



Report on the Education Dialogue on Strengthening Community Engagement and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati, Assam

17th & 18th of September' 2014

RELEVANCE/RATIONALE OF THE DIALOGUE

PRIA's perspective

Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

"This dialogue in IIT-G is part of the series of conversations that began with the formation of the sub-committee by Planning Commission in 2011, the agenda for which is to promote Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)."

"The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education is one of the first of its kind, as it brings together North South co-operation of an academic institution and a practitioner organization."

"We are committed to work with all of you and many others in thinking of ways by which we can promote, expand, deepen and broaden meaningful community engagement in Higher Education, so that the entire purpose becomes socially relevant and mutually beneficial."

"Can we create opportunities of learning, which is both consultative and mutually supportive?"

"If we are serious about community engagement, we need to look at all disciplines and ask as to what kind of teaching/research can embrace and foster such engagement."

"We need to question the sustainability and public accountability of our Higher Education Institutions, which appear to be highly alienated at this point of time, along with pondering on the question that whether it is a public or a private good. Another question of public accountability of HEIs that arises in this context seeks answers to whether it is only engaged in preparing a next generation of elites, or is it making a meaningful contribution to the society through its core function of knowledge generation and research."

“This is no moral exhortation. It needs to be attached to the assessment of the students and the credits awarded to them. Else, it will end up being just hogwash.”

“It is time we ask ourselves as to why do we perform so badly in human development indicators despite increase in economic growth, gross domestic product and per capita income, along with an increase in public investment in social development programs.”

“My appeal to one and all is that those who are engaged in such work, come together and demand from the UGC to include community engagement activities in the assessment of students, researchers and teachers alike.”

“We are not prescribing any format as being good or bad. The purpose is to explore as to how to take forward the issue. Although the path is tough and challenging, we have enjoyed the course and will continue to look for meaningful ways for taking the scheme forward.”

Dr Rajesh Tandon began his note by giving a brief history about the origin and formation of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. He mentioned about its genesis being in the 2nd UNESCO Conference on Higher Education, held in Paris in the year 2009 (the first being in 1997). He shared that it is basically a two-legged chair, with one co-chair being Dr Budd Hall, from the University of Victoria, Canada, while the other being Dr Tandon himself from the Participatory Research in Asia, a practice based organization situated in New Delhi.

Dr Tandon also shared that as the 12th five year plan document also talked about fostering social responsibility in Higher Education, work in this front began in collaboration with agencies like the British Council, Planning Commission, and University Grants Commission. This was aimed at trying and understanding what is going on the country at present in the name of community engagement. He stated that although a lot was practiced in this regard, not much was documented. This was the prime reason behind the documentation of such activities, in North Bengal University and Punjab University and now in Assam and other North Eastern Universities.

Through a presentation focusing on the context, essence and rationale of community engagement in HEIs, Dr Tandon shared the following points:

- Today is the time when ‘prosperity and poverty’ and ‘plenty and scarcity’ co-exist.
- Despite of a fairly substantial economic growth from the year 2000 onwards, India secures unenviable rankings in human development/gender index. Also, although there has been an increase in investments in the social sector, still the socio-economic situation of the country continues to stagnate.
- Growth has been coupled with massive environmental and natural resource degradation, an issue which remains unaddressed, despite accelerating growth. Along with this, insecurity and violence is rampant.
- In this context, when we look at the HEIs, we can clearly see the sense of alienation that has crept in its premises. As institutions which are witnessing increasing massification,

in an era where they are created and run by politicians and real estate agents, their identity and relevance is in the dock,.

- Serious questions are being raised about the quality of education imparted, relevance of curriculum and significance of pedagogy practiced in the HEIs today.
- As public accountability of HEIs is being questioned, there reduced to being merely, 'islands of plenty amidst scarcity'.

As regards the principles of engagement, Dr Tandon shared the following as being the basics of pursuing meaningful community engagement:

- It is essential that the education institutions redefine its roles and responsibilities, especially towards the society, through its three missions of teaching, research and outreach/extension.
- There is a need to move beyond the one way flow of information and social service activities through the NSS/NCC, towards engagement opportunities with the community which can be mutually beneficial.
- It is essential for the engagement to be streamlined and free it from the notion that it falls in the domain of humanities/social sciences alone. The need to engage science students in similar activities is immense, and can prove to be highly beneficial.
- Academic credits needs to be assigned to such work, both from the point of view of students and teachers, in order to incentivize the efforts and motivate the academic fraternity for the same.



Picture 1: Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair, setting the stage for the dialogue

Dr Tandon also mentioned about some countries where half of the annual research funding in social sciences is linked to development of joint proposals with the community. In this regard, he also mentioned about different practical ways of ensuring such engagement. They are:

- (i) Learning with the community, wherein learning is garnered in the process of doing community service
- (ii) Researching with the community, wherein indigenous knowledge can be tapped while devising research proposals
- (iii) Knowledge mobilization, which should be seen as a mutually beneficial exercise, and not as an extension activity, usually performed by the NSS units.
- (iv) Devising of new curriculum and courses, which incorporates socially relevant knowledge into the academic curriculum
- (v) Inviting practitioners as teachers, by way of giving a chance to seasoned local practitioners to share their practical knowledge and experiences with the students, who stand an opportunity to gain credit and recognition for their knowledge, in return.

Dr Tandon also took this opportunity to launch the 5th GUNi World Report titled as ‘Knowledge Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change’. He introduced this book as being the ‘*summation of stories/examples/analysis and statistics regarding what is going on under the umbrella of community engagement practices in different parts of the world.*’

As the political economy of the knowledge industry stands challenged, Dr Tandon cited the example of the program launched in the European Union, titled ‘Science and Society’, in the wake of increasing questions on the benefit/purpose/relevance of research. This program calls for the research community to engage with the neighbourhood communities in meaningful ways. In India too, the UGC is on the verge of creating a scheme, which is aimed at ‘*fostering community engagement and social responsibility, so that such activities which link the HEIs and the community can be promoted.*’

British Council’s Perspective: Overview on Higher Education

Ms. Sujata Sen, Director, East India British Council

“The purpose of the dialogue is to share information about existing engagements, analyze capacity and institutional challenges that need to be addressed and to build and scale up partnerships between the Universities and the community.”

“Under its Internationalizing Higher Education (IHE) initiative, the British Council facilitates policy dialogues, scholarships, student and faculty exchanges and engagements with alumni, which also involves building and developing alumni networks across the country”.

