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

Punjab University, Chandigarh

6th – 7th March' 2014

RELEVANCE/RATIONALE OF THE DIALOGUE

PRIA's perspective:

Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

"Today, we facing a series of challenges, ranging from inequality to exclusion to degradation of natural resources; for example, the land of Punjab, which was once considered as the 'food bowl' of India, has turned infertile, because of water logging and decreasing fertility because of excessive use of fertilizers. It is here that social responsibility in higher education acquires a new meaning. It was here that it was realized that the body of knowledge possessed by practitioners, small and medium farmers, small businessmen, and their practices provided solutions to an array of challenges faced today."

"In today's world, knowledge sources are as much located outside the university premises as within it."

"This recognition of traditional knowledge has also been articulated in the 12th five year plan, which sees social responsibility as being mutually beneficial."

"Increasingly, social responsibility will be one of the key criteria in assessing excellence in Higher Education and Punjab University can position itself in ways such as it can be a part of the overall mission"

"Historically, HEIs have focused on producing and re-producing local and national elites, as the access to higher education has been limited to those belonging to a particular caste and society. In the course of developing educational curriculum and research, HEIs have distanced themselves from the society. Therefore, today, questions have been posed regarding the relevance of their research and teaching. This is because the curriculum and pedagogy of teaching is not linked to the problems of the context in which the university is located or the aspirations of the students"

*"In the second UNESCO Conference held in Paris, in the year 2009, the deliberations recommended that the future challenges for Higher Education will be building meaningful relationships and mutual benefits for the society at large; and which are not only restricted to its effluent sections"*

"Such dialogues will help us explore how such mutually inclusive bridges can be built between the universities and the marginalized communities"

"We must move ahead with a vision that in the next few years, meaningful and mutually respectful engagement will be promoted in the universities. It is through this lens, that such dialogues are viewed"

"Under the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, we have been convening dialogues in partnership with various universities, so that the ideas generated from here can be fed into into the Yojana Bhavan in Delhi and the schemes be influenced accordingly."

Dr Tandon began his note by introducing the GUNi World Report on Higher Education [http://us.macmillan.com/book.aspx?isbn=9780230535565], titled "Knowledge Exchange and Higher Education :Contributing to Social Change, that was recently released in the Planning Commission, by Sh Ashok Thakur, Secretary, Education, MHRD. He said that the "*reason behind the dialogue at PU, was linked to the theme of the book and the deliberations that are going to take place over the next couple of days."*
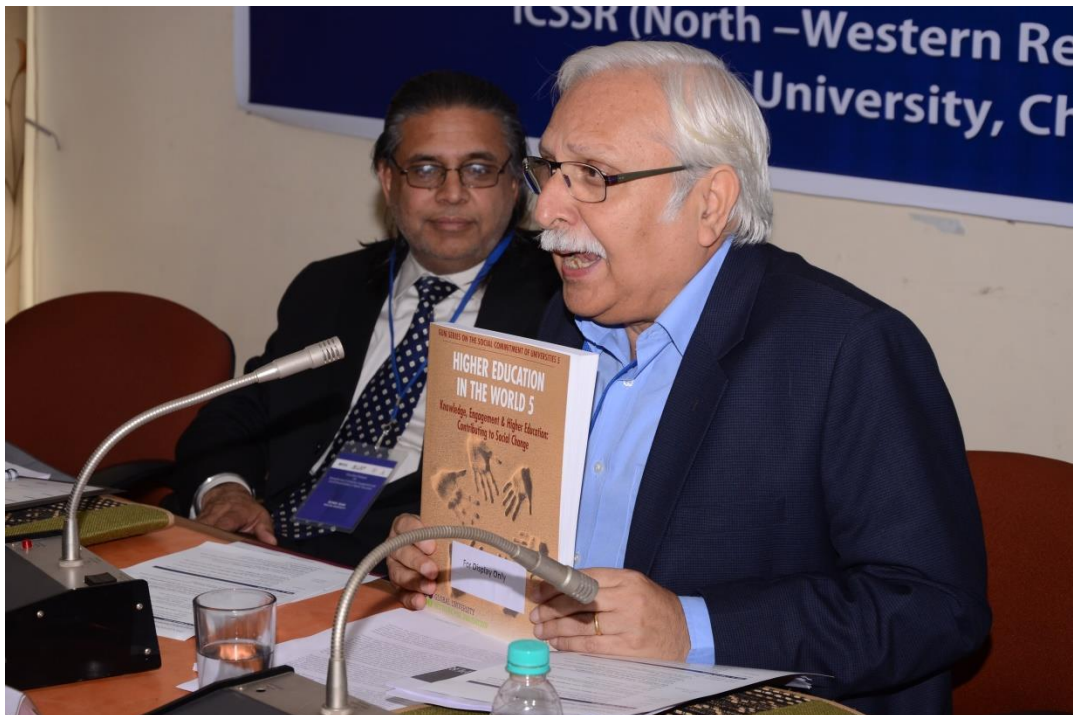
Picture 1: Dr Tandon, introducing the GUNi World Report on Higher Education, at the Punjab Dialogue.

As regards the relevance of such dialogues, Dr Tandon further commented that:

- Knowledge production in the universities in various fields has implied that unless it is represented in the traditional and systematic manner, it did not mean knowledge. In this regard, the traditional knowledge of the community members is not validated and is looked down upon.

- Only in the recent years, when traditional knowledge systems have gained ground globally and the age old health recipes have found their way into "holistic health" methodologies, have we started to value and acknowledge such knowledge systems.
- An example in this regard can be the tribals, who have traditionally been the collective trustees of natural resources and the environment, were dismissed as being ignorant, just because they did not possess a professional degree. However, today, they are increasingly being regarded as the sole knowledge resource in the area of disaster management. Dr Tandon quotes that *"We are slow learners; only when a particular thing is valued outside India, do we begin to acknowledge it."*
- When the modes of engagement of communities and universities, were deliberated upon, during committee meetings, it emerged that "In most Universities, community engagement was done when there was nothing better to do. As per the GoI initiated NSS scheme, certain disinterested faculty and students got together to perform some scattered activities, which were known as 'community engagement'.
- Most of such engagement activities revolved around telling others what they did not know, assuming that the providers of such knowledge knew it all. In this process, it emerged that "*community engagement was not integrated in the various disciplines taught across the university, but was being done only through the outreach programs of the agriculture extension departments and the schools of social work."*
- Unfortunately, science disciplines such as Physics/Chemistry/Metallurgy and Biotechnology, did not invest in community engagement initiatives. It was only seen as a thematic area for subjects like sociology, gender studies, rural development and lifelong learning.

