

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

***North Bengal University (NBU), Siliguri***

***3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> of March' 2014***

**RELEVANCE/RATIONALE OF THE DIALOGUE**

***PRIA's perspective:***

**Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair**

*“This dialogue is an initiative to bring together practitioners and researchers on a common platform.”*

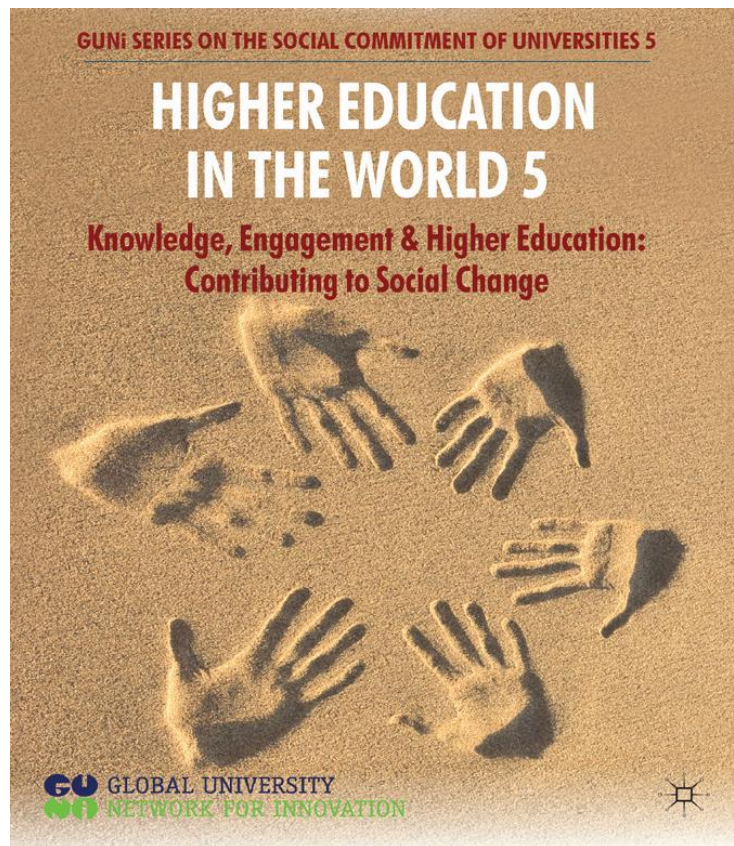
*“Knowledge is power, which is the essence of participatory research, gives value to the fact that knowledge resides in the life of the people, as much as it does in academia. Therefore, knowledge from the practice of life is as important and valuable as the knowledge shared in the structures of HEIs. This is now evident, as the people's traditional knowledge in healthcare is now being recognized as holistic knowledge elsewhere and the traditional tulsi tree is being acclaimed as the source of ecological health.”*

*“PRIA has made an attempt to establish organic linkages between knowledge of people, derived from practice, and that from research, and has been ensuring that both derive mutually re-inforcing benefits, out of this relationship.”*

*“UNESCO Higher Education Declaration of the Paris Conference in July' 2009 talks about the relevance of higher education in the societal agenda of sustainability and wellbeing.”*

*“UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education is not promoting a prescription, but an explanation, through which it seeks all colleges to discover their own respective arenas of engagement.”*

Introducing the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility, Dr Tandon began his address by explaining the ideal/rationale of the chair. He also shared information about the international networks working under this umbrella, one of them being the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNI), a network of about 8000 universities across the world, which has recently produced a book, which is titled *“Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to social change”*. The theme of the book is focused on bringing back the HEIs into the centre of social change.



Picture 1: GUNi World Report on Higher Education  
(<http://us.macmillan.com/book.aspx?isbn=9780230535565> )

Other ideas and reflections shared by Dr Tandon are:

- The present time is witnessing enormous expansion and massification of education, which is bringing such students into the HEIs, who belong to diverse communities, such as the minorities, SCs/STs, indigenous, etc. who are having slightly different aspiration than elites.
- Less than 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of the graduates today, are considered as employable, despite a large number of them obtaining attractive degrees from the university.
- Today the education institutions are faced with both, challenges and opportunities. Challenges are in the form of issues such as growing inequality, problems of migration, urbanization, health, sanitation, access to drinking water, etc. Opportunities are in the form of increasing demand from the society at large, and the availability of a wide number of options for both the students and the researchers. The HEIs in such a scenario can address the problems of the society, which is in a churning phase, if it can engage with it in a meaningful way.
- Certain principles of engagement are:
  - i) Mutually agreed interests and needs of both the community and the institution be articulated and respected. A relation of mutual respect needed to be established.

- ii) Engagement must encompass all the three functions of the institutions of higher education, teaching, research and outreach/practice.
- iii) Institutional engagement must cut across disciplines and faculties and must include the natural sciences, and not be restricted to the social sciences and humanities alone.
- iv) Participation in community engagement projects by students should earn them credits and partially meet their graduation requirements, along with being integrated into their evaluation systems.



*Picture 2: Dr Rajesh Tandon, briefing the audience about the essence of ‘community engagement in HEIs.’*

**British Council’s perspective**

**Ms. Lynne Heslop**

*“The British Council is about the cultural relations between the India and the UK, and looks for knowledge synergy between the two.”*

*“Exchange of knowledge and expertise are important and mutually beneficial issues today, which also provides with a chance to share ideas in important areas.”*

*“From among the variety of work done by the British Council, 70% of its efforts are focused towards the education sector, which is one of the strategic work areas for the council in India. In the higher education, the council facilitates policy dialogues, university-university partnerships in areas of mutual benefit.”*

*“The British Council feels that the future of higher education needs to be closely linked in both the countries.”*

Speaking about the British Council's portfolio in higher education and how it can be of better service to the two countries, Ms. Heslop shared three main ideas. They were:

- There should be researcher connection between the two countries. This can be done by way of swap of researcher's, by which they can travel to the partner country and learn from practical experiences.
- It is important to now focus on multi and inter-disciplinary research, integrating the disciplines of humanities, social sciences and arts, along with that of sciences, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- The collaboration should not only be limited to research, but must also extend to the teaching fraternity in the India and the UK.