Ms Sen, while giving a brief overview of the British Council’s perspective on Higher Education went on to share the following points:

- Under the IHE strand, there is strong focus on developing a knowledge bank of relevant information on the higher education sector and conducting research on the sector to better understand how relationships can be made stronger.
- The UK India Education and Research Initiative (UKEIRI) initiative of the Council has played a pivotal role in establishing a step change in the educational relations between India and the UK. It provides opportunities for professional and leadership development of schools, Higher Education Institutions (IHE) and vocational institutions, support partnerships and develop student mobility and other skill development programmes.
- The British Council's 'Services for International Education Marketing' aims to create a platform for the UK and the Indian Institutions to get together and explore opportunities for collaborations and faculty and student exchange programmes.
- Additionally, programmes like Generation UK, GREAT Education Campaign and the Newton Fund continue to support and foster more mobility.



Picture 2: Ms. Sujata Sen, Director, East India British Council, giving an overview of the Council's perspective on Higher Education.

IIT Guwahati's perspective, as a collaborating HEI

Dr Pahi Saikia, Assistant Professor of Political Science, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS), IITG: Opening Remarks

“This collaborative workshop is intended to research the interface between Higher Education and the community.”

“As India enjoys demographic dividends, our HEIs can help promote deeper social responsibility by giving an opportunity to young students to meaningfully engage with the community.”

Dr Saikia highlighted her understanding and concerns about the interface between HEIs and community. Her remarks noted three key aspects of expansion, excellence and inclusion of HE as recommended by the *National Knowledge Commission* in 2005. She noted in her remarks that community engagement significantly involves a ‘sense of belonging, commitment, sharing, participation, mutuality and multiple situational realities.’ With respect to the essence of the dialogue, Dr Saikia put forth the following pointers:

- HEIs cannot operate in isolation, and as they are situated amidst the communities, a lot is expected out of them. It is their responsibility to fulfill their societal responsibilities by providing meaningful engagement opportunities.
- Before embarking on the process, it is essential to clearly define the term ‘community’ and ‘engagement’, both of which are entrenched with confusions and misconceptions.
- Mutually beneficial relations between the HEIs and the target community are what the basic premise of such efforts is. Fostering of such harmonious relations in turn contributes to the sustainability of both parties in question.



Picture 3: Dr Pahi Saikia, giving the opening remarks for the dialogue

Dr Arupjyoti Saikia, Head of Department, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, IITG: Welcome Remarks

“As a modern HEI, this department at IIT is asking, understanding and exploring socially relevant questions.”

“This workshop provides fertile ground for sharing of rich experiences from different regions with respect to community engagement in Higher Education Institutions. Additionally, it also provides a wealth of opportunities to learn and build lasting partnerships”

Dr Saikia outlined the essence of the department as being its interdisciplinary nature, which lends itself to fuller, complex and meaningful research. He welcomed the idea of holding such workshops which provides numerous opportunities for students to learn and have gain from the sharing of practical experiences. The department, as the meeting point of researchers from diverse academic backgrounds, functions as the nerve centre for a number of researches being carried out, and such workshops help such exercise gain meaning and social relevance, along with helping the institution as a whole to fulfill its responsibility towards the society.



Picture 4: Dr Arupjyoti Saikia, presenting the introductory remarks

PLENARY SESSION I

Trends in Assam and Meghalaya

Dr Pahi Saikia, Assistant Professor of Political Science, HSS, IITG

“There are a number of challenges that are entrenched, when we try to foresee the community engagement activities going on in various HEIs. Also, a number of questions also arise on the relevance and quality of such efforts, and whether they are able to achieve the intended purpose.”

Dr Pahi and her students carried off the responsibility of conducting a survey in 3 HEIs (IITG, Gauhati University & Cotton College State University) of Assam, in order to research the community engagement initiatives in the respective institutions. As she shared the findings of the survey, she put forth the following points:

- As regards learning with the community, there have been interventions, which include extensive field based interventions such as ethnographic studies and FGDs conducted by Dr Saikia alongwith her students over the past few years, with the conflict affected communities in violence prone areas of Northeast India, including Bodoland, Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong, Rabha Hasong and Assam-Nagaland border areas. Dr Saikia is currently involved in the projects that conducted research on ways to build capacities of marginalized tribal ethnic communities in Assam. Although a lot of work needs to be done, these projects involved research on an array of confidence building measures through dialogues and deliberations with community leaders and leaders of Village Councils.
- This category also includes initiatives taken by other departments in the institute such as the machine designed for silk production, by engaging artisans and other communities.
- The category, ‘Researching with the community’, included various departmental research projects, pertaining to disciplines of botany, geography, statistics. However, the real relevance of such projects to the community may be debatable, as they were designed solely based on academic interests.
- Knowledge sharing with the community, assumed the form of various documentary films which were prepared for increasing understanding on various issues. It also included the community radio program, which was an initiative of the department of Journalism.
- As regards, designing new courses and curriculum, although some innovative courses were a part of the curriculum, but their quality and benefit to the society remains questionable.

Therefore, Dr Saikia pointed out although there was no dearth of scattered efforts, the need of the hour was to streamline such initiatives, with a vision to provide them with a specific purpose and intent, through clarifying the actual concept of ‘community engagement in HEIs’.



Picture 5: Respected panelists for the session on Trends in Assam/Meghalaya

Ms. Sarmishtha Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University

“Notwithstanding structural and systemic challenges, Tezpur University has a lot to offer in the context of community engagement, if certain critical issues are dealt with and crucial questions addressed.”

Ms. Das performed a similar survey in Tezpur University, and shared some of the below mentioned points as the emerging findings from the same:

- Through adoption of villages, the NSS unit at the University is engaged in providing an array of services to the community, such as regular health care, plantation drives, etc.
- In the course of the preparation of their thesis dissertation, the Masters students engage in research work, which includes comprehensive field based research. Herein, students from different department such as Mass communication & Journalism, Engineering students undertake different researches pertaining to their domain, such as that on human trafficking, energy consumption pattern respectively.
- There are also specialized projects such as the Rural Hybrid Energy Generation Project going on, in collaboration with the Department of Energy, which is aimed at benefitting the society as a whole.