Further, Dr Tandon re-iterated the rationale of the dialogue as seeking to promote and publicize certain key principles of community engagement. Some of them are:

- Community Engagement needs to be integrated all across the university and not ghettoized into certain sectors.
- The good practices being followed in other universities need to be followed and adopted after being contextualized according to the needs of the respective regions.
- Engagement can be strengthened only when institutional policies are designed to incentivize them.
- Higher education should include community engagement as one of the prime criteria's for accreditation of colleges/universities.
- Engagement must be linked to the curriculum and be made a part of the syllabus. Unless it is integrated and made a part of the credit system, meaningful engagement in practical way will be unable to flourish.

British Council's Perspective: Internationalizing Higher Education

Ms. Manjula Rao

"British Council has been organizing education dialogues all across the globe, in an attempt to bring together various stakeholders, for discussions and suitable policy recommendations on community engagement of HEIs"

"As a part of its initiative of internationalizing higher education, British Council has been promoting leadership through evidence based research, informed on trends and insights. It has also been developing partnerships on knowledge economy."

Other perspectives put forth by Ms. Rao are:

- British council has been supporting funding for research collaborations and student mobility programs.
- Currently, it is making plans to engage with India, in more meaningful was, and especially through the channel of community engagement and social responsibility of HEIs.
- It seeks to give an advantage edge to students in the job market, through investing in student mobility programs, and providing an opportunity for increasing their employability quotient.

Picture 2: Ms. Manjula Rao, British Council, putting forth the Council's perspective on Higher Education.

PLENARY SESSION I

Trends in Punjab

Dr Ronki Ram, Professor, Department of Political Science, PU

Theme: Current scheme of practices in Punjab and difficulties faced

"From the survey findings it has emerged that, in the name of community engagement, primarily what is conspiring in Punjab is a one way discourse and actions which are construed to be of a philanthropic nature"

"Distinction needs to be made between 'helping others' and 'community engagement'."

"Dedicated faculty members should be encouraged to visit places all across the world, to learn about the community engagement practices."

Dr Ronki Ram had been the key person, who had conducted the survey on community engagement practices, all across the Punjab University. This work was done for about two months, and the outputs which emerged, were in his words, '*mind-boggling'*. The findings he shared are as detailed below:

- Although the *Centre for Women's Studies, Department of Adult Education & Lifelong Extension, Human Rights* and *Public Administration*, were involved in different kinds of community activities, it was mostly a one-way interaction, in which the community were only the passive recipients of what was meted out to them.
- The practice of inviting expertise from the community, in the form of seasoned professional experts, was not practiced by the university, although it did send out their experts to them.
- Community engagement was primarily seen as being a philanthropic activity, similar to the Self Help Groups, which were running in the villages.
- Also, community engagement, per say was not clearly understood by the academia, across the PU. An example of this was the workshop conducted by the university authorities, in order to educate the students and parents about the various courses offered, and even this was being done in the name of community engagement.
- Although such scattered activities did serve the community, and is appreciable, it cannot be considered as 'community engagement'. Therefore, efforts need to be directed towards core practices of such engagement.
- Indigenous knowledge from within the community, such as the seasoned talent of a good carpenter in the village, who has inherited the art from his fore fathers, needs to be integrated into the knowledge hub of the university system.

As regards the challenges and the difficulties encountered in this process, Dr Ronki Ram enumerated the following points:

(i)   Lack of motivation and involvement of the community

The community viewed the university initiatives to approach and engage with them, only through the lens of receiving some benefits. They also lack any kind of motivation to get engaged in such activities. They have pre-assumed for themselves, the role of takers and therefore pay negligible attention to the fact that they can also engage with the authorities, in their interventions, through sharing their knowledge and ideas.

(ii) Language barriers

The language and syntax used by the community at times, poses barriers to effective communication between the parties.

(iii) Infrastructural problems

The infrastructural problems with relation to the community are mostly an intangible one. An example of this can be that despite making efforts to approach them, they are not very forthcoming in this regard.

(iv) Financial problems

As the universities have no fund earmarked for community engagement activities, budgetary problems pose a huge challenge in this regard. Dr Ronki Ram says *that "The university system should be made inclusive, by way of creating a separate budget head earmarked for such initiatives."*

(v) No academic credit contributes to the lack of enthusiasm for engagement in such activities

As no academic credits are attached such community engagement work, the students are often disinterested to carry them, at the cost of such subjects, which earn them credits. Also, for the faculties, while publishing papers in journals added to their promotion criteria, spending time with the community was accorded no value.

Certain suggestions put forward by him were:

- Organized departments/institution and colleges be mandated to do community engagement for a fixed number of hours, through the channel of NSS and NCC units
- Students should be provided adequate exposure to the fields and provisions should be made for their frequent visit to the community.
- Dedicated faculty members should be encouraged to visit places all across the world, to learn about the community engagement practices.
- Academic credits for students and professional credits for teachers to be attached to such work.
- Practitioners from the community to be given space within the university to share their knowledge with the students.
- There was a need to overcome the infrastructural barriers from the side of the community, and they be motivated and encouraged to engage in interventions meant for their benefit.

Picture 3: Dr Ronki Ram, sharing the findings of the survey conducted in Punjab University, with respect to community engagement.