Picture 3: Ms. Lynne Heslop, sharing the British Council's portfolio in higher education.

### **Key note Address**

**Dr Samir Kumar Das, University of Calcutta (Former VC, NBU)**

*"Today, our higher education system is dis-embedded from the society, as a result of past efforts to deliberately quarantine the university from the society around it, and segregate it from the latter's corrupt practices, and re-establishing this relationship will not be an easy task."*

*"Much of what I propose to argue is that while the necessity of strengthening community engagements and restoring university-community ties can hardly be doubted, there is also the*

*need for reviewing the strategies that we seem to have employed and employ in order to strengthen such engagements particularly in the new millennium.”*

*“The community today, is not an object, but a subject of knowledge. However, unfortunately, the traditional knowledge residing in the community is not considered as knowledge.”*

*“More than persuading the regulatory and accrediting bodies, it is important that there is enough ‘political will’ in favour of treating the albeit unconventional Universities with strong community ties at par with the multi-starred universities with potential for excellence – a political will that should be strong enough to force regulatory bodies to recalibrate their scale before they go on to accredit and assess the Universities.”*

*“Many of our Universities continue to be involved in such activities as national service, community work, extension, outreach and so forth. However, it is more of uni-directional flow, as we in our arrogance, refuse to learn from the society. The knowledge we acquire inside our laboratories gives us the power to speak for the society.”*

*“Community engagement is as much engagement ‘with’ the community, as it is ‘of the community.”*

*“Satisfaction of job markets, by way of suitably designed courses and those with a touch of social relevance are parallel trajectories within the University.”*

*“We need the society to transform in order that our initiatives in higher education can bear fruit.”*

As he delivered the keynote address, Dr Das shared some key ideas and pointers that depicted the state of community engagement in HEIs today. He also brought to the attention of the participants, the challenges, along with giving his ideas on ways forwards. Some of his sharing’s are as follows:

- The idea of community engagement in HEIs is not a new or an alien concept in India. The traditional ideals of the University education in India needed to be re-visited, taking cue from the writings of Tagore and Gandhi.
- There was a need to build bridges between the university and the society, which have remained quarantined from each other for a long time. This called for a review of strategies and new perspective towards education.
- Taking cue from the UNESCO report which calls for a paradigmatic shift in the education system, new mechanisms need to be devised, through which the universities can achieve their role, and function in the larger good of the society.
- Strong political will was desired to coerce the regulatory bodies, to fix appropriate accreditation criteria for the universities, which would be inclusive of the perspective of community engagement.
- In the last few years, there has been a strong emergence of private players in the higher education system. However, it has been seen that they are not very keen to support the kind of knowledge generation through community engagement. This results in funding

issues for carrying out various interventions under this agenda, as the colleges and the universities are only left with government funding in this regard.

- The NGOs too have been reluctant in funding community engagement initiatives. This perspective needed to be changed.
- Local and indigenous knowledge, although possessing enormous amount of social relevance, are not considered at par with the university degrees, but is accorded with awards and degrees that are hardly graded at par with other university degrees and honours. This to cite an instance, the importance of running a course on Peace and Conflict Studies can hardly be doubted in a region like India's Northeast, while several such programmes had to be shut down on the ground that students having their postgraduate degree in such studies find it difficult to make entry into the job market.
- The absence of market demand for such activities is a huge hurdle in carrying forward the agenda of community engagement, through the universities.
- There is a need for more intentional relation building with the community partners.
- A partnership between the Universities, NGOs and the private sector needs to be forged that cuts across communities, cultures and nations.



*Picture 4: Dr Samir Kumar Das, delivering the keynote address.*

## ***PLENARY SESSION I***

### ***Trends in North Bengal & Current Practices***

***Dr M Bose, NBU***

Dr Bose started his address by displaying the results of the survey undertaken in NBU, to explore community engagement in its constituent colleges. However, the results that emerged were not very heartening. It was found that community engagement, per se, in NBU is perceived as only the programs undertaken by the NSS units, by way of various health camps, training programs, awareness programs, etc. The essence of the theme, i.e. engagement from the side of the community, with they being active givers in the process, rather than passive receivers, was completely missing. More so, there was a touch of philanthropy and social service attached to the whole process, rather than viewing it as meaningful engagement, aimed at mutual benefits.

However, a point worth noting here was that the scenario in the hill colleges of Darjeeling was much better, as in, they exhibited much better engagement activities with the students, along with having students who enjoyed doing the work, and also a community which was much more receptive and engaging as compared to that in plains of north Bengal. In addition, the Christian or the missionary colleges, performed much better in this regard, as compared to others. They engaged with the community by way of various interventions, aimed at empowering them, and have also come out successful in their initiatives. A stand-out example in this regard was the St Xavier's College, which had been transforming lives, in the neighboring *Ramjhora* tea garden, and *Titlidangi* village.

Along with sharing the survey results, Dr Bose also gave a presentation on the extension and outreach activities undertaken by the Department of Lifelong Learning & Education, in the area of community engagement. The various initiatives of the department have been:

- Action research projects, such as that on reproductive and child health in rural areas of Siliguri division; changing status among SC/ST and muslim women in the terrain region; Sex education for rural adolescents, etc.
- Workshops on mushroom cultivation, adolescent health care, folk media, population education, etc.
- Training courses on marketing, IT; Certificate Course on life skill education, etc.
- Other adjunct activities in the areas of rural consultancy, rural extension, health education, etc.

