



WEBINAR

COMMUNITY BASED PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH AND THE PANDEMIC: TODAY AND TOMORROW

April 21-22, 2020

Organised by
UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social
Responsibility in Higher Education

UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education organised a two-part webinar series, titled, “Community Based Research and the Pandemic: Today and Tomorrow” on April 21-22, 2020 for the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium members.

During the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, the limits of western science and rationality as well as the significance of local innovations has been realised. Thus, moving forward, there is a need to mobilise different kinds of knowledge and learn new ways of living and organising our work, life and institutions.

Recognising the importance of creating a space to share experiences and ideas regarding how we move forward together, the K4C Consortium aims at continuing the conversation through its [online discussion forum](#).

Webinar-1

April 21, 2020

Moderated by Dr. Budd Hall & Ms. Suriani Dzulkifli

Prof. Irma Alicia Flores Hinojos
University of Los Andes
K4C Hub- Bogota, Colombia

The pandemic has affected the people not just physically but also emotionally. It has brought with it the feeling of uncertainty, fear and surprise. Describing the situation in Colombia, Prof. Hinojos shared how the assertive decisions taken by the government helped in controlling the situation within the country. While at present matters may be under control, she shared how the inequality and injustice gaps are evident in the country in terms of social security, access to education and connectivity.



Under this time of duress, the Colombia hub has tried to maintain contact with communities where their projects run. Furthermore, they have also been supporting communities near the universities by providing them with food and other essentials.

Change, according to Prof. Hinojos, needs to come through from both the micro and macro level. At an individual level, one needs to realise their role as a part of the community before taking any action and at a macro level, there is a need to understand the interdependence on one another. She shared that the importance of solidarity for the common good, justice and democracy needs to be recognised as we mobilise our brains and heart towards a new planetary consciousness- one which respects all lives on the planet.

As a consortium, Prof. Hinojos shared that having an exchange of ideas on how to face the pandemic collectively is important as it allows one to learn from each other and feel supported.

Prof. Andrea Vargiu
Università di Sassari
K4C Hub- Sassari, Italy

Prof. Vargiu shared how he believes that there is a lot to learn from current situation. One key realisation that has come through is that no one will be getting out of this pandemic alone. Thus, solidarity as a way to face the emergency is critical.

He stated that this pandemic has highlighted that science is not omniscient- it is unable to foresee how people will react. Thus, moving forward, there is need to respect and mobilise different kinds of knowledge.



As a K4C Hub, Prof. Vargiu shared that it took time to transition to 'working from home'. He emphasized on the existence of the section of society which does not have the instruments- both the capacity as well as the internet facility for this 'new normal' that the pandemic has forced upon all. Thus, finding alternate means of remaining connected, especially with the community, needs to be discovered. He shared how for him, the use of mobile phones has been the best way to communicate with the community partners.

During an emergency, people establish priorities. These primary needs are focused upon and engagement is usually seen as the "other". Prof. Vargiu stressed on the need to change this view. He stated that there is a need build on episodic engagement to pave way towards structural engagement.

Ms. Lesley Wood
Research Director, Community-Based Educational
Research, North-West University, South Africa
K4C Hub- North West, South Africa

Universities, Ms. Wood shared, are struggling to continue with their teaching and learning functions as they do not have the necessary technology. While ideas such as the provision of laptops to students has been put on the table, there is also the need to question whether the students have a conducive environment at home to enable online education. She also shared how the lockdown and its consequent shut down of universities has led to a start of a movement by the students, demanding that teaching and learning activities should be put on a hold until they can come back to the campus.



Ms. Wood shared how she believes that the divide between the middle/rich and the poor is starkly visible under the current circumstances. The rich have access to the necessities and are working from home while the others still have to face the daily struggle of making ends meet. Sharing some initiatives undertaken across the country to help those in need, Ms. Wood discussed how the government and other individuals have been making donations to funds & organising food parcels in order to help those in need.

Dr. Budd Hall
Professor Emeritus, University of Victoria
Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social
Responsibility in Higher Education

Dr. Hall stated that all of us are currently living in uncertain times and during this, it is important for us to come together. Sharing stories from different cultures and language groups & displaying solidarity is important during this pandemic.

He further elaborated on how the current circumstances highlights that science in its narrow sense and dependence on the principle of rationality is no longer sufficient to find the required solutions. Thus, it is critical for us to move beyond the same. One way of doing so is by enlarging the questioning community. As most of consortium members are '*products of the western knowledge system*', he discussed the need to include the community partners into future discussions such that a diverse opinion is achieved.