Comments from the Audience:

- There is a sense of disharmony between the society and the state. The education system in our country being 'state-controlled', distances itself from the society, and a result, there develops barriers of alienation between the two.
- As the education system in our country has become exam based, as per the british mode of education, traditional valued within it have gradually vanished. There is nobody who collects and documents traditional skills and keeps it preserved in the confines of the abodes of learning, such as the colleges/universities.
- There was a need to capture traditional knowledge systems into the university. For this purpose, all departments need to identify certain areas, where the traditional wisdom can find integration into the course syllabus.
- However, in line with the above, the *social work department*, *the population research centre* and the *department of sociology*, under PU has been encouraging its students to undertake their dissertation work, in relation to the issues and problems of the society.
- The initiatives such as the "Skill Development Institutes" (SDIs) need to function in a systematic manner.
- Initiative such as the community radio, which breaks the barriers between the university and the community, should be used more extensively.
- Community engagement is not a one way process. It should be a multi-channel and cross sectoral process, cutting across barriers and getting the community to align themselves to the development process.

- There was a need to do away with schemes, which were forced upon the community, disregarding their interests, and ultimately failing in the long run. Dialogues needed to be initiated and schemes of mutual benefit must be devised.
- Although some good work is being done, the need now was to institutionalize such efforts under the umbrella of community engagement.

Picture 4: Participants at the Dialogue

Comments from Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

"Historically, universities have been pictured as being the sole repositories of knowledge, and unfortunately, those devoid of any certification, have been considered as being ignorant, thereby disregarding alternate practitioner based knowledge systems."

"The Universities, undoubtedly are a huge body of knowledge. However, the issue at hand is not to deny university knowledge, but to establish bridges with other knowledge systems, which was possible only if we believed and respected those alternate knowledge systems."

"Our formal schooling pattern makes s arrogant, whereby which we don't appreciate the sea of knowledge within community practitioners, which they have gained after years of experience and hard work. Therefore, there was a need to inculcate a sense of humility in the students and the professors alike."

"If the IITs can mandate community engagement activities, then an institution like PU can definitely take some practical steps forward. The idea is not to stop what is going on, but tom open new avenues of engagement."

Other pointers put forth by Dr Tandon in this regard are:

- A process needs to be initiated for creation of a mechanism of recognition of prior experience and knowledge. Under such an initiative, not only the plumbers or the accountants, but even people like accountants, with a 25 year experience, and a B.Com degree can get a certification in equivalence to an M.Com, which can open avenues for him pursuing a doctoral degree.
- However, although this is theoretically possible, its practicality and implementation opportunities are limited.
- Therefore, mechanisms need to be devised where prior experience can be accredited and given designations such as a *Class A* driver or a *Class B* plumber. Another example can be that of nurse having an experience of 20 years or so. There was a need to accredit her knowledge and experience which can help her advance her career.
- Irrespective of what the UGC or the MHRD mandates, PU can take a initiative themselves, and establish linkages between their graduate/postgraduate students to the community outside. For example, the students learning mapping/planning exercises must be linked to the practical knowledge of local CSOs, for undertaking research work having social relevance and value. Therefore, institutional policies required to make this happen must be framed accordingly.
- PU can make use of policies such as the *National Skills Qualification Framework* (NSQF), under which seasoned community practitioners (such as accountants, plumbers, etc.) are certified for being eligible for certain job roles.

Chair's Comments: Professor Sween, Chairperson, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension, PU

"The contradictory patterns in the Indian economy today sees the per capita income increasing and the growth rate decreasing, which thereby has implications in the employment sector. Such a situation has arisen because of the mismatch between the demand and supply of employable graduates."

"Presently our HEIs are disconnected with the markets and the societies. Along with this, their rigidity in terms of course curriculum, evaluation systems, is resulting in the creation of such graduates who are considered as being unemployable by the job sector."

Other comments put forward by the chair are:

- The UGC recognized community college initiative is a great step in the direction of increasing the employability quotient. Its advantages are that it is set up for the community, by the community and with the help of community resources themselves,

serving multiple purposes. They were mandated by the UGC to award advanced diploma level degrees

- The community colleges by way of being flexile, allowing for work in between the conduction of a course and also providing multiple entry and exit points are hugely beneficial for the students. Also, the course structure being designed in collaboration with the local industry/community is not traditional and exclusive; but vocational and inclusive. This is therefore, immensely valuable in increasing the employability of the students.
- There was a need to formalize institutional structures corresponding to community engagement.
- Quality and access to higher education needs to be improved.
- Modes to strengthen public private partnership needs to be devised
- More participation from the private sector needs to encouraged in this field, in addition to the public sector institutions.

PLENARY SESSION II

Forms & Structures of Community Engagement

Dr Emma McKenna, Science Shop Co-ordinator, Queen's University' Belfast

Theme: The Science Shop Model

"Science Shop is based on working with the community and to develop research questions based on community interests, by the engaging the community, and not in exclusion, in a University library."

"Through the interfaces conducted with the CSOs through the channel of the Science Shop, the student begin to recognize and appreciate that knowledge is not only help in the university premises, but is scattered at different places, specially in the community, amidst which the university is located"

"We hope that the model of Science Shop would encourage responsible research worldwide."

Dr Mckenna as the Science Shop Co-ordinator, presented the model of a "Science Shop", as a model example of an interface structure between the community and the University, whereby which both can filter out mutually beneficial issues and work on them together. Such an example of co-produced research not only enjoys the advantage of incorporation of indigenous knowledge systems, but can also be regarded as a work having social relevance and value to the community. It provides dissertation topics and curriculum based research projects for undergraduate and post graduate students across all disciplines (such as Science, Humanities, Social Sciences and Law.)

He student is able to appreciate the indigenous knowledge residing among the communities, when he/she gets a chance to interact with them. For example, a fisherman may have enormous

amount of knowledge on the changes taking place in the waters. However, in the absence of scientific backing, his knowledge takes a back seat. It is here that the science shop steps in, and seeks to give a voice and platform for the local knowledge to be showcased, in the form of student research projects, which are often linked to their degree program. In return, the value for students occurs in the form of their skill development, career enhancement. They also get a chance to work cross sectorally, along with getting a real life experience and personal satisfaction. Few other examples of such co-created projects have been those dealing with flooding, river flow, etc.