He concluded by saying that *“NBU, by way of various interventional programs, combines research, extension and rural outreach, giving the University, a multi-disciplinary role in meeting regional developmental needs, and is also well placed as a facilitator for collaborative rural development schemes.”*



Picture 5: Dr Bose, sharing the survey results

**Dr Afzal Hossain, Sitalkuchi College, Coochbehar**

*“India has the third largest higher education framework, next only to China and USA, with equally high number of student enrolment. Unfortunately, today, they are just carrying forward the curricula and are no longer the ‘degree earning institutions’*

*“Community engagement in the colleges in North Bengal, at the present, revolves around the programs entailed by the University or the UGC in the form of NSS activities. It comprises the mainstay of engagement.”*

Dr Hossain described the district of Cooch Behar in North Bengal as one of the poorest in the state. Along with this, he also shared certain pointers, which restricts the scope of the colleges to effectively engage in community engagement. They are:

- Shortage of physical/human resources.
- Shortage of faculty
- Negative effect of student politics
- Normal routine of the college

However, Dr Hossain also put forth certain suggestions to overcome the barriers and move forward in the process. They were:



- Student must be used as the ‘Community dialogue initiators’. This called for a change in the academic course curriculum, along with imparting such work due credits.
- In the process of community engagement, mechanisms of direct benefit to the community must be built, pertaining to their skill/capacity development, etc.
- There must be a provision of a common platform within the University, wherein the colleges can share their ideas, with respect to the modalities and the design of the community engagement process.



*Picture 6: Dr Afzal Hossain, sharing his ideas on the status of community engagement in North Bengal Colleges.*

***Dr Hadida Yasmin, St Xavier’s College, Jalpaigudi***

*“A college is a storehouse of resources and personnel which can contribute significantly towards the educational and skill development aspirations of the poorer sections who cannot aspire or afford such an education.”*

As the co-ordinator of the community college section of the college, Dr Yasmin quoted its vision as being ‘of the community, for the community, and by the community’, in order to give responsible citizens to the society. The community college section in St Xavier’s College was a stand-out example among the North Bengal Colleges, and doing commendable job in promoting social outreach of the college and playing a role in betterment of the society. The objectives of

the community college are to motivate the students of the vernacular medium to take up skill training programs and spoken English programs. Another point worth mentioning here is that the community college is situated in the same campus, thereby providing the students with the opportunity to use the college resources and expertise from the faculty. Apart from the community college initiative, other dimensions whereby the college engages with the community include *village extension programs, departmental projects, and social awareness programs*. The detailed interventions carried out under the separate heads are as follows:

- Community College Programs

This includes computer training programs, spoken English with life skill programs, tailoring and embroidery courses, etc.

- Social Outreach programs

This includes empowering illiterate women through literacy and providing them with various job skills and ensuring that the children complete their education, along with conducting evening classes for them. The college also supported the formation of small self-help groups, who could earn a sustainable living for themselves.

- Departmental Projects

This included projects such as impact of mass media on rural society, role of panchayats/rural women, conducted by the department of sociology and a study on chronicling local myths and folklores, conducted by the department of English.

- Village extension programs

This was primarily done through the channel of NSS unit, wherein various interventions were carried out in an 'adopted village'. For example, village Kheripara.



*Picture 7: Dr Hadida Yasmin, giving a presentation on the initiatives undertaken by St Xavier's College in the area of community empowerment.*

## ***PLENARY SESSION II***

### ***Forms & Structures of Community Engagement***

***Dr Michael Osborne, Chair & Professor, University of Glasgow***

*Theme: Principles & Forms of Community Engagement*

*“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 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 4<sup>th</sup> 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 PASCAL 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.



*Picture 8: Dr Michael Osborne, addressing the participants*

***Smt Nandini Kajuri, Director, State Resource Centre (SRC), West Bengal***

Smt Kajuri, as the Director, SRC and member of the executive board of the NIOS, shared the initiatives undertaken by the government towards promotion of literacy and adult education. Such initiatives were primarily aimed at benefitting those disadvantaged groups, who could never dream of entering a college or a university, and were described as being ‘unreached’. Some

of them were *the National Literacy Mission, Total Literacy Campaign, Post Literacy Programme and the Continuing Education Programme*. Under these schemes, the Universities were encouraged to conduct motivational campaigns, literacy classes, innovative programs for the neo-literates.

Apart from these, the overall policy of the Government aimed at empowerment of women and giving due recognition to the fact that female literacy is a pre requisite to socio-economic development, the National Literacy Mission was re-introduced as the *Saakshar Bharat Abhiyaan*. Its aim was to establish a fully literate society through improved quality and standard of adult education and literacy. Its overall objectives included achieving access, equity, quality, along with policy level reforms, through literacy, equivalency, skill development and continuing education programs. NLM envisages that the University and the Social Service Research Institutes encourage their researchers to work on different aspects of adult education. Along with this, the State Resource Centres are advised by NLMA to tie-up with the Universities mainly for conducting capacity building programme, research and outreach activities.

The State Resource Centre (West Bengal) has had a decade long experience in undertaking collaborative programme with the North Bengal University. Some of them are, organising health check-up camps , identifying the common diseases of the area and reporting the same to the Health Department, Action research project on women empowerment, evaluation of literacy programmes in different districts, workshop with self-help groups, etc.

Smt Kajuri, apart from detailing the initiatives from the side of the government, also laid down certain expectations which the latter had from the universities. They were:

- Identifying Adult Education Centres (AECs) where short duration courses on vocational skills/life skills can be offered to the disadvantaged groups.
- Outreach activities can be arranged through AECs to make the community aware of their rights and responsibilities, specially on Right to Education, Right to Information, Legal Rights and Entitlements.
- Preparation of ICT based teaching-learning programme for neo-literates.
- Motivating senior students & educated youth in the villages to play the role of teachers for the campaign.