Picture 6: Ms. Sarmishtha Das sharing the findings of the survey done in Tezpur University

Ms. Das also shared some of the challenges that she encountered in the course of the survey work. She shared that:

- Although the University has maintained some amount of community engagement component in its courses, there was still room for widening and deepening such efforts.
- Incorporation in the curriculum and attachment of credits for such work can help provide more space for community engagement activities.
- University resources should be shared for fostering engagement of local communities.
- In the wake of the communities being mere subjects in academic research, it is desired that joint research projects initiated in the academic circles aim for their equal participation.
- With students concentrating more on academic grades and teachers on their respective API scores for career growth, the basic purpose of such initiatives stands defeated.
- As a result, mechanical carrying out of social service activities by the students often also proves to be counter-productive.

Dr Binayak Dutta, Assistant Professor, Department of History, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong (with help from Dr Susmita Sen)

“Although situated in an abysmally low literacy rate area, NEHU has emerged as a regional leader in Higher Education learning, and through its various non-traditional courses, has been providing the students necessary skills to go back to the community and use its dormant resources as economic assets. This is done with the objective that the community too, feels worth having an HEI in its neighbourhood.”

Dr Dutta started his address by outlining the objective of NEHU, a Central University, established by an act of the Parliament, as disseminating and advancing knowledge by promoting institutional research facilities’. He said that NEHU has been using this as a testing stone in order to judge the performance of various disciplines and to what extent the University has fulfilled the mandate of the Act, through which it was established.



Picture 7: Dr Binayak Dutta, sharing the survey findings from NEHU

He cited the examples of the departments of agri-business management and food & technology, who work closely with the communities in the primary economy region. The Department of Political Science and History, in collaboration with the *North Eastern Hill Association (NEHA)*, has been particularly involved in the preservation of cultural heritage and consciousness of the communities of the *Garo* region. Additionally, studies on social and economic change, importance of colonization on tribal lives are some of the other areas, wherein engagement with the community was sought. The Department of Political Science, since its inception in the year 1974 has been engaged with the communities in particular. They have focused their work on

ethnic communities, their concerns and issues, such as regional coal mining, invocation of Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA) etc.

Dr Dutta shared that at NEHU, they have tried to move beyond traditional research and conventional understanding of knowledge. They have tried to use technology to document the cultural heritage of the communities (traditional dances, festivals, etc), including how the society and ecology has changed over time. This has been an important part of research engagements.

However, Dr Dutta mentioned that herein, they were faced with the challenge of how to go back to the community once a particular project ended. The absence of one to one relationship with them further aggravated the problems. In spite of this, he believed that the various disciplines through their initiatives played a seminal role in discharging understanding on 'community development'.

Dr R K Debbarma, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), Guwahati

“TISS has a strong social work component in all its programs, with emphasis on engagement with the communities. However, when it comes to meaningful engagement, it is the structure of pedagogy that is followed in the academia, which poses the greatest challenge.”

Dr Debbarma shared the findings of the survey done to research community engagement activities in TISS. However, he clarified that it had been limited to only the MA programs in TISS, in Social Work and Environment, Ecology and Sustainable Development in particular. Some of the points that he shared as findings emerging from the survey can be listed as follows:

- As regards learning with the community, the engagements included learning from the community about their traditional knowledge, livelihood practices; mediated contact with the communities through the channel of external groups; and filed action projects in collaboration with the communities.
- Researching with the community took the shape of student's doing their thesis work on issues such as violence against women, water problems, migration, pollution, deforestation, etc.
- Knowledge sharing with the community involved efforts to impart certain skills, through trainings, conduction of awareness programs, etc.

Dr Debbarma also mentioned that TISS also collaborated with agencies such as Tribal Research Institutes, Government line departments, various NGOs, etc.



Picture 8: Dr R K Debbarma, sharing the findings of the survey done in TISS, Guwahati

Comments from the audience

Dr Pahi Saikia, IITG

- It is essential to delineate what kind of communities are we talking about? Do they really have the freedom or willingness to speak up?
- Equally necessary is to redefine the word 'engagement'. This is essential considering the fact that such engagements as practiced in the HEIs today, only turns out to be a one way dialogue. It also needs to be understood that merely visiting communities is not what the idea of 'community engagement' is.
- The methodology that is used for field work also needs to be revised and revisited. This is because it often incorporates what we think to be important and very rarely open discussions are initiated.
- Structural issues in the HEIs need to be addressed on a priority basis, if we want to make such engagements 'meaningful'.

Dr Ronki Ram, Punjab University

- Formal/informal engagements with the community are the weakest link. Therefore, ways and means needs to be defined as to how the HEIs can meaningfully engage in this process and learn from the communities.

- There is a need for self-introspection among the actors in the HEIs with respect to in-depth interaction with the society.
- Despite of the course curriculum still following the traditional norms, there has been no attempt to re-evaluate it. Therefore, the need of the hour was careful re-arrangement of the curriculum and not merely adding community engagement to it as an additional component
- Community engagement does not merely refer to moralizing the communities; in fact such engagement is of a much highly complex nature. It is an attempt to recreate the society through scientific ways.
- We must realize that no knowledge is independent of its context/community.
- In the wake of such efforts, it needs to be ensured that community autonomy is never compromised, and that it does not become a victim of the HEIs community engagement programme. It should be given due respect and credit.
- The ultimate goal should be to empower the communities, and as a result, the HEIs will be empowered.



Picture 9: Dr Ronki Ram, sharing his ideas during the open discussion session.

Prof Apurba Kumar Baruah, Former Professor NEHU & ICSSR National Fellow

- The survey instrument, i.e the questionnaire needs a bit modification, and must take into account the fact that communities that not homogenous. Along with this, communities

are also often hegemonized by educated elites. This kind of defeats the essence of engaging with them.

- Therefore, it is essential to clearly demarcate as to which section of communities we are looking to engage with, considering consensual dominance prevalence among them.

Prof Girin Phukon, Director, Institute of Tai Studies & Research; ICSSR National Fellow

- It is essential to see that when we talk of community engagement, ie. HEIs responsibility towards the society, does it only refer to merely programs adapted/initiated by the University?
- Instead, what is more important is the kind of product/students that these HEIs produce, and their quality.
- However, structural fallacies and entrenched corruption in our education system today does not allow quality products to come out of system such as this.
- Initiative such as community engagement stands challenged in an era in which the education system is commercialized and globalized.
- Therefore, one needs to go to the root of the problem and view the education system as being a part of the broader socio-economic structure. The education system, being a part of the socio-economic structure, and thence, vital problems needs to be addressed keeping in mind a holistic point of view.
- In an era where knowledge is imparted only for the sake of it, and not for any achieving any societal benefits, it is extremely important to change the mind-sets of the people, both inside and outside the system.
- Hence, the product coming out of the HEIs is related to the process. Once the process is rectified, the output is bound to be good.
- It is here that initiatives such as community engagement will help improve the process of education, and as a result, the quality of product will also improve.