It is the student who decides what research process he/she wishes to undertake, after having deliberation with the CSOs. Simultaneously, such initiatives help such CSOs develop their thinking around research. Along with this, many a times the community may not have time to think over a research question, or they don't understand how to articulate it. Such interfaces with the students give their ideas a form and shape, through integration into research and corresponding methodology.

Dr McKenna says that such science shops have been established at various different places like the Cambridge, Canada, Belgium, Denmark, Korea and China, and is operational under different names. This initiative has been supported by the European Commission. Dr McKenna also makes a mention of the European Commission funded project known as the PERARES, with which she has been associated. She says that it "*explores the different mechanism through which CSOs all across the European Commission can be roped in to research process.*"

Dr McKenna also points out to the challenges that are encountered in the process:

- Finding space in the academic curriculum and explain how the process of community engagement link to it.
- Some academic disciplines which are overburdened with course curriculum work, like the physics/chemistry are left with little or no time for such engagements. Although there have are examples from Netherlands, wherein, science shops have been set up for such disciplines as well.
- Bogged down with busy schedules, methods need to be devised which can seek to achieve academic buy-in. Mechanisms through which they can be encouraged and roped in to do such work needs to be improvised.
- There was also a need to have student buying this idea. Therefore, they need to be explained the worth and value of such work, so that they are encouraged and incentivized to work in this field.
- There is a lot of expectation associated with this kind of activitiy. Satisfying all of them poses a great challenge.
- Policy issues in the University, and at a broader scale tends to present a barrier at times.

Picture 5: Session on Forms & Structures of Community Engagament. On the dias, Dr Emma Mckenna, Queen's University, Belfast, presenting the model of 'Science Shops' (extreme left), Dr Michael Osborne (middle), University of Glasgow, and Dr Swarnjit Kaur, Chairperson, Centre for Human Rights, Chandigarh (extreme right)

Dr Parmjit Singh Kang, Department of Lifelong Learning & Extension (DLLE), PU

Theme: Community engagement practices of DLLE, PU

"The vision of the department is to reach the unreached, along with extending knowledge and university resources to the community and vice-versa. The department strives to reach more and more people, in an attempt to enable them to become lifelong learners."

Dr Kang representing the department of lifelong learning and extension, put forth the activities initiated by the department in the field of community engagement. He gave an account of different types of projects/training programmes/skill generation activities/awareness programmes/computer courses being conducted, with an objective to reach out to the community and break the barriers contributing to their exclusion.

Dr Kang mentioned some of the vocational courses being run by the department, such as the certificate courses on computer application/computer hardware/Fashion & Textile Designing/Cosmetology/Basic Electronics/Handicrafts, etc. Apart from this, the department has also been organizing programs on Skin Care & Cosmetology, Interior Decoration, Plumbering &

Sanitation etc. For such initiatives, the department has also been collaborating with various agencies, such as government departments, for instance, the state department on Health, Environment, Population & Education, and also non-governmental agencies, like the *Jan Shiksha Sansthan, Confederation of Indian Industries (CII),* and also involved local stakeholders like the village pradhans and the *sarpanches*.

Mr Kang concluded his speech by saying *that "We strive to empower citizens and build an empowered nation as we believe that this is the first step towards achieving sustainable development".*

Picture 6: Dr Parmjit Singh Kang, sharing the experiences of the Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension, vis-à-vis community engagement

Dr Michael Osborne, Chair & Professor, University of Glasgow

<u>Theme: Principles & Forms of Community Engagement</u>

"There needs to be recognition of prior learning, by way of their work experiences and the range of activities undertaken in their daily life."

"We have to create opportunities for people who are have had no access to higher education before, along with bringing knowledge to the excluded and the marginalized groups."

"Creating engagement opportunities is a difficult task because there are no obvious incomes arising out of it, despite having huge social benefits."

"Engagement has not been a new concept. There have been long standing links between the Universities and the community, in history, by way of trade unions, worker movements, etc"

"As engagement with the community, is not considered in university rankings, as research, teaching and internationalization, the universities are under continuous pressure to focus on the factor that counts"

"Community Engagement in Europe has been an exceptional activity, but is challenged by new models of privatization and internationalization"

"Citizens need to exert pressure on the government, to align community engagement as one of the priority missions of the Universities"

Dr Osborne has been closely working with the UNESCO's initiative of learning cities. As the professor in the University of Glasgow, he has been associated with the field of community engagement for as much as 32 years. He classifies "*Access*" to Higher Education systems, into three categories:

(i)   Inreach

This deals with finding new ways for an individual to access new provisions.

(ii)   Outreach

This is related to the preparatory courses being run by practitioners having no higher education degrees.

(iii)   Flexibility

This prescribed moving away from supply driven to a demand driven mode, whereby the community is approached and provisions are developed in accordance to their needs. The flexibility is sought in time, space and in logistically recognized knowledge and pertains to changing the structure of higher education on a fundamental basis.

He adds that the community college initiative in the UK, offered a mixture of advanced and non-advanced vocational courses, which are developed in conjunction with the industry. Along with this, it offered huge amount of flexibility in the modus operandi of the courses, having multiple entry and exit points. Being linked to the industry, it stood in a greatly advantageous position with respect to job employability. Therefore, the community college initiative offered an opportunity to secure a traditional degree through part time study. Despite having such a provision in place, the autonomy of universities in the UK, greatly restricts the possibilities. Also, another caveat here is that as long as there is a supply of skilled professionals to the universities, community college graduates are not viewed as advantageous.

However, there are some good examples like the "dual sector institutions" functioning in Australia, who offer both community college education and higher education in one premise/structure. Such universities can create huge opportunities for success, in comparison to those who made a distinction between the two.

Along with this, he added that:

- Community engagement in many Universities, is often considered as the 4th mission, the first, second, third and the fourth being teaching, research, and internationalization. Therefore, it was needed that this agenda be brought into the priority list of the academics, and be seen as the first mission, and not viewed as an additional responsibility. Along with this, it should also be made an integral part of all other missions.
- Community engagement basically takes up four forms. They are:

(i)   Economic

The economic side of engagement deals with processes like technology transfer, science & technology etc. An example, in this regard can be the University of Salford, UK, who is helping communities in their financial management through their initiative, known as *"Moneyline"*

(ii)   Social

The social benefits are related to activities aimed at providing access routes for such groups who have been systematically disadvantaged with respect to access to higher education. An example, can be the University of Newcastle, who are working on public engagement, health & well being.