Picture 9: Smt Nandini Kajuri giving a presentation on “Literacy initiatives undertaken to reach the unreached”

**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.
- Bugged 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 activity. 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 10: Dr Emma McKenna explaining the concept of 'Science Shops'

**Dr Soumitra De, NBU**

*“Although there is some sensitization on the idea of community engagement today, it is incomplete and also not conceptualized.”*

*“Unfortunately, in India, today, the emphasis given to project based learning is weak, as compared to the Science Shop model practiced in the UK.”*

*“The University is not a static structure, it develops dynamically. The condition/power/wealth of a country shapes its universities.”*

*“Today, we need to have a mission for community engagement in HEIs, by way of networking between different universities, and led by an organization like PRIA or the British Council.”*

Dr De said that in order to internalize and practice community engagement, HEIs will have to promote certain kinds of 'engagement'. They are:

1. *Scholarship of discovery*, pertaining to the traditional idea of research.
2. *Scholarship of integration*, pertaining to linking the disciplines, thereby promoting interdisciplinary research.
3. *Scholarship of teaching*, pertaining to validation of skills, so that learning can be done together and students be encouraged to play the role of teachers themselves.

Dr De also spoke of challenges that pose hurdles in the way of practicing and promoting community engagement in HEIs today. They were:

- Since the universities today, needed to satisfy the markets, it is forced to follow the latter's dictates. This is in total contrast to the traditional universities of Nalanda, Taxila, who had loads of indigenous knowledge, along with having total autonomy. Therefore, their functioning was totally self-sufficient, and was engaged in practices such as adopting villages and engaging with the community in a much better way.
- Today, the relationship between the students and the teachers is strained, and there is considerable distance between the two. This comes in the way of smooth handling of plans and schemes.
- Autonomous disciplines, with almost nil integration between them also restrict ideas.
- Absence of innovation and incentives results in the development of a lethargic attitude towards community engagement.
- The presence of rigid, mindless and more rules than needed, in the university system, considerably restrict the possibilities.



*Picture 11: Prof Soumitra De sharing his reflections*

***Dr Biswanath Chakrabaty, Rabindra Bharti University, Kolkata***

*“Our educational institutions are very much engaged with community life and involved in different community activities.”*

*“Since independence, we are always approaching community engagement from an institutional point of view, why do we not focus on what the society can do to the University?”*

*“It is true that the university is involved in different types of community activity, however, there is a lack of integrity, spontaneity from their side. Although they are involved through their curricula and extension activities, but the efforts have been discontinued, sporadic and fragmented.”*

Dr Chakrabarty shared an important point of less emphasis being given to the community’s side of engagement, by quoting the *Zakaria Commission* report, which emphasizes on the role of universities/colleges, but not on the role of community or other agencies towards the university or university education. His other observations, with respect to engagement between the society in general and the community in particular are:

- Differential participation of the community, with respect to discrimination and hierarchies based on caste, class, religion, etc.
- Erratic funding patterns, often constrain the effective functioning of plans and programs.
- The point on the ‘democracy’ of the governing bodies in the universities, being a debatable one, again puts restrictions in the way of putting theoretical principles of community engagement into practice.

Dr Chakrabarty emphasized on the role of local self-governments, being directly responsible to the people, in taking the agenda forward, and also in enabling the communities to come forward, rather than the universities approaching them. As regards the possible solutions to the challenges at the higher policy level, he put forth certain pointers. They are:

- Need to change the old and traditional mind set up of the state level functionaries, as also the university functionaries.
- Need to evolve a nodal autonomous co-ordinating agency at the district level (such as the District Planning Committees, as envisaged under Article 243-ZD)
- Need to develop an alliance for achieving community engagement in HEIs. Such alliance should not only be targeted towards the NGOs, but also the market agents, both domestic and international.



*Picture 12: Dr Biswanath Chakrabarty giving his presentation on ‘Community Engagement in HEIs: Challenges in practice- The West Bengal Experience’.*

***Comments from Chair: Dr Samir Kumar Das, Former VC, NBU***

*“After independence, there have been a series of HEIs in West Bengal, with the objective of accomplishing synergy between HEIs and the community.”*

*“It is important to appreciate that the community is not unproblematic. Therefore, we have to focus on not only the engagement of the community, but with the community.”*

Concluding the session, Dr Das put forth the following remarks:

- Community empowerment is a pre-condition for community engagement. Therefore, the community needs to be invested with such powers so that they can articulate effective demands on the higher education system.
- Attention needs to be paid on the reasons of dissipation of the good initiatives that were characteristic of the premier ancient universities, such as the Nalanda and the Taxila. Efforts need to be channelized in the direction of reviving those traditions and initiatives.



Picture 13: The chair for the session, Dr Samir Kumar Das, sharing his thoughts.

### ***Panel Discussion on Forms & Structures of Community Engagement***

***Dr Sheikh Rahim Mandal, NBU***

*“Education should be catering to social needs.”*

*“A relation between the HEIs, community and agencies such as the government, civil society and NGOs needs to be established, or else, it is impossible to achieve engagement. Ways and means to provide this linkage must be explored.”*

Dr Mandal started his note by providing his ideas on key terms. As regards community, he described them as being rural, urban, ethnic, linguistic, caste, village community etc. Regarding engagement, he emphasized that it was important to see as to who was engaging with whom, and to what degree. Higher education also needed to be understood properly, as it was seen differently by different people, such as that pertaining from post-secondary education to the doctoral level, or did it entail the education prior to that. Therefore, he said that *‘It was necessary to understand the basics of community engagement in HEIs, before embarking on the process.’*

As regards the challenges faced in the present scenario, he shared some of them as being:

- Globalization of markets

Today, only those courses were taught in Universities, which had a market. Therefore, the knowledge which is being gained is merely for profession, and not for wisdom. However, in the pursuit of gaining market oriented knowledge, the necessities and the responsibilities of the academia towards the society remain unfulfilled.