Ms. Suriani Dzulkifli
University of Victoria



Discussing the need to revisit the basics, Ms. Dzulkifli highlighted the need to ensure that essential requirements of the people are met during the pandemic before looking at solutions on the technological side. Furthermore, with the rise in the cases of anxiety, depression and gender-based violence, there is a need to focus on the self - to ensure that people feel safe and secure in their environment while the transitioning to the new normal of 'working from home'.

Webinar-2

April 22, 2020

Moderated by Dr. Rajesh Tandon & Ms. Nandita Bhatt

Dr. Rajesh Tandon
Founder-President PRIA
Co-Chair, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research & Social
Responsibility in Higher Education



The COVID-19 pandemic has affected regions across the world. With lockdowns initiated in several countries, educational institutions and organisations have adopted alternative ways to function during the present times whether it be through the online educational platforms or by working from home. This, Dr. Tandon, stated is a new experience for all and has slowly become a 'new normal'.

He further shares how there are some challenging questions being raised by

the pandemic and these hold a relevance to the work that the Knowledge for Change (K4C) consortium has been undertaking.

As each day with the pandemic sheds light on various cracks in the present system, Dr. Tandon shares three key learnings he has learnt during this time.

1) Significance of Local Actions

The pandemic is pushing the primary action locally. As witnessed in various parts of the world, it is the local organisations, local actors, local governments and the local communities which are dealing with the pandemic first-hand. It is their knowledge, wisdom and experience that is holding all of us together.

Thus, the significance of local action based on local knowledge has been highlighted through this pandemic.

2) Local Solutions

One needs to understand that solutions do not come ready made. One cannot import solutions as each region has different characteristics. Thus, while the underlying principles for solutions may be the same, there is a need to innovate solutions which are applicable in the local context.

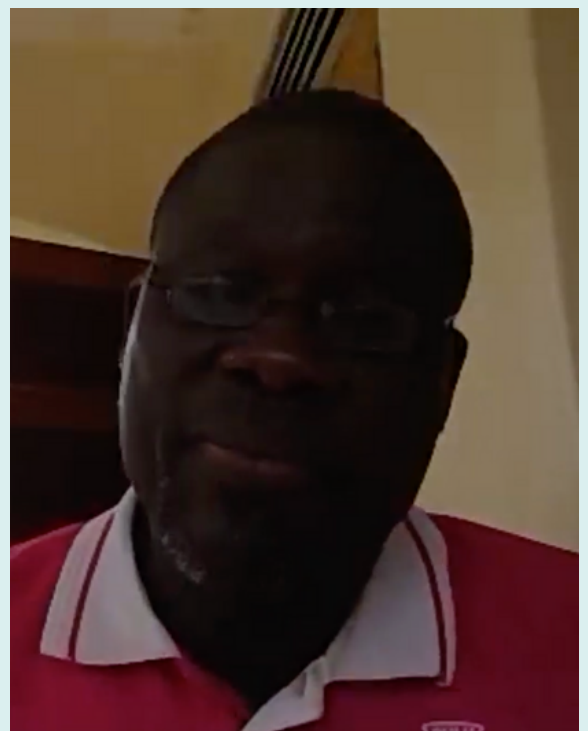
3) New ways of learning & living

There is a need for not just an immediate solution to the pandemic but also for the future. While the world has witnessed wars and pandemics before, the nature of the current crisis differs from that of the past. The result of living in a globalised world is seen to be reflected in the reach of the pandemic in all regions of the world. There is a dire need to learn from this experience and find new ways of living and organising our lives, work and institutions for the future.

Prof. George Openjuru
Vice-Chancellor, Gulu University
K4C Hub- Gulu, Uganda

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in China, Prof. Openjuru shared how his initial thought was that this disease would remain a country-specific situation. As the virus spread across Europe and India, the gravity of the situation was slowly unveiled.

Gulu University has been shut down at present and this, according to Prof. Openjuru, has opened up opportunities for the faculty and staff members of the university to engage in measures to help the community. One such step is that the staff from the faculty of medicine and department of public health have been actively participating in guiding the District Task Force in their endeavours to help the community.



Recognising the plight of the daily wage earners, the university has also taken steps to contribute food and essential goods for them. It has also provided a vehicle to allow for the ease of mobility of the task force members working in the community.

On a national level, Prof. Openjuru shared how the number of cases in Uganda are low with 55 confirmed positive cases, out of which 32 have been released. As Gulu still remains free of any positive cases of the virus, there have been strict monitoring measures that have been adopted.

Dr. Muzaimi Mustapha
Universiti Sains Malaysia
K4C Hub-Penang, Malaysia



Dr. Mustapha shared how the government in Malaysia acted early and aggressively with the implementation of the MCO (Movement Control Order) from 18th March. This was triggered with the early identification of the cluster of positive cases as well as the realisation that the first case in Brunei involved a person