(iii)   Cultural

Many universities have museums, which they use as a link to connect with the communities. This forms the cultural mode of community engagement. AN example can be the University of London, who are working on preserving the legacy of Olympic Games, in conjunction with the Universities.

(iv)   Environmental

The environmental perspective on community engagement is the extremely important and must be placed on the top of the priorities. An example in this regard may be the exploration of new techniques of farming practices, as being practiced in France, etc.

- In view of the manifesting the process of engagement within the universities, a carrot and stick philosophy may be resorted to. This included the following:

(i)   *Regulation*: As in France

(ii)   *Incentivization*: As in the UK

(iii)   *Legal Obligation*: As in Netherlands, Sweden & Finland

- As regards the institutional structures within which community engagement processes can be carried out, some of them are:

(i)   *Research*, in the form of collaborative research project with the communities

(ii)   *Knowledge Exchange*, in the form of consultations, and capacity building activities

(iii)   *Service*, in the form of different ways in which the University assets and services are made open, thereby making way for continuing professional development

Dr Osborne also made a mention of the P ASCAL Universities on Regional Engagement (PURE) Project of the PASCAL Observatory, which has been in operation in 17 regions in different parts of the world, exploring and promoting the idea of community engagement. It look into what the higher education is offering to their regions, in the form of economic/social/cultural and environmental benefits.

Reflections from Group Discussions

The Group discussion was aimed at coming out with some key ideas on strengthening the community engagement and the mechanisms required to be roped in for achieving the same.

*Group I: Represented by **Dr Ravindra Khaiwal,** PGIMER, Chandigarh*

The pointers raised by him are:

- The process of community engagement should be stopped being viewed as charity. Community's perspective needed to be holistically integrated and reaching out to them and incorporating their needs and concerns into the research process.
- Sharing of good between international collaborators, such as India and UK, through the agency of British Council.
- Academic credits needs to be attached to the work done by the students, and it was desired that such project be linked to their dissertation work, and should also be mentioned in their certification/report cards. Along with this, professional credits needs to be given to the faculties associated with it, which helps them in advancing their career. This would also ensure that such engagement opportunities are not viewed as additional burden by the students and teachers alike.
- When working on a theme like community engagement, it is as necessary to have short and mid-term plans, as long term perspectives.
- It should be ensured that there are no gaps occurring in such work, with the passing of students or transfer of teachers. The passing on of the baton and responsibilities to the next team should be smooth and with the flow.

Some other ideas shared by this group were:

- Community policing in the form of student police cadets was a nice idea, to rope in the community, to work with the students and get acquainted to their ideas, and methods of work.
- As regards the domestic violence support groups were concerned, it was desired that they discuss the problems of the community, and incorporate their suggestions, when coming up with suitable solutions.
- There are some genuine people who are interested in working with and for the community, such people must be engaged in community engagement initiatives. An example given in this regard were the patients who had once suffered from HIV, but had overcome the disease and were now supporting other people, suffering the pain.
- The financing/accounting students can be roped in to help the community file their IT returns or advise them on the mechanisms of obtaining social credit etc.
- Community radio initiative should be expanded to reach more people and specially the rural hinterlands, who suffer exclusion owing to myriad of factors.
- The issue of human rights and gender should compulsorily be covered in the courses taught in the colleges/universities.
- Every department in the college/university must be allocated a particular coverage area in the neighbouring communities. Here, they should be responsible for spreading awareness on key issues, and for example, ensuring every person in the community has a voter ID card.
- The libraries in the educational institutions must enter into a public private partnership with appropriate agencies. This would not only help the libraries to expand its resources, but will also offer access to the public. Such plans need to be thought on and the modalities worked out accordingly.

Group II: Represented by **Dr Jennifer Chambers**, Senior Policy Manager, RCUK

"There needs to be a formal validation within the University for Community Engagement as a legitimate activity"

The suggestions she offered were:

- There was an immediate need to acquire value and recognition for indigenous local knowledge within the academia and universities. For this, it was desired that we have in place, a legal instrument like the "*Community Intellectual Property*". In recent years, indigenous peoples, local communities, and governments, mainly in developing countries, have demanded equivalent protection for traditional knowledge systems.
- Attention needs to be paid to the fact that building such harmonious and positive relation between the communities and the universities takes time, specially when both of them have been alienated by different barriers, for a long time, as in the case of India.

Group III: Represented by **Dr Ronki Ram**, Punjab University

"The fire tender in the UK commands a lot of respect, both for himself and his profession, but can we say that the same respect is accorded to the best of dead animal skin tanner in India, despite being proficient in his profession? Probably not"

"Community is society specific and varies from civilization to civilization"

"It is more important to set the ball rolling and in this process, it was perfectly fine to make a start with an easy initiative"

"We should begin identifying issues where we would like to engage with the community, and then move from one issue to the other, along with monitoring the previous ones."

The reflections he put forth were:

- Before community engagement in higher education is taken up, we need to have clarity on the word 'community' and which component of the population it represents. Is it only the marginal groups or others come into this category too. An example cited in this regard was that of a Japanese industry group who entered into a symbiosis experiment with the students, wherein the former taught the latest automobile technologies to the students, while the latter learnt the Japanese language from them.
- Influential leaders from the community need to be made an integral part of the planning process within the concerned departments.
- Community engagement should be incorporated within the course curriculum. Along with this, provision can also be made for field based assignments within it, and can be thereby, used to assess students internally.

Comments from Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

"The need of the hour was to identify mechanisms, which would help break the barriers between the Universities and the communities, through the channel of interface structures between the two, which could filter community issues, and also be mutually beneficial."