- Privatization of academic institutions

The private academic institutions, being driven primarily by profit motive, do not view community engagement as a profitable venture and therefore, often disregard its value towards the empowerment and betterment of the society.

- Resource Sharing

Unequal resource sharing also constrains the agenda of carrying forward the process of community engagement.

Dr Mandal, also put forth certain suggestions as the way ahead which could help achieve the idea. Some of them are:

- The courses need to be redesigned in order to incorporate the element of community engagement, along with giving the latter due recognition by awarding it academic credits.
- Interventions needed to be brought out of the laboratory into the field. Accordingly, classroom teaching should be appropriately substituted with grassroot field work.
- Although being in a global knowledge era, attention needs to be paid to linking it with the traditional knowledge, which was now finding acceptance, on a broader scale in sectors like disaster management/ecosystem management.

***Dr Chinmayakar Das, AC College, Jalpaigudi***

*“Who are the people who are ordained with the capability to think about what is good or bad for the community? It is the public intellectuals like us. Through our knowledge and experience, we can have tremendous impact on the lives of the people.”*

*“As a result of discrepancy between theory and practice, the picture of community engagement in HEIs is gloomy. Also, one of the main the main reasons behind the anomaly in practicing community engagement is the low emotional quotient in the people.”*

*“Being encouraged through this dialogue on community engagement, I pledge to work in three areas, where I would seek such engagement between the community and the universities. They are, Sanitation, Solid Waste Management, Urban Forestry and Water Conservation.”*

Narrating his practical experiences in AC College, Dr Das shared that,

- The student incentive for participating in such programs was minimal.

- The teachers too only wanted to be engaged in such activities, which could facilitate their promotion, rather than engaging in work of social relevance.
- Although every college had an institutional mechanism, called the Internal Quality Assessment Cell (IQAC), which mandated the participation of 1-2 members from the community, this provision was not adhered to, and the corresponding positions remained vacant.
- Documentation with respect to whatever activities that had been undertaken was also very poor. As a result, there was almost no record kept of the interventions undertaken.

Therefore, he concluded by advocating for making community engagement a compulsory activity within the academic curricula. Along with this, he added that this engagement must be ‘*reciprocal*’ in the true sense of the word, only then the desired objective can be achieved.

***Ms. Anwesha Mazumdar, CINI, Kolkata***

*“We are looking to create a sustainable model where each community becomes self-sufficient when it comes to improving the standard of education at the grassroots level. We believe that leveraging the educated youth in underprivileged communities is a critical step in not just building community engagement but also creating a more powerful network of learners and teachers.”*

*“Protection of a community cannot be ensured without education. Cases of child trafficking, children in conflict with law all results due to drop out rate, lack of access to higher education, less options/ opportunities available to community people.”*

Ms. Mazumdar focussed on certain functional areas of deficit, and provided certain key way forwards which could help achieve our objectives. She pointed out that:

- The high unemployment rates reflect, at least partly, the mismatches between skills demand and supply.
- Employment strategies in India needed to prioritize youth employment issues.
- Sustainable development could be achieved if quality education is provided to the youth and the community, thereby empowering them.

As regards some of the existing mechanisms to empower the community, Ms Mazumdar mentioned about the *Integrated Child Protection Scheme (ICPS)*. It is mandated to provide a safe and secure environment for overall development of the children, contribute to well-being of children in difficult circumstances, and reduce vulnerabilities to situation and actions that lead to abuse, neglect etc. For this, every village shall have child protection committee, under the chairmanship of the local representative. In this, the community collaboration was sought to build a sustainable model, increase scope for employment, provide access to higher education, and create community leaders.

Concluding her note, she outlined the role of CINI as being a facilitator, in guiding the communities towards development and empowerment. However, she clarified that that



although CINI played a big role in supporting the community by way of providing assistance and infrastructure, it was the community who worked for themselves to attain self-sustenance.

***Comments from the Chair: Ms. Lynne Heslop, British Council***

Ms. Heslop provided her concluding remarks in the form of two pointers:

- It was necessary to ensure the reciprocal nature of the engagement, and that is its mutually beneficial for both the community and the university.
- Community knowledge and university knowledge should be integrated in a way by which both of them exist side by side, without super-imposing on the other.



*Picture 14: Panel discussion, Ms. Anwasha Mazumdar, Dr Chinmayar Das, Ms. Lynne Heslop (Chair) and Dr Sheikh Rahim Mandal (left to right)*

***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.

The students were chosen as representatives of the respective groups, who put forth their reflections as follows:

- Every individual should participate to further the agenda of community engagement. The ideas generated at events such as this dialogue must be disseminated to one and all, in order to share and promote the knowledge and help achieve the engagement that is desired.
- Individuals should also come up with new and innovative ideas, to improve on the existent scheme of things.
- The process of community engagement should start more early in the education system, and involve students from the elementary level as well. This will not only help students get an early exposure to the idea but will also allow the process to get an early integration into the education system. Along with this, the quality of education at the elementary level should be improved. New methods of teaching must be experimented with.
- Privatization of education was affecting the standard and quality of education in India. As evident from examples from abroad, like Chile, where privatization negatively impacted education, India should look to not replicate such a model.
- The students should go to the community with the knowledge that they gain in the college premises, in order to help the people claim their rights and entitlements.
- Students often undertake survey work as part of their project work, in their curriculum. However, they are of not much impact or worth. Therefore, ways should be explored by which such surveys can be made more effective.
- The scheme of engaging with the community should not be approached in a philanthropic manner. The process needs to internalize the idea of gaining their engagement, as much as we look to engage ourselves.
- The idea of making community engagement compulsory in the academia must be explored.
- The spirit of community engagement, its value and worth should be properly disseminated among students, so that they are encouraged and inspired to be part of the process.
- The schemes which are envisioned for the communities, often fail because of the lofty objectives and the attitude of the policy makers. Therefore, the leaders must proclaim more responsibility and show practicality while designing various schemes.
- A process like this cannot be successful by the efforts of a lone stakeholder. All concerned department and personnel need to contribute to make it accepted and practiced country wide.



