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# University-Civil Society Relations:



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**Public Lecture by Dr Rajesh Tandon**  
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# Tracing the past

- Historically, equation between universities & civil society has not been the greatest
- Epistemological conflict between the two schools of thought (dominant mode of knowledge production & popular knowledge)
- Viewed human/social development via different lenses
- Community service learning programs served as the first point of contact between the two institutions



# Current scenario



- Today, the world is faced with crisis like never before
- Co-existence of social, economical, and political problems are posing crucial sustainability questions
- Achievement of SDGs calls for production of ‘new knowledge’; cutting across disciplines, institutions & perspectives
- Here, the partnership between universities as ‘knowledge producers’ & civil society as ‘practitioners’ assumes critical importance



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# Literature says

- *Through their contribution to social construction of knowledge, universities have the potential to solve complex problems..however, more important is their ability and willingness to question, to communicate, to draw on different forms of knowledge (GUNi HEIW 4, 2011)*
- *We need to reduce the time it takes to transfer new knowledge to society..and open up access to knowledge to ensure it is as useful as possible...this can be done by establishing relationships with civil society organizations, institutions, citizenry etc. (GUNi HEIW 3, 2008)*
- *Universities can re-assert their contributions to emerging agendas of human & social development through creative forms of civil engagements at local and global levels (Tandon, 2007)*



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# Social responsibility of universities

- Need to reconsider social relevance of universities, on local & global scales (GUNI HEIW 6)
- Universities to explore new form of civil engagements, to pursue its missions of teaching, research & service
- World of research to collaborate with world of practice; to ensure coming together of multiple epistemologies of knowledge



- This partnership has the potential to generate 'new knowledge' for sustainable development



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# Role of civil society

- Civil society, in its myriad manifestations, can help universities approach its missions in effective & meaningful ways
- Apart from service, there are emerging discourses on ‘engaged teaching/research’
- ‘Engaged stance’ opens up a plethora of opportunities for university-civil society partnerships
- Offers new meaning to ‘learning opportunities: learning to do/be/learn’



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# Challenges in the partnership

- Strict academic culture poses challenges to co-construction of knowledge with other civil actors
- Relative power/resource differentials between universities & civil society
- Differing approaches to research for solving human/social development problems
- Non-acceptance of action oriented Participatory Research as a valid mode of knowledge production



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# New forms of engagement

- Universities to redesign themselves to support lifelong learning; partner with civil society for curriculum design, etc.
- Invitation to experienced practitioners as professors inside the campus
- Civil society to commit towards contribution to university missions
- Engagement in knowledge production involves joint research projects with civil society actors
- Partnerships between universities & social campaigns by civil society actors can contribute to knowledge production
- Creation of an 'interface structure'; jointly managed by both



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