Comments from Chair: Prof Rakesh Gupta, Visiting Professor, IITG; Former Professor of CPS, JNU

- The social function of knowledge in a society, and its dialectical relationship with the latter needs to be emphasized. This knowledge should be function as such that it becomes the shield of the society's insecurity.
- There is a need to redefine the term 'engagement'.

PLENARY SESSION II

Forms & Structures of Community Engagement

Dr Ronki Ram, Dean, Faculty of Arts, Punjab University

“Community Engagement in our country is projected as though we have mastered this skill. However, this is far from the reality at the present.”

“Community Engagement is something very different from what is perceived by the academicians in today’s times.”

“At present, Punjab University is completely lacking an orientation towards community engagement, and as a result, no meaningful work is being done in this regard.”

Dr Ronki Ram shared the experiences of the survey and the findings that emerged regarding community engagement practices in Higher Education Institutions. Dr Ram basically highlighted the misconceptions that were prevalent, with respect to community engagement in the academic circles. Referring to the particular questions that figured in the survey, Dr Ram shared the answers given by the respective departments at the University, and how there was a sense of confusion with respect to the same. He shared the following points:

- With respect to the component on ‘Learning with the community’, the respective departments showcased their outreach initiatives to the communities, such as conduction of awareness programs on health, education, block/field placements of students etc.
- The question on ‘Researching with the community’ drew answers such as the research scholars working on the local problems of the communities.
- Even in case of a specially designed, practice oriented vocational course, the main intent is far from what the term ‘community engagement’ prescribes.
- Even in case of a specially designed, practice oriented vocational course, the main intent is far from what the term ‘community engagement’ prescribes.

Dr Ram agreed to the fact that the survey did project a ‘one way traffic/flow of information from the academics to the community as the general practice underway in most of the departments and the colleges.

Dr Mohammad Yasin, Head, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, North Bengal University

“In spite of all the bottlenecks prevailing in the system, and the misconceptions on the concept of community engagement, we are and have been committed to do something for the society, since taking one step at a time is always better than not taking an initiative at all.”

“With the help from the regulatory authorities, we need to think over as to how to devise a well-defined and sustainable programme for the future, which incorporated the tenets of community engagement.”

“Such dialogues need to be undertaken in a more intense manner, both at the state and the national level. In this regard, efforts should be made towards organizing a national level symposium, wherein a consensus can be reached among all parties, with respect to a prescriptive policy on community engagement. This can then be shared with the regulatory

authorities, so that a well-designed program on community engagement can be adopted at a national level.”

Dr Yasin shared that in March this year, a similar survey, like the one done in Assam and Meghalaya was done in North Bengal as well. However, what emerged was that in more or less all government colleges, there was virtually no engagement with the community, primarily due to the same reasons as in Assam and Punjab. The points he shared were as follows:

- Reasons such as the teachers having no incentive such as addition to their API scores, or value addition to the student’s academic credit, or accreditation benefit for universities construing from such activities, made practicing community engagement in colleges enormously challenging. Therefore, as a result of the absence of any such individual or institutional incentive, there was no urge for taking up such engagement activities.
- Lack of well-defined University programs, adequate manpower, financial resources further aggravated the problem
- However, some missionary colleges have been doing a commendable job in this regard, and therefore, their motive behind taking up such activities may be solely their dedication towards the societal betterment, rather than community engagement, per say.
- The activities carried out under NSS, are kind of ritualistic activities, which is far from the essence of ‘community engagement’, although it is showcased as being that, as ambiguity on the term is rampant.
- Although NSS was taken at as a routine job till lately, however, with the inclusion of such activities as countable in API scores, there have been an increasing number of teachers vying for the post of NSS co-ordinators. This is a stand-out example of how incentives can lead to exciting results.
- Some departments such as that of Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology, Centre for women, Himalayan studies were engaged in socially relevant research work. However, such research merely ends up as papers in leading journals, and do not reach the policy makers. Therefore, in the absence of the linkage between findings of such research and policy makers, one of the important purpose of undertaking such research, i.e. influencing policy, stands defeated.
- The Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension (DLLE) at NBU is engaged in carrying out community engagement activities to a certain degree. Up till the 11th plan, when the department was supported with funds provided by the UGC, it used the funds to engage with the community in a positive way. However, after the grants stopped, the department had to remain content with imparting formal education.
- Despite the notwithstanding challenges and the inescapable circumstances, the department continues to remain committed to its responsibility towards the society. Especially in the light of the March dialogue, it has chalked out a plan for engaging with the community, and sought approved by the regulatory bodies and the University authorities. This plan involves 4 components, viz, certificate courses, training of trainers, organization of self-help groups, and sensitization/awareness programs for women, children, with respect to health, nutrition etc.

- Considering the valued work being done by DLLE, the University authorities have given it an additional responsibility of coming up with an action plan in relation to disaster management.

Dr Yasin also shared some of the problems encountered by him and his department in the course of carrying out such activities. Some of them were:

- Despite all the training and field outreach activities, somehow, the things did not appear as moving in the right direction. The main reason for this was that the communities who were targeted through programs were basically ‘passive *communities*’, who were not forthcoming. This resulted in a one-way traffic of information and knowledge flow, rather than being a two-way process.
- Moreover, the slum dwellers/communities were mostly interested in monetary gains or other benefits, accruing from any such social intervention. This defeated the purpose of the cause, and made carrying out the designated tasks difficult.
- All initiatives so far have been in the form of piecemeal efforts or at an ad-hoc level, with nothing much of relevance construing out of them.
- As far as West Bengal was concerned, intense politicization of communities and prevailing political divides made things even worse.
- Resources are declining as a result of the crisis faced by Indian state under the liberalization program.

Professor Girin Phukon, Director, Institute of Tai Studies & Research; ICSSR National Fellow

“The entire problem related to community engagement needs to be understood in term of totality of socio economic system of our country.”

“I do believe that our education system is a part of the larger socio-economic system, and unless we understand the basic root cause of constraints of community engagement, we will not be able to do justice to the problem.”

During his presentation, Prof. Phukon mainly addressed the challenges faced by the education system today, in delivering meaningful community engagement. He reflected on issues based on his personal observations and experiences, as an old actor in the education system. Prof. Phukon put forth three assertions in this regard. They were:

- According to the HEIs, meaningful community engagement is not possible under the present socio-economic system.
- The basic purpose of social science research stands defeated amidst the prevailing circumstances.
- HEIs are basically fulfilling ‘class’ interest, rather than ‘community’ interest.