Picture 15: Students presenting the views from the respective groups, Ms. Lynne Heslop (extreme right), Session Chair.

### **PLENARY SESSION III**

#### ***Policy Implications***

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

***Theme: International perspective on policies surrounding community engagement (UK)***

*“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 16: Panelists for the session on ‘Policy Implications’. Dr Ranadhir Chakrabarty, NBU; Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair, Dr Jennifer Chambers, RCUK; Dr Ranjita Chakrabarty, NBU (left to right)*

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 conducted. 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 have 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 draw 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 were 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 were diverted, incorporating the concerns, rather than stream rolling into a completely exclusive direction.
- People need to be encouraged to 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 played 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.

***Dr Ranadhir Chakrabarty, NBU***

*“One of the major challenges faced by our universities today is the establishment of an appropriate balance between intellectual rigour and respect for experience. However, the increasing interest in community engagement at the highest levels of our universities is evidence that our universities have indeed awakened and are recognizing community engagement as being vital in the education system.”*

Dr Chakrabarty, as the head of the department of biotechnology put forth the perspective of the University and his own reflection, with respect to community engagement. As certain pre-requisites for community engagement, he laid down the following points:

- University should have open channels of communication allowing contact with the communities
- Institution should use team for solving community problems to yield creative solution.
- Decentralized organization structure with loosely defined positions and loose controls are more creative.
- Freedom to discuss ideas and long-term vision of an Institution is conducive to promotion of creativity in Community Engagement Programmes (CEP)
- CEPs are made creative when resources are allocated to creative projects without caring for immediate payoff.

Dr Chakrabarty also emphasized on certain key criterions to be kept in mind while selecting a CEP. They were:

- A CEP should be selected so as to enable community to utilize the skills.
- To enable the use of locally available raw materials for products or service
- To help members make products that have a demand, but are not freely available
- To enable use of any technical know-how the members are familiar with.

- To enable the community members to solve a current problem that brings tangible benefit

Using the example of the Centre of Floriculture and Agri Business Management (COFAM) at NBU, Dr Chakrabarty shared with the participants how the process of community engagement is integrated into the structure and design of the unit. COFAM is mandated to provide hands-on practical training to the growers/entrepreneurs on various aspects of floriculture, produce disease free quality planting material by tissue culture, and establish linkage between growers and buyers. Through various initiatives, the COFAM unit at NBU was engaging with the nearby communities, in order to strengthen their capacities in the field of floriculture and agriculture. It also sought to use their knowledge and expertise in the plantation of different types of crop varieties. The unit then also supported the community by helping them find a market for their products and earn a sustainable living in the process.



*Picture 17: Dr Ranadhir Chakrabarty, deliberating on ‘Challenges in Practice’*

***Dr Ranjita Chakrabarty, NBU***

*“Unfortunately, local knowledge was not regarded as ‘knowledge’ per se.”*

*“We cannot expect the community to come forward; we have to create channels to facilitate their contact with the University”*

*“If we can forge a partnership between the government and the community through the medium of NGOs, then this system can work excellently for the betterment of the people.”*

*“We may have many laws, but unless we have people accessing them, it is useless.”*

*“The ultimate objective should be to produce empowered individuals, and ways needs to be explored on how the HEIs can play the role of a catalyst in this regard.”*

Dr Chakrabarty put forth her reflections, not as a technical expert or an academician but by way of her multiple roles, such as a teacher, a field worker, part of the community, as a member of CBOs, etc. She shared the various challenges and problems faced by the community in the present scenario, such as those dealing with communication and livelihood issues. She detailed out the deplorable condition of the poor communities in the region of north Bengal, majority of whom were forced to live in miserable conditions. The lethargy of the governmental officials to take care of issues, aggravated the problems further.

However, she did acknowledge the role played by NGOs in the region, who looked to support such communities and improve their living. Other institutions such as the Legal Aid Centres (LACs) were also functioning with the objective to educate the people and help them claim their rights. However, they suffered in the absence of adequate manpower and resources. She added that *“It is here that the Universities can step in, and play a major role as facilitators and managers, thereby helping the community lead a dignified life.”*



*Picture 18: Dr Ranjita Chakrabarty sharing her reflections.*



### ***Comments from the Chair: Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair***

Concluding the session on 'Policy Implication', Dr Tandon put forth the following points:

- There was a need to create channels for communication, for which the universities needed to have in place a particular structure/mechanism, which can promote and facilitate the process of community engagement, and also for better outreach.
- The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education has been involved in conducting a global survey of such structures across the world.

### **WAYS FORWARD:**

#### ***Dr Yasin, Head, Department of Lifelong learning and Extension (DLLE), NBU***

*"NBU is having a kind of mixed experience as far as community engagement practices are concerned. While the missionary colleges are doing excellent work in this field, the mainstream colleges paint a quite sordid picture in this regard. The reason for this may be the absence of single conditionality requirement for accreditation/UGC grants. Along with this, the absence of incentives for students/teachers for undertaking such activities, contributes to the poor state of affairs. However, some departments of NBU, like the department of biotechnology and the COFAM unit under Dr Ranadhir Chakrabarty are doing a laudable job through their extension activities."*

*"I am impressed by the dialogue that has taken place and I pledge that I would request the University authorities to rename the master's course in Rural Development run by the Department of Lifelong Learning and Extension as the Masters course in Community Engagement and Rural Development. The curriculum should be redesigned accordingly and the syllabi should include the aspect of community engagement"*

Other suggestions put forth by Dr Yasin are:

- *Need for follow ups to be ensured after the interventional activities*

As regards the Department of Lifelong learning and Extension at NBU was concerned, although it did engage the students in myriad of field activities such as awareness/training programs, its follow ups had been missing. Dr Yasin admitted to this weakness of the programmatic activities, as a result of which the impacts of the programs were not covered. Therefore, whatever work was being done, remained a one-way exercise; where although the community was approached, what they gained out of the interventions was not culled out.

