dialogues and activities in the months and years to come. In the end Dr. Shastri expressed gratitude to all the participants of the dialogue for the deliberations and also thanked colleagues from CERSSE who contributed to organizing the event.