Prof. Phukon re-iterated the fact that education today has become commercialized and has assumed the shape of a mere commodity. As a result of this, the kinds of products they are

producing are far from having a sensitive bent of mind. Mostly, they turn out to be corporate professionals, out to take care of their self-interest.



Picture 10: Prof. Girin Phukon, delivering his address.

Professor Dhrubajyoti Saikia, Vice Chancellor, Cotton College State University

“How wonderful it is that we don’t need to wait for a single moment to create a better world: Anne Frank”.

“While we talk of the doom and gloom of the Indian situation, there are a number of inspiring stories of students who are making a difference to the world. It is such examples that need to be highlighted and taken forward.”

“Cotton College State University is committed towards fulfilling its University Social Responsibility and motivates its, along with building their capacities for making them responsible and sensitive citizens.”

Dr Saikia started his address on a positive note by citing inspiring examples of students who have broken the glass ceiling and have been doing wonderful things for the betterment of the society around them. He cited examples of students contributing to society using local knowledge, such as designing crucial day to day use machines, starting up a BPO in rural areas, etc, engaging with the community in sectors of microfinance, entrepreneurship development. Along with students, Dr Saikia also made a mention of the illustrious scientist, Meghnad Saha,

who with the help of his students, laid down the seeds of Damodar Valley Corporation, in the wake of rampaging floods. Dr Saikia also mentioned about Bankar Roy, who had set up a bare foot school, and re-energized the agricultural practices using local knowledge and technology.

However, Dr Saikia admitted that the number and scale of such efforts have been low, and the prime reason for this has been low levels of commitment for the intended purpose. He outlined some of the requirements in this regard as being:

- Developing an understanding of the poor.
- Developing empathy towards the problems of the less privileged.
- Inculcating a sense of commitment and passion.



Picture 11: Dr Dhruvajyoti Saikia sharing his reflections and experiences.

With respect to the modalities regarding how to go about things, he shared the following points:

- Although the Universities usually fall short of financial resources, it does have umpteen human resources at its disposal. It should make use of this resource in fulfilling its responsibility towards the society, by bringing about meaningful community engagement. As such activities often require innovative thinking by people; students can be used to bring out innovative programs and proposals.
- Dr Saikia also emphasized the importance of looking at an institution critically, with respect to the kind of values and ethics it imparted to its students. This gained

importance because a corruption laden system can never motivate its students to think of the society at large. Therefore, he called for the HEIs to set strong ethical norms for themselves and follow them in letter and spirit.

- For achieving the underlying objective, it is essential for the physical science and the social sciences to come together. This integration of societal sensitivities and technical know how's can offer promising solutions to the problems at hand.
- The quality of knowledge imparted can be increased by making the practical component of field immersion, an essential part of the overall curriculum. Through ensuring this, we need to take a guard against subversion of critical processes which is quite common in our education system.
- It was time the HEIs encouraged its students and teachers to move beyond grades and API scores, by providing them with an enabling and engaging environment to work and perform

Professor Apurba Kumar Baruah, Former Professor, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU); ICSSR National Fellow

“Notwithstanding the challenges and the fallacies in the system, we should not lose hope, for there are departments and people, who are doing a commendable job.”

“The Higher Education today must contribute to excellence, capacity building, and motivate the people to work for the poor.”

“The communities must exercise its rights over the HEIs and demand from them suitable interventions which are of mutual benefit. Being located and rooted among community structures, it is also their duty to serve the people around them.”

Prof. Baruah in his address also joined his fellow panelists in critiquing the present higher education system in the country as marred with fallacies and deficiencies. Along with this, Prof. Baruah also raised some crucial issues such as:

- The idea of ‘community’ itself needs to be critiqued and re-defined. This is because the communities in our neighborhoods are not homogenous, as is usually perceived. In contrast, they are often stratified, hierarchical, hegemonized and polarized among varied sections of powerful elites.
- Another issue that needs to be clarified is that which community are we looking to serve and to what capacity. This assumes importance because if we are looking to foster any of such meaningful engagement with them, we need to be respectful towards their traditional knowledge systems. Approaching them with an air of ‘we-know-all’, would not serve the purpose at all.
- HEIs usually function for a dual purpose, profit and social service. As regards the social responsibility of an HEI, the two different ways to look at it is that
 - (i) It serves the communities as a favour being done to them and under the purview of being morally correct.
 - (ii) Community has a right of expecting such an intervention from the HEI.

- Creating knowledge itself is a social service, as its benefits gradually percolate to the bottom. However, this knowledge must be mutually beneficial and socially relevant.
- Care also needs to be taken of the fact that communities can at times be oppressive and driven by fascist motives and vested interests. Such fragmented communities do not easily open up to external ideas.



Picture 12: Audience at the dialogue

Comments from the Chair: Professor Dilip Baruah, Former Principal, Cotton College & Professor of Economics

“What is repugnant is not that corruption in our education system exists, but that it has now become morally acceptable.”

“Are we spending too much time in learning too little that is relevant? Courtesy: Dr Amreek Singh”

- The students/educationists must engage in a live dialogue with the community, and thence the actions must be modified as according to what best suits the local needs and conditions.
- Along with Higher Education, an attempt must be made to introduce practices such as community engagement at the primary level as well. Although NCERT has done some

work in this front, where it provides children an opportunity to visit slum areas, more efforts in this direction was desired.

- There was also a need to de-school and un-learn. The students must be given the freedom and leverage to judge for themselves that then choose the path they feel to be the most appropriate.
- Modalities for awarding credit to such work needs to be worked out. This will also help end the debate whether community engagement in HEIs is compulsory or voluntary.

Student's Perspectives & Reflections: Issues, Questions & Concerns

Ruchinilo Kemp, MA Development Studies, HSS, IITG

- *“There is nothing more tragic than a young cynic.”*
- *“The inspirational talks by the speakers has ignited the latent energy in me, and helped me reflect on my experiences, from a better perspective.”*
- We need to devise ways and means through which the community can be developed with the help of education.
- There are many underlying features amongst the communities, and it is essential to honour such identities when working with/for them.
- Engagement with the community does not only help build new knowledge, but also helps preserve and sustain old ones.
- The dwindling social capital and decreasing social interaction among the community is one aspect which needs immediate attention, if we think of engaging with them.