- *Liasioning to be ensured between different agencies, structures and institutions*

There was a need for liasioning between different agencies and structures, spanning policy makers, target groups, intermediary institutions in order to promote community engagement practices.



Picture 19: Dr Yasin, sharing his reflections

**Father George**

*“One doesn’t exist in isolation in the society; its existence is very much connected to its neighbourhood”*

*“We have no policy framework to certify past experiences, despite being practiced by other countries in the world. If this is done, for example in NBU, then it will be able to provide a recognition and legitimacy to the knowledge of the age old practitioners of a particular profession”*

The suggestions he put forth are:

- *Envisaging teachers without borders*

As a part of the greater vision, we must strive to have teachers without borders, such professors who can go to the rural/tribal hinterlands with low literacy levels and provide them with quality education. The reality of our rural areas is that in the absence of good primary/secondary schools, the children are forced to discontinue their studies, and are therefore, termed as a ‘drop

out', in government records. It is for the sake of such children, that the teachers need to cross the boundaries and reach out to them.

- *Community radio to be used as a higher education tool*

The radio should be used to record and share the stories of the people in the community, in the voice of the students. Such engagement may seek help from the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting for technical and other support.

- *Providing certification to existential resources in the community*

If our higher education system can draw out experienced practitioners present within the community, create a curriculum accordingly and provide certification to their knowledge, then the existing resources can be tapped and indigenous knowledge utilized in the most efficient way.

- *Need for a policy framework to certify past experiences*

The National Skill Development Unit in our country today is functioning in a limited manner. This is evident from the fact that out of the 91% of the population working in the informal sector, only 9% of them are provided with any vocational/certification courses. Not only recognized professionals like the barbers, but even those like the drivers or plumbers need recognition to their knowledge. For example, if the managerial capability of a women vendor is recognized and provided certification, (such as a *Certificate in Inventory Management*) this can enable her to approach a bank and secure a loan for herself.

***Mr. Chandan Dutta, Development Consultant, Kolkata***

*“Drawing from Prof Soumitra De’s reflections on the ancient universities of Nalanda and Taxila, I would like to make a mention of Tagore’s institute, Biswa Bharti University, wherein there is an exception in the teacher’s qualifying criteria needed for the Sangeet Bhavan (Kala Bhavan). There is no requirement of a strict degree to get a teaching position in this department.”*

*“Those people who tried to create a positive difference from the community’s perspective must be made a part of the course curriculum”*

*“We should explore some kind of support from policy institutions like the UGC or the MHRD, in exploring ways and means to engage local colleges/local communities, local CSOs to do some work which really facilitates the involvement of the community”*

*“To have striking changes made at the policy level, we have to work hard for a very long time. There have been examples of practitioners like Bina Mazumdar who toiled hard for convincing the university authorities in creating positions for women. As a result of her efforts, today the Biswa Bharti University, Jadavpur University and others have a separate department/centre for women’s studies. Therefore, community engagement in higher education institutions may*

*get formalized in our education system after some years, but the work on it needs to start now.”*

As regards moving forward in this direction, he put forth the following suggestions:

- *Need to define the term “community”*

Although it is true that everybody in the society comes under the ambit of “community”, but we need to rationally define it in the present context. Along with this, we also need to critically analyze as who are the people who need special attention, like the SCs/STs/marginalized/deprived sections. Special attention needs to be paid to those sections who are kept bereft of various opportunities, due to different kinds of constraints.

- *Voluntary organizations to partner with different agencies to promote the agenda*

The importance of NGOs in this field cannot be underestimated. The universities should tap and utilize the experience of voluntary organizations of working with the deprived communities, and must work in alliance to further the agenda of community engagement. Therefore, here, along with the British council and the UNESCO Chair, the 3<sup>rd</sup> partner working alongside should be the voluntary organizations working in a particular area.

- *Efforts to change the syllabus of the courses taught in colleges/universities needs to be made*

Experiences of practitioners, like Bina Mazumdar and their positive experiences, should be documented, analyzed and be made a part of the university curriculum.

- *Reports and initiatives taken on engagement practices must be de-mystified and widely circulated*

There was a need to ensure that reporting on such good initiatives like the education dialogues must not be limited to the elite section of the society. Such documents needed to be converted to the local and widely used vernacular languages, such as Bengali, Hindi and Nepali (considering the large population of migrants working in the tea gardens in North Bengal). If we desired to involve the deprived communities, we need to demystify our information and circulate it widely.

- *Exchange of ideas to go down to the district level*

Exchange of information, ideas and experiences with respect to community engagement should also be done at the district level, and must involve enthused professionals who are in the look out of opportunities for working in this field.

***Father Cherian, Principal, St Xavier’s College, Jalpaigudi***

*“Any kind of community engagement has to be founded on certain convictions/principles. One of them is that, we as educators/institutions have a responsibility, not only to those who come*

*to our colleges as students enrolled in degree programs, but also to those residing outside the university/college premises, in the community”*

*“This kind of commitment is based on a sense of responsibility which should come from a highly evolved social conscience.”*

*“Once we have moral/social conscience and social responsibility, then engaging in such engagement practices becomes easier”*

*“Although being faced with resource crunch, if we manage to have committed personnel and staff working for a cause, then we can contribute enormously to a changed world.”*

Other points put forth by him are:

- *Movement of community education is the need of the hour*

Whatever actions we desire to undertake, be it community colleges, community engagement or such other community programs, it needs to be ensured that they are not planned in isolation in the principal’s offices, or between elite academics. All such efforts must be and should be based on people’s problems and the crisis they face in their day to day life. An example cited in this regard was the evening literacy program initiated for the children of the migrant labourers working in the neighbouring *Ramjhora* tea garden.