"The universities today are in a powerful position, while there is a considerable degree of hesitation within the community. Ways need to be found out to do away with such existential boundaries"

"A information fair can be organized on a monthly basis, wherein, different stakeholders, such as CSOs, government department, practitioners participate and feed in their respective concerns"

"While learning is one thing, community engagement places emphasis on taking this learning out of the classrooms. Therefore, attention needs to paid to how the pedagogical learning can be spread out of the classroom and the university premises"

Dr Tandon elaborated on his comments on 'interface structures between the universities and the communities by citing four examples:

- The idea of Science Shop, as explained by Dr Emma McKenna, provides a brilliant opportunity for the interface between students and Community Based Organizations, wherein they discuss the local problems and devise a research project out of it, in search of the corresponding solutions.
- In the University of Victoria, there was an office of community based research, co-governed by one professor of the University and one eminent community leader from the city of Victoria. This department played the role of filtering the interests from both sides of the table, and devising mutually beneficial research work. For example, if there was any research project dealing with the immigrant community, then such students were roped into it who were interested in the issues of housing/livelihoods. This initiative was seen by the immigrant population as something that had value and impacted their day today life.
- Similarly, in the year 2006, in one of the universities in Himachal Pradesh, some of the students were engaged in doing research on Himalayan agriculture/ecology. However, despite visiting the fields and interacting with the famers, they were not getting sufficient feedback on their work. Then, they set up a unit, comprising of student researchers and professor, who would organize periodic sharing's of the research work findings with the farmers and the officials in the agriculture department. This interaction served as platform to cull out individual interests and concerns, along with filtering key issues. This information was also documented and converted into local languages, which was then disseminated into the community, along with the panchayats and the district officials. Such extension work found enormous support and acceptance from the community, as they began to find the research work done by the universities as important and valuable to them too.
- Along with the above mentioned examples, there were also some good models/practices followed by old agricultural universities, like the one in Hissar, who work very closely with the farmers. Such practices must be picked up by other universities and put into practice in their respective neighbourhoods, by contextualizing the practices, into what suited them.

Chair's Comments: Ms. Lynne Heslop, British Council

"If people can look to see what the others have done, and in attempts in which they had been successful, or even failed, for that matter, then it can give us an opportunity to a step forward"

"It's important to focus on ideas which can help validate or excite community engagement"

She added that

- It is important to phrase and describe your profession and what you do. Therefore, this is the reason why the community colleges initiatives in the UK are such a success, as they provide a validity and attraction in the form of a foundation degree.
- Following successful case studies and models, of how institutions and regions and countries have taken forward community engagement is extremely important.

PLENARY SESSION III

Policy Implications:

Dr Jennifer Chambers, Senior Policy Manager, Research Councils, UK

<u>Theme: International perspective on policies surrounding community engagement (UK)</u>

"RCUK hopes to have such a culture change in the universities, whereby which Public Engagement is recognized, valued and accepted as a validated exercise"

"RCUK has been focusing its efforts on incentivizing socially relevant research, by creating and supporting the window of public engagement."

"We have a vision for public engagement in research, as we want to help societies value and have confidence in the research conducted by Universities."

"We believe that community engagement empowers people, changes attitudes and encourages research that adds value and impact"

"We originate from the community and since public money is at stake, we ensure that the research which uses this money, is done in a manner which is socially acceptable."

We believe that effect on the public and the community is a part of the research and by engaging the community, we can improve the quality of research"

Picture 7: Dr Jennifer Chambers, making a speech at the Punjab University

As the senior policy manager in the research councils, UK, she introduced as RC as the being the agency which looks after the higher education funding in the UK universities. It is an umbrella term, which covers seven different research councils (corresponding to humanities, social

sciences, biological sciences etc.). It has a strategy unit, which looks into different areas of research policy, such as gender inequality, international policy, policy around public engagement in research, etc. In the UK, the autonomous nature of the universities allows for encouragement to public engagement, but has no legal backing for the same.

In an attempt to give a perspective on policy implications of community engagement processes in the UK. She put forth the following points:

- Public money for research in the UK is allotted through the Research Councils and the Higher Education Funding Council. When receipt of a research proposal, one of the primary criteria considered by the RCUK for its approval, is the impact of the research and the pathways to the impact. The Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and the Research Excellence Framework (REF), also allow for gauging the relevance of the project, through assessing the "Impact" of the research being conduct. In the wake of the financial crisis, there are obvious questions on devoting public money for research purposes. It is here, that the social relevance and value of the research needs to be brought out. As a result, the research councils has allocated 20% of the funding to be decided solely through the impact of the research work.
- She added that research work in Universities cannot be done in exclusion, in ivory towers. Therefore, there was a need to engage the communities, through incorporating their concerns and thereby providing the research not only academic, but also social relevance, being a co-produced one.
- As business engagements draws out financial rewards, it offers a lot of incentive to the universities to engage in such corporate alliances, wherein the companies pay for the research work/patents etc. In contrast, public engagement doesn't seem to offer such ready benefits, although being of immense importance. In such a scenario, the RCUK has been working hard to encourage the academics to enter the field of public engagement, and make them realize that only publishing papers does not contribute to professional credits, but doing something socially relevant does.
- We need to look at systematic approach to promote community engagement and also encourage students to undertake similar activities.
- Since not everyone vies for a University career, a collaborative partnership should be developed not only with the universities, but also with the schools, through which the school students get an opportunity to engage. This will also allow for sharing of knowledge at all levels in the education system.
- Public engagement needs a kind of support whereby which it is incentivized through different approaches.
- Research needs to be informed by public opinion, regarding their issues and concerns. Therefore, it is ensured that there are sufficient mechanisms for such engagement. An example was a project on genetically engineered food technologies, under which dialogues was conducted with the concerned community (the research topic being a controversial one), which was not a mere validation exercise for the project, but a genuine interest in the community's perspective. As a result, in accordance with the deliberations that construed, the research methods was diverted, incorporating the concerns, rather than stream rolling into a completely exclusive direction.

- People need to be encouraged t work with the community, not only during their stay in the universities, but all through their career, as a result of which a more quality research can be done.
- Therefore, through strategic interventions and requisite funding, public engagement can gain recognition, and as a result, the good practices can be shared.
- Three practices on similar lines are:

(i)   Beacons for Public Engagement Project

From this project, invaluable results emerged for policy makers. Fantastic bridging mechanisms were developed, which plaed a great role in promoting public engagement.