Chao Aicheng Mung Borgohain, PhD scholar, Philosophy, HSS, IITG

- *“Whether we become a cynic or a romantic on the issue, in the end we have to move together and move forward.”*
- It is time we introspect as to how would we engage ourselves in such activities and work out the modalities on how to take this forward.
- Along with a two way dialogue between the University and the community, what also needs to be ensured is that the process is continuous and sustainable.
- In addition to University Social Responsibility, attention also needs to be paid to ‘Scholar’s Social Responsibility’ towards his society.

Pankaj Kumar Kalita, PhD Scholar, Political Science, HSS, IITG

- *“We need to delve into the problems of the society, before making an attempt to solve them.”*
- Participation is very important under the framework of community engagement. The academics and the society must collaborate, and pool in their resources in order to find solutions to the problems at hand.
- There is a need for community engagement initiatives to be introduced at the primary level of school also, in addition to higher education premises.

- There is also a need to critically analyze the system and the process that a part of it, if whether it is fair, or corruption driven. In case of the latter, it is essential to go to the roots of the problem.
- Issues on funding of research proposals needs to be addressed, since proper funding provides the freedom and leverage to embark on a project, as desired.
- In times when academic degrees shape the careers of students, it is essential that credits be attached to any work done under the premise of community engagement. This will help provide the much needed incentive and motivation to the students for moving further in this direction.



Picture 13: Students sharing their perspectives at the dialogue

Konkumoni Boro, PhD scholar, HSS, IITG

- *“Community engagement is a wide concept and therefore incorporates many views and perspectives. Therefore, there is a need for more clarity on the concept.”*
- When we interact with the community, can it be called as engaging with them?
- It needs to be clearly outlined as to how we as researchers can engage with the communities in a better way.
- When we interact with the community, can it be called as engaging with them?

Bhaskar Pegu, PhD scholar, Political Science, HSS, IITG

- *“Although developed countries have a lot of scope of community engagement, there is considerable confusion and limitation with respect to it, in the Indian context.”*
- *“As an HEI, we need concrete policies on community engagement, and this workshop must come up with specific pointers which can help achieve the same.”*
- The community that needs to be engaged with also needs re-definition, as to whom are we referring to as community, whether it is the people in the rural areas, or road-side vendors, etc.
- In the context of our faulty education system, it is difficult to rectify it from the bottom, considering the bottle necks that exist at the top level.
- The communities in our neighborhoods are torn with problems like conflicts, floods etc, and through the Focused Group Discussions (FGDs) with them, it has emerged that they have a lot of hope from the students coming to them from educational institutions, much more than what they have from the politicians themselves.

Aniruddha Kumar Baro, PhD Scholar, HSS, IITG

- *“If I have to talk about community engagement, I believe that firstly I will need to have extensive field experience.”*
- It is essential to work out the details and modalities of community engagement initiatives.
- Attention needs to be paid to the fact that communities may refer to different section of people, for different individuals. Therefore, clarity on this helps determine the success of the interventions.
- Funding issue needs to be sorted for this alone determines the sustainability of such efforts. Funding agencies such as the UGC should be flexible with students.

Jimmy S Daimary, Research Associate, Political Science, HSS, IITG

- *“Generalizing the process of community engagement will not work. We need to be sensitive to individual contexts and the needs of particular communities.”*
- There is a need to clearly spell out the modalities of such activities and initiatives.

Comments from Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

“There is no generalized prescription on how to pursue community engagement. Each of your experiences is an example of how to promote it.”

“In all cases of engagement with the community, be it in the context of floods or community forestry, the basic thing that needs to be realized is that in all such areas, there is a body of knowledge residing outside the institutional premises.”

“Your study/research can be enriched if you acknowledge this knowledge, give it the respect it deserves and incorporate it in your project. Attempts can also be made to bring this knowledge inside the campus.”

- The difficulty is that our academic institutions instead of facilitating this process, pose to be huge barriers for the same.
- This bridging of gap between the academia and the community is not the prerogative of a student or a teacher. This gap should be bridged institutionally.
- The knowledge that resides outside the campus, in the areas of forestry, fishery needs to be tapped in a respectful way, and not a patented one, which also proves to be mutually beneficial.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Dr Mahfuza Rahman, Professor of Geography, Cotton College

“There has been a gap in the understanding or an understanding deficit about the situation at the ground level. In this context, it is also worth mentioning that despite of a lot of governmental schemes, there have been many default areas.”

“Social Responsibility in Higher Education, although a challenge, must become a purpose.”

“Cotton College University focusses on programmes of both social and academic relevance, along with development of values and a sense of responsibility in the students.”

Dr Rahman shared her experiences in this context, both as an academician and one coming from a development sector background. Some of the issues she shared are as follows:

- The community often has problems in expressing and articulating itself. Therefore project proposals in a video clipping form must be allowed, rather than sticking to a written document alone.
- We need to realize that we are a part of the community, and not someone external to it. Therefore, we need to inculcate passion/love for such work. Moral exhortation in such case will not bear any fruitful result.
- Particular apprehensions among the community, with respect to any external people coming to it, needs to be dealt with sensitivity and due respect. Therefore, building rapport with the community has to be an important component of such programs.
- Exhaustive discussion session on social problems needs to be initiated with the students, by way of simulations, videos, lectures, role plays, etc. This will help sensitize them towards the needs of the society they live in, and their expectation from them.
- HEIs need to create more programmatic opportunities for facilitating student’s engagements with the communities. Along with this, it should help develop foresight in the students with respect to their responsibility towards the society
- Engagement between the community, civil society and the HEIs must be ensured through a ‘*Social Responsibility Cell.*’ This cell would try to understand multifaceted issues for the well-being of everyone. It will also help to strategize relationships between all stakeholders and promote the idea of ‘*Scholarships of Engagement.*’

- With proper assistance from the University, this cell would also contribute to lifelong learning and employability, along with building capacities and leadership abilities.

As a way forward, Dr Rahman suggested, *‘collaboration, dialogues and networking between different stakeholders to help co-create new knowledge through partnerships.’*



Picture 14: Dr Mahfuza Rahman, sharing her experiences.

Shri H N Das, Former Chief Secretary, Government of Assam

“Considering the recommendations of the sub-committee of the Planning Commission and the experiences of PRIA, a lot of work has been done. However, it has been limited both locally and spatially, and has not been as extensive as it should have been.”

“The ideas that are being discussed and brought out indeed have a lot of promise and can prove to be very effective if these can be transcended into action.”