- *Community Colleges should be based on problems and perspectives of the community*

The idea and envisioning of community colleges must be based on the local perspectives and problems. Therefore, rather than top down, a bottom up philosophy must be used while laying down the principles of such initiatives.

- *Empowering women through literacy and training programs*

Citing the example of literacy programs aimed at educating the illiterate women working in tea gardens, Father Cherian said that women empowerment through provision of education is the most important. Once educated they can be trained in tailoring, embroidery work, and as a result of which they are made capable of earning a living and supporting their family.

### ***Ms. Lynne Heslop, British Council***

Sharing some of her experiences from her visit to Sri Lankan colleges, post the Tsunami devastation, she said that *“There was a sense of gloom all around, as the community sat devastated. As the Universities regularly interacted with the local community and held meetings, the community asked the university that how could they let this happen to them? How could they not know about this? The University held their head down in shame, and shock, and felt the pain of failing the trust the community had in them”*

*“Efforts needed to be directed towards development of a sense of a responsibility in the Universities, and a sense of expectation from the community’s perspective, because it is only through this manner, that the community and the university can be bonded together”*

*“One reason why the British Council is interested in working with communities and Universities is that this goes out to the heart of what the British Council believes, i.e, building trust and understanding between people from different parts of the world, both from a local and a global perspective.”*

Few other pointers put forth by Ms. Heslop are:

- *Opportunities for international collaboration between HEIs and communities*

There was a need to articulate and establish mutual benefits, not only between the communities and HEIs, but also explore the opportunities of international collaboration between the two, which can be hugely important and valuable.

- *Quality and expansion of higher education needs to be ensured and maintained*

Taking cue from the three pillars of higher education, as proposed in the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan, which are expansion, equity and excellence, it was important that the quality of higher education be maintained, along with expanding its access to all parts of the community. This was fundamental to the principle of *“University of Service”*.

- *Innovation and multidisciplinary required to be integrated into research*

As the hot topic of present times revolved around having new ideas to the problems never solved before, the international research community is trying to contribute to the idea in myriad of ways. These teams needed to be diverse, innovative and explore issues from different perspectives. Such efforts, coupled with multidisciplinary, provide the “ideal” perspective on community engagement, which holds importance, not only locally but also globally. Ms Heslop said that *“I hope that some ideas will work to bring the UK and Indian stakeholders together in a mutually benefitting manner.”*

### ***Chair’s Comments: Dr Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO Chair***

*“Building capacity in community based research, being more empathetic and linking the community needs to the research questions devised by the university are some of the means by which such engagement can take place”*

*“The solutions to the problems is embedded in multi-sectoral and cross linking partnership between various stakeholders, such as the community, university, CBOs, etc.”*

*“Is it possible that as a follow up to this conference, all the faculties of NBU comes together to look at the general possibilities of social responsibility in higher education, come up with 3-4*

*things that will work and a make a demand to other universities and the policy makers regarding the same?"*

*"Hope this engagement expands the space, HEIs have historically provided to new ways of thinking of buying conflicting parties together"*

Other suggestions put forth by Dr Tandon are:

- *Need for systematic mapping of the current situation*

There was a need to systematically map, record and analyse the present situation so that future efforts could be built on it.

- *Adoption of a broad approach to capacity enhancement*

As regards enhancement of capacities, a broader approach needs to be devised, incorporating diverse perspectives and different ideas.

- *Culture change to be brought about*

Reflecting on how the universities had segregated themselves from the community, and had remained incentivized to do so, Dr Tandon said that now, the opposite trends are in action, as their integration is being promoted. This would incorporate culture/mind change shifts in the people.

- *Need to evolve an empathetic attitude*

The university culture from the time in memorial has been only providing importance to its own research questions; in exclusion to the needs of the community and the ideas of the students. Therefore, it needs to be realized that the community was not only an object from where data was to be mined and reports produced, but, it has its own value systems and ideas which can be borrowed and built on, while researching a particular problem. Along with the community perspective, the students themselves are full of ideas and prejudices. Therefore, such multi-sectoral and cross linking partnership was essential, in finding answers to pressing problems.

- *Boundary of alienation between NGOs and Universities needed to be overcome*

Capacity enhancement of NGOs/CBOs/Panchayats/Municipalities/Line Departments/small business associations needs to be ensured, as they are important channels of facilitation of interventions/activities and have enormous experience of working with the community. Along with this, the boundaries of alienation/chism/divide between the NGOs and the universities need to be overcome. Dr Tandon quoted an example in this regard, by saying that *"Once PRIA facilitated the interface between university professors and young dalit women in Haryana, for whom places like universities was a distant dream. This proved to be life changing event for those young girls and today, as a result there are many young people coming to the university and seeking advice for a better future."*

- *Policy making to be contextualized as per the requirements/experiences of the region*

The adaptation and implementation of policies needs to be contextually determined. It is unfortunate that in our country, policies are often made in a rigid fashion, and the intended guidelines presume the role of permanent subscription. Along with this, they are more of a generic nature, and less of a prescriptive nature. Therefore, the universities were required to place a demand on the policy makers, to come up some actions that will work for the agenda of community engagement in the region, by providing some guiding pointers.

- *Essentiality of student engagement*

Dr Tandon lauded the vibrant participation of students in the dialogue and appreciated that the teachers and the students were reclaiming their roles within universities as quality research enthusiasts who looked forward to work on projects that are socially relevant.



*Picture 20: Panelists during the session on “Ways Forward” (Ms. Lynne Heslop, Father Cherian, Mr Chandan Dutta, Dr Rajesh Tandon (left to right))*