

Seminar on 'Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions'
Planning Commission, New Delhi
05th March' 2014

"My agenda is to mobilize my fraternity of NGOs, in this field of community engagement, along with ensuring the mutuality of the benefits of the work done, and its linkage with the core academic curriculum in the Universities." – Dr Rajesh Tandon, Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair on Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

On 5 March 2014, PRIA organized a seminar on "Community Engagement in Higher Education" at the Planning Commission in New Delhi. The event saw the participation of 10 universities across India, through video conferencing, who apart from participating in the deliberations also shared stories of community engagement which were being practiced in their respective institutions. Organizations such as PRADAAN, UNESCO and IRRAD also shared their experiences.



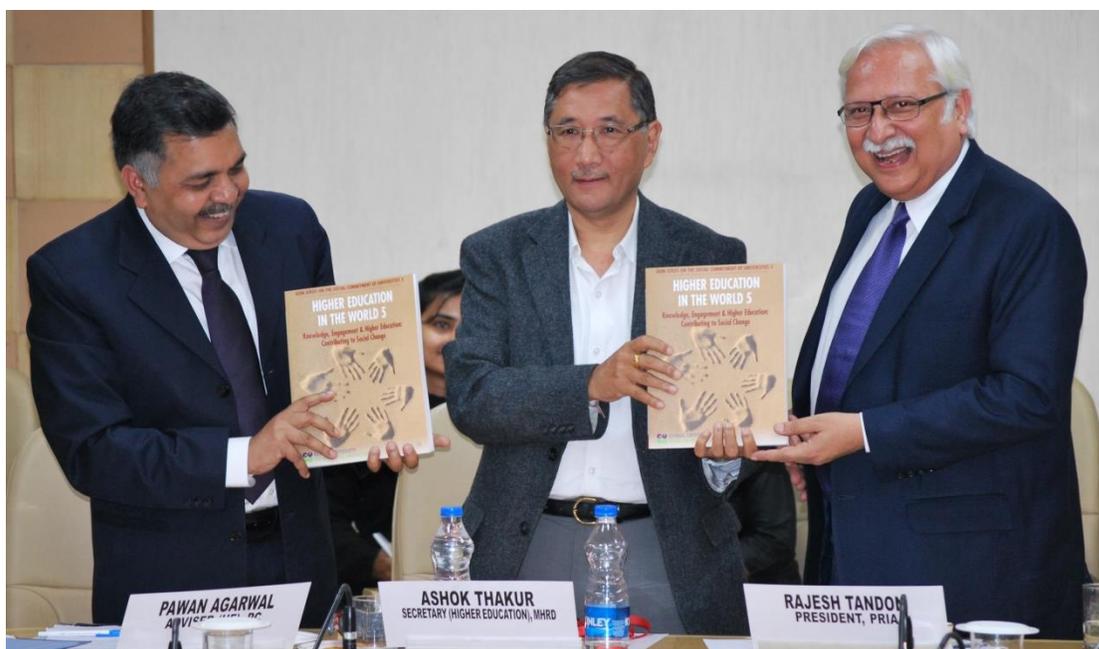
Delegates included Professor Michael Osborne, Chair of Adult & Lifelong Education (Social Justice Place and Lifelong Education); Dr. Emma McKenna from Queen's University, Belfast, specializing in Education and Skills Development; Dr. Jenni Chambers, Senior Policy Manager, RCUK Public Engagement with Research; Mr Pawan Agarwal, Advisor (Higher Education), Planning Commission; Dr. Pankaj Mittal, Vice-chancellor, Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya, Sonapat, Haryana; Mr Amit Khare, Joint Secretary, MHRD; and Mr Shigeruayagi, Director, UNESCO.



The event started with a welcome note by Mr Pawan Agarwal. Dr Rajesh Tandon, Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, set the stage for the deliberations by elaborating on the essence of the theme. Dr Tandon also introduced the GUNi World Report on Higher Education, *Knowledge, Engagement and Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change*.

Dr Osborne spoke about the role of PASCAL Observatory in promoting community engagement through various initiatives such as the PURE (PASCAL Universities Regional Engagement) project along with elaborating the economic, social, cultural and environmental forms of community engagement. Dr McKenna spoke about her role and the range of activities she undertook as the Science Shop Co-ordinator at Queen’s University’ Belfast. She elaborated on the ways in which the Science Shop sought to promote community engagement and community based research by employing students to undertake research in collaboration with communities. She also briefed the audience about the PERARES project, which looks at mechanisms to involve Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the European Commission in research processes. Dr Chambers explained how Research Councils, UK, promotes the cause of community engagement in higher education by ensuring that the research work which universities undertake has social relevance through two platforms – RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) and REF (Research Excellence Framework). She also emphasized how the “impact” of a particular project was given due recognition when being considered for funding, thereby promoting engagement opportunities. Dr Chambers also spoke about the NCCPE, which has been supporting universities in taking up engagement activities and opportunities.

At the end of the discussion, the GUNi report was released by Mr Ashok Thakur, Secretary, Higher Education, MHRD. In his address he emphasized the importance of integrating indigenous knowledge systems with the elitist knowledge in universities and applauded efforts which promoted community engagement. He highlighted the policy changes which help promote the cause of community engagement in India, for example, the special amendment to the IIT Act which mandated working for the community as an essential exercise by the students for earning credits. Along with this the government has also made mandatory community engagement as one of the defining criteria for accreditation of colleges/universities for academic ranking.



Participating universities: Avinashilingam University, Coimbatore • NIT, Surat • NITTTR, Bhopal • Central University, Himachal Pradesh • IARI, New Delhi • IISER, Pune • NIT, Trichy • IISER, Mohali • Dayalbagh Educational Institute • IIT, Patna.