In his address, Shri H N Das mentioned about the issues and concerns at the ground level. He cited some of them as being environmental degradation, depletion of natural resources, low level of skill development, etc. As the question on skill assumes great importance in this region, Shri H N Das called out to the HEIs to take steps to address this problem. Shri H N Das also questioned the concept and relevance of NSS units operating in colleges, as it has not been able to deliver the kind of results it was expected to. Some of the suggestions that Mr Das came up with are as follows:

- The work needs to be carried out with the collaboration of Panchayati Raj Institutions (PRIs)/Urban Local Bodies (ULBs)
- Other Institutions such as constitutional bodies (Autonomous district council), Statutory/Executive bodies (Development Council) should also be tapped in the process.
- Herein, help from organizations proposed by the government, as those having no territorial limits but addressing problems of minorities, can also be sought.



Picture 15: Shri H N Das, delivering his address at the dialogue.

Professor Nani Gopal Mahanta, Professor of Political Science, Gauhati University

“The knowledge that resides outside the campus premises must be tapped through a two way process between the Universities and the communities in a way that it proves to be mutually beneficial for both.”

“I believe that any academic discipline, for example, Political Science cannot be taught in the campus alone, and we as students/researchers cannot remain aloof from the community. This is in fact not a pedagogic issue, but a normative one.”

“As part of the society we need live in, we need to be assertive and sensitive to its needs and requirements. This is especially relevant in the case of the North East, considering its strife-torn situation.”

“I feel that social sciences can immensely benefit from community engagement activities.”

Prof Mahanta, while sharing his experience as a researcher in the North Eastern India, raised certain key issues and questions. They are:

- The disconnect between the community, higher education, policy makers, HEIs needs to be done away with, through ensuring meaningful engagements with the concerned stakeholders.
- The question of institutionalization of community engagement initiatives is an important one, and needs to be addressed on an urgent basis. In an effort to institutionalize such efforts, attempts are being made to include such activities in the course curriculum of the students, and attach with their regular evaluation.
- Attempts must be made for lobbying with the UGC, so that it comes up with clear cut policy guidelines for community engagement in HEIs.



Picture 16: Prof Mahanta, sharing his North Eastern experiences.

Prof Mahanta cited the example of the Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS), as an example of an engagement with the communities, which offered opportunities for interaction between the students and the community leaders (the rebel group leaders in particular). Under this, along with the regular courses, a lot of field work was also done, which included a number of round table conferences, which brought together different stakeholders on a common platform. An initiative under the UGC's innovative program, the objective of the Centre on Peace and Conflict Studies was mapping of the conflict, how people coped with it, their plight in the

displaced camps, how they negotiated conflict situation and the role of the state in the same. This program attempted to merge the interests of the students, HEIs and the communities.

As regards policy prescriptions regarding community engagement in HEIs, Prof Mahanta suggested the following:

- Although the policies in many countries were fed by the research done, India was conspicuous by its absence. The research conducted in the Universities, does not find place in policy circles. Therefore, this needs to be done away with.
- National/State government representatives must be invited to workshops such as these, so that they get a situational overview on the matter.
- Collaboration and partnerships between different stakeholders needs to be ensured, so that all actors come face to face with each other, and concrete steps on ways forward can be taken.

Professor Akhil Ranjan Dutta, Professor of Political Science, Gauhati University

“It is essential to pay attention to the fact that how the ongoing policies itself has been trying to dismantle the community itself, as the whole policy regime is based on appropriation of profit.”

“It is inappropriate to glorify the communities while acknowledging the changes that they are undergoing in the current policy regime.”

Talking about the realities at the ground level, Prof Dutta shared that under the changing policies today, inequality has expanded to an extent that negotiations have become difficult and the society is on the verge of breaking down. Therefore, such issues need to be taken care of when we think of engaging with the communities. Prof Dutta outlined the importance of looking at both the macro and the micro perspective of community engagement at a time when the society is fragmented and views PRIs/ ULBs as extension of the state itself, which has further aggravated their discontent. In addition to this, the economic situation of the communities also needs to be assessed before embarking upon any such engagement process.

Prof Dutta also outlined the importance of clearly delineating which community we are targeting in our interventions, whether they are the forest dwellers, who resist governmental policies of environment protection, or the Joint Forest Management communities, or the ones resisting it. Therefore, he summed up by saying that, *‘we need to be clear about own socio-political situation, before trying to engage with the communities in a meaningful way’*.

Comments from the Chair: Professor Arupjyoti Choudhury

“The importance of social responsibility of intellectuals as well as an intellectual organization like that of a University in having a close touch with the people at large, assumes great importance in making the whole exercise meaningful.”

“Recently, I got an experience on how important community engagement is, when in a recent consultation with development council members (initiated by Tribal Research Institute,

Government of Assam), some of them who had not even seen the doors of the University presented the kind of views, which were of enormous importance to the society.”

Prof Choudhury while reflecting on the current political situation and the concept of community engagement said that the problem of de-massification that has been plaguing our society, can be rectified to a great extent if we start engaging with the community. He shared that although we may have our reservations against the PRIs/ULBs, the constitutional mandate of our country is clear, wherein people’s participation in democracy is the most important component. Some other points he shared are as follows:

- Incorporation of people’s views in all fields of development, such as agriculture, resource management, etc is extremely important.
- Tapping of traditional knowledge assumes great significance in the present context.
- It is necessary to keep intact the autonomy of both the researcher and the community.
- There is a need to think critically on the issues, because field experience can also prove to be deceptive at times.
- Through establishment of linkages between the micro and the macro issues, the democracy can be strengthened.
- The methodology and modalities of community engagement should be kept as flexible as possible. It should be left to the wisdom of the researcher and the context in which the research is to be carried out.
- Although some guidelines for research may be referred to, but it should not tamper with the researcher’s autonomy.
- Engaging with the communities for conflict resolution is of great importance in the North Eastern context, and must be taken at a wider level.



Picture 17: Respected panelists for the session on ‘Policy Implications’

WAYS FORWARD

Mr Shubrajyoti Bharali, ASOMI

“ASOMI has been committed to delivering crucial services to the society, in collaboration with the HEIs and the Government.”

Mr Bharali gave a brief account of the services provided by the NGO, ASOMI, to the people of Assam in various sectors of line. Some main points from his presentation are as below:

- Under Micro-finance, ASOMI has been assisting the rural families in Assam, by providing them need based capital, for taking up income generating activities.
- It has also been providing services by way of training and skill development initiatives.
- With respect to drinking water services, it has tied up with IITG, for research and development work on production of water filter and Bhabha Atomic Research Centre (BARC) for technology transfer purpose.
- As part of its education venture, ASOMi has also entered into a partnership with Tezpur University for certification on soft skills, management and vocational skills.