(ii)   Support to the National Co-ordinating Centre on Public Engagement (NCCPE)

The NCCPE provides a physical space for conversations and exchange of information on practices related to such engagements, along with being hugely valuable for policy decisions. It has also been providing support to researchers, because it is not only the question of empowering the communities, but we need people from the universities to go into the community and work for them.

(iii)   CONCORDAT Project

This was based on principles which looked to explore ways in which the universities could undertake community engagement. Along with this, the different kind of structures (formal/informal) required to support such activity was also researched. Under this, engagement was recognized and promoted in job placements, along with setting up training centres where engagement was the key focus area.

Mr Zulfiqar Khan, President, Theatre Age

Theme: Flaws in the Governmental policies in India

"When we intend to look at community engagement, we need to focus on the practical aspects, with respect to the realities on the ground"

"Although crores of rupees have been spent on initiatives like the Skill Development Institutes (SDIs), nothing much has accrued out of it"

"We need to explore how the university and our institution can work together in a scalable manner, so that we are able to change the lives of at least a few children"

"Unfortunately, in our country today, policies are made, schemes are sanctioned, money is allocated, but no accountability is fixed"

He has been involved in running and funding community schools through innovative measures. He has been educating children coming from the economically weaker sections of the society, fulfilling funding requirements, by collecting and selling waste newspaper/plastics and other

such unused items from households in different sectors in Chandigarh. From the resources collated through such methods, Mr Khan has been fulfilling the needs of the children like providing them with pens, pencils, medicines, etc. However, forced to sustain on such meagre resources and in the complete absence of government funding, he says that *"We continue to struggle for space"*

He brought the participant's attention towards the flaws in the governmental policies, whereby which through schemes are running on paper and are also being successfully implemented; the ground realities are way different. In the absence of monitoring, evaluation and feedback mechanism, the schemes which are shown as completed on paper, have in reality achieved a zero impact among the community. Citing examples of some training centres in this regard, he said that despite completing the course at such centres, the students gain nothing out of it. Also, since there are no accountability mechanisms to fix responsibility, such practices have been going on with convenience.

WAYS FORWARD:

Dr Ronki Ram:

"The task we have chosen for ourselves is an uphill and challenging one, but the discussions that have taken place have set the ball rolling. Now, we need to ensure that the propaganda is taken forward and not lost, as a result of the old fashioned techniques of working"

""In order to promote the agenda of community engagement, the need of the hour is to take a stalk of the current situation, conceptualize the ideas and perform solid and sustainable networking."

The issues put forward by him are as under:

- *Importance of collating scattered information*

Dr Ronki Ram deliberated on the importance put the deliberations of the conference together, in an attempt to take a step forward in the direction of community engagement. He opined in the favour of preparation of a report immediately after the deliberations, so that in due course, challenges would be raised, which would ultimately lead us to solutions. He said that there is a need to conceptualize certain terms, rationalize certain steps and clearly define the interventional areas. Herein, UGC has been providing the universities with opportunities through its policies and the latter needed to ensure that the schemes that were being launched had a component of community engagement program embedded in it.

- *Challenge of accommodating traditional knowledge within the academia*

He admitted that the task we have chosen for ourselves of that of engaging the community with the universities is an uphill task. Presently, the universities and the academia are distanced from the community, as a result of which it is not able to tap the indigenous knowledge residing among the communities. Therefore, although being a challenging task, he stressed on the need

to bring the understanding within the academia to the social surroundings in which it is situated.

- *Importance of defining the term "Community"*

Given contextual differences between societies, he emphasized on the importance to define the word "community", and state clearly as to who constituted it. This was essential as a starting step towards ensuring the larger objective of "*community engagement*".

- *Need to create a social space for the idea*

Dr Ram said that creation of a social space and acceptance for the idea of engagement was the need for the hour. An example for this can be good write-ups/articles in the national dailies, which can widely and quickly disseminate the theme. This was required to take the process further after such a good start, and not fall victim to the old fashioned processes and lose the plot and relevance of the idea with time.

Ms. Lynne Heslop, British Council

"We need to have a clear vision for the PU, so that in about 5 years' time, everyone in the university can proudly acclaim that that it has community embedded in it"

"There are some really interesting areas for international working in the space of community engagement"

"Over the next few years, the British Council would like increase the flow of students between the UK and India, especially from the UK to India, to learn and share their experiences. This initiative would be one of the major thrust areas of the council for the next few years"

"I would try and re-inforce the agenda of community engagement, in all forums to which I have an access, and wherever and whenever I can"

She stressed on the importance of rationalizing the actions before they are implemented. The points she came forth with are:

- *Need to chalk out a clear vision of community engagement*

In order to have the university and community engaging with each other, the university needs to define the terms and principles of this engagement beforehand. This envisioning will help PU engage with the community in a much better way, say about 5 years from now.

- *Essentiality of having in place practical models/examples*

Although having a vision plays the role of a guiding light in the implementation of plans, but equally essential is having real time and practical models/case studies/good practices in place which can be followed and replicated/contextualized as per the situation and circumstances. We

have around us a number of good practices going on, and we need to take a cue from them, and build on their efforts, after developing an understanding of such practices.

- *HEIs to function as custodians of local knowledge and heritage*

There are distinctive cultural traditions, peculiar and characteristic of different types of society, but today, they are threatened by the social change taking place due to increasing urbanization. As a result, gradually, they are being lost and transformed with time. It is here, that the universities need to step in, in an effort to preserve such culture and knowledge skills of the community. The universities need to include this function as part of their vision and mission alike.

- *Internationalizing community engagement by way of international collaboration between countries, such as the UK and India*

The space of community engagement offers some really interesting areas for international working and collaboration. There are interconnected global and local issues, which are extremely valuable from the global and local perspectives. For example, the social issues that arise when looking at community around the university may be similar to those arising in India. Sharing such issues on an intellectual and practical basis, would open new arenas of partnership and knowledge sharing, and international collaboration is a great way of doing this.

- *Advocacy of the agenda at various forums/platforms*

There are various discussions that take place in the governmental sector, and across different political gatherings/forums. We need to try and re-inforce the importance of this area, as and where it is feasible. Therefore, we all need to play an advocacy role, across different sectors to get this agenda as a central focus in all policies made and schemes implemented.

Picture 8: Speakers for the session on "Ways Forward". Ms. Lynne Heslop, Dr Rajesh Tandon and Dr Ronki Ram (left to right)

Dr Ravindra Khaiwal, School of Public Health, Chandigarh

Dr Khaiwal briefed the audience about a community collaborative development project undertaken by the School of Public Health at PGIMER, Chandigarh, titled as "Bassi Pathana Community Collaborative Development Project. Under this initiative, the PGIMER Institute of Public Health was devoted to discovery of new knowledge and advocacy for application of new ideas in health care, along with strengthening capacity of health organizations and health development of the population through the education of public health professionals.

He added that "The school recognize s and values the needs and rights of the communities and thereby looks to engage them in enhancing health, education and livelihood, in an attempt to improve the quality of their lives. For this, the project helps communities identify their priorities, works with them to identify solutions, along with developing mechanisms for sharing the best practices.

The various activities undertaken under this project include providing health services such as *health melas* and medical camps, awareness activities, student visits, workshops, seminars, etc. Herein the professionals involved include PhD students, public health nurses, and laboratory technicians, in addition to faculties and the respective demonstrators.

Audience's Reflections:

- Sumit Kumar from Ambuja Cement suggested that, *"If the university with the corporate players, doing a good job in terms of CSR activities, such as the skill development initiative undertaken by Ambuja, then definitely solutions and way aheads can be found out in a mutually beneficial manner.*

- Enthused and energized by the conference's deliberations, a professor from PU said that *"Taking a cue from Gandhi ji's talisman, I promise to myself today that from now onwards, whatever research I will undertake, I will make sure that it has community engagement as an integral component within it".*

- Dr Zulfiqar Khan from the Theatre Age group. Brought the audience's attention towards the challenges that existed in the present scenario. He said that *"We need to focus on how to change the mindsets of the people, how to reach the grassroot and most importantly, how to change the quality of the education system in our country today"*

- Dr Michael Osborne offered international exchange of information as a part of the solution. He said that *"PASCAL Observatory is a means through which people around the world can exchange their ideas, experiences and information"*

- A professor from the Mass Communication department of PU, shared his experiences, and said that *"The department has already started the process of community engagement, and is involved in raising issues and finding solutions, in collaboration with other departments. One of the its successful initiatives has been the community radio"*

- Mr Ajay Goyal from the Wadhwani Foundation said that *"My organization is willing to help and support PU in getting the scheme of community colleges implemented within the Universities and its affiliating colleges"*

- Another PU professor added that *"The dialogues has encouraged the department of Women Studies/Human Rights/Social Work and Adult Education and Lifelong Learning to work together to promote the theme of community engagement"*

- As the senior policy manager in Research Councils UK, Dr Jennifer Chambers, said that *"Having access to institutional level statements and policies, I can advocate the issue, for its greater integration within the research work done in the universities"*

Chair's Comments: Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair

"Mapping current engagement efforts within the University and across Punjab is extremely important"

"We must use the lens of mutuality while judging and gauging the relevance of community engagement practices"

"Pressure needs to be developed on the competent authorities, only then is attention paid to the demands and needs"

"The significance of linking the core work of Higher Education to the larger socio economic development of the society needs to be propagated at all level (including the government framework, and not only within the colleges and the departments. It is only then that the government will be able to make demands on the universities, for implementation of the activities in a meaningful way. This linkage building can be enables by providing interaction opportunities between the marginalized and the endowed institutions like the Universities."

Dr Tandon appreciated the experiences, good examples, challenges and problems faced by the participants in their respective spheres. Summing up the way ahead for the dialogue, he put forth the following points:

- *Importance of mapping f current engaged efforts*

Drawing from the points that emerged from the PU survey on community engagement, it was essential to map the existential practices with respect to community based research within the university. This mapping needs to be done for the whole of Punjab.

- *Importance of ensuring mutuality of benefits*

It was important to ensure the mutuality of benefits which are construes, as a result of community engagement activities, which alone can ensure its success and sustainability. The good practices could then be documented and used where applicable.

- *Integration of community engagement into the academic curriculum*

Efforts were needed in order to explore the integration opportunities of community engagement within the academic curriculum of the colleges. This will not only help promote the agenda, but also benefit the students, by way of giving them an opportunity to earn academic credits.

- *Incorporation of community based research methodology in the research curriculum*

Just like many other universities, who have a component of community based research methodology integrated into the module on Participatory Research (PR), PU can follow a similar practice, in order to promote local indigenous knowledge. As the head of ICSSR, Dr Ronki Ram can take the initiative to organize community based research projects for young faculty members. Such projects could also be taken further in the form of a separate module. Such efforts can play a big role in promoting the integration of local knowledge into the academic expertise.

- *Initiatives undertaken at the Governmental Policy level*

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The Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), the Planning Commission (PC) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) are on the verge of formulating a scheme, in order to promote community engagement efforts. This scheme has 3 components embedded in it. They are:

i)   *System of incentivizing joint research*

The universities, in collaboration with the community (panchayats, NGOs, municipalities) are encouraged to jointly put forth a research proposal in order to study a particular problem. It may be related to any local issues, such as water and sanitation, or school drop outs, etc.

ii)   *Incentive for student practicals*

The students would be encouraged to get associated with a community based organization (CBO) for a semester, and their work could be awarded with credits, which can help them satisfy their degree requirements.

iii)   *Business of sharing knowledge*

Knowledge sharing is now awarded with a great degree of importance. An example in this regard can be the National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE), who supports community engagement initiatives and thus has an enormous amount of positive impact on operationalization of activities. Similar efforts in India are encouraged by the policy makers and planners.

Therefore, there was a need for PU to make a demand to the UGC/MHRD/PC, in relation to their planned activities, vision and schemes. A proper report should reach the competent authorities about the plan of action, and the necessary steps to be taken.