Picture 18: Mr Bharali, sharing the experiences of ASOMI

Prof Rakesh Gupta, Visiting Professor, IITG; Former Professor, JNU

“There is a need to bring about collaboration between HEIs, community and the NGOs. Herein, we must also count for the class which is usually forgotten in many debates, i.e, the working class.”

“The NGOs must come forward, in order to help the HEIs send its students into the field, for achieving effective community engagement, through establishment of self-representing organizations.”

Prof Gupta mentioned that the interaction with the community in the field, often has a dual role to play, firstly, to impart consciousness to them, and secondly, to bring the people’s consciousness at par with that of the researchers/students. This is the pre-requisite if we desire to achieve any meaningful output out of such engagement activities. Some other suggestions that Prof Gupta put forth are:

- Considering the implication of the capitalistic society we live in, the students must establish a relation with the community whom they are engaging with and attempting to liberate. Prof Gupta also raised an important question: aren’t the students enrolled in institutions like IITG are representative of the ‘communities’ that they belong to?
- If a teacher/scholar in an IIT goes to the community for a project, they need to have a self-help system and create self-representation bodies among the community, which can be used a vehicle for engagement, and will help establish solidarity in relationships.
- Such bodies can be established with the help of mutual interaction between the HEIs, communities, NGOs, policy makers, etc. and the students can become the voice of such self-representing organizations.



Picture 19: Prof Rakesh Gupta, suggesting pointers on ways forward.

Dr Pahi Saikia, Assistant Professor, Political Science, HSS, IITG

“Notwithstanding the constraints in HEIs faced by teachers and the students, one can say that the kind of projects we come up with, do have some amount of knowledge sharing component/outreach with the communities.”

“As the students hail from the same community, they desire to work and engage with, this forms the beginning of community engagement.”

“Considering that any research cannot be undertaken in isolation, there needs to be further centering of interdisciplinary units, such as the Centre for Indigenous Governance or a multidisciplinary Center for Gender Studies, for sharing ideas and collaborating for production of scientific and socially relevant knowledge.”

As regards other areas in which concrete and significant steps can be taken for furthering community engagement in HEIs, Dr Pahi Saikia put forth the following suggestions:

- There is a need to come up with ‘*Community Engagement Scholarships*’, for students hailing from marginalized sections of the society, and considering that they too need some kind of incentive/motivation to work in this area. Herein, we can take a cue from European countries, some of which have been offering similar kinds of scholarships, an example of which is Trinity College, UK.
- Sensitivity with respect to the community’s needs and aspirations needs to be built, along with building a rapport with them. This is essential for effectively engaging with the communities and if we want to construe any social relevance out of such activities.
- It is extremely important to get involved in a dialogue process, which helps build the capacities of communities, for instance, indigenous Mising tribal women working in a flood affected area in Dhemaji and Majuli areas of Assam.
- The local governance institutions and the civil society groups may also be involved in the dialogue, to make the process more effective and relevant. Herein, the NGOs may function as a mediator between the HEIs and the government and help lobby on critical policy issues.
- The syllabus and the course structure needs to be revised and re-designed to include theory and practical experiences in the field.
- The local governance institutions may also be involved in the dialogue, to make the process more effective and relevant.
- Deliberate upon innovative ways to adopt villages in association with the existing local governing institutions in rural areas.

Comments from the Chair: Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

“The question to ask is not the modes/form/type of engagement, but that whether the research in HEIs can be qualitatively made more rigorous if attention is paid to the fact that significant knowledge resides outside the campus.”

“If we believe that only one mode of knowledge is the real knowledge, this will mean negating alternative modes of knowledge production.”

“HEIs in this country and in this region, in particular is heavily resourced with public funds, which allows for intellectual, physical facilities for training of the next generation professionals today.”

“The challenge for us is to map, assess and document what is already being done, in order to make it visible, considering that a lot of activities that are assumed to be happening continue to be invisible.”

“In this dialogue, often the discussion has been focused on which and what agenda to e followed, with respect to engagement. Herein, we need to ask ourselves as to how our basic agenda, which is pursuit of knowledge, can be made two way and mutually respectful and what is the most appropriate way of doing that.”

Dr Tandon began his address by asking crucial questions, with respect to the questions that had been raised time and again at the dialogue about the modalities of community engagement. He asked that in the context of the problem on flooding, that tends to recur in this region at regular intervals, has the civil engineering department at IIT done something about it? It is time that the knowledge of the community, which has helped it brave the menace for centuries, is used by academics, and combine it with their technical know-how to come up with a sustainable and a lasting solution. Dr Tandon outlined this example to be the essence of ‘community engagement’ that the UNESCO Chair has been advocating so vociferously.

Other pointers put forth by Dr Tandon are as follows:

- It is necessary to initiate a debate on whether the curriculum in IITG is responding to the societal context around them. If not, the question of disconnect of an HEI, as important as that of an IIT with its society arises, and therefore, needs to be immediately addressed.
- There is a need to align the institutional policy and practices, in favour of community engagement in HEIs, before debating on the nature of individual/institutional engagement.
- As evident from the oozing interest in both the students and the teachers, there is an urgent need to include such activities in the credit based curriculum, which can provide their interest, both value and relevance.
- Round table conferences can be resorted to as a method of method of knowledge production, an example of which can be the interventions under the Center for Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS).
- Systematization of ground level activities can the invisible activities gain visibility and build a strong case for community engagement.
- Given the diversity of the context, it is impossible to devise a precise methodology, and therefore, it is important to open new avenues with respect to engaging with the community.

- The one way engagement between the Universities and the communities has created a sense of mistrust, hiatus and divide. Therefore, we need to move from this one way to a two-way engagement which can be mutually beneficial for both parties.
- Individual efforts assume great importance in this context, and therefore , the teachers must set an example for the next generation of students.
- The challenge is not so much about policies, forms, funding, scholarships, as it is about 'justice'. The scholars need to understand that '*there can be no social justice without cognitive justice.*' This challenge of justice would be addressed if we moved beyond way that is normally followed.
- We need to create an interface between the knowledge and the society, and have respect for multiple knowledge systems. This forms the basis of '*community engagement*'. In the absence of such an approach, this process of engagement is reduced to a process of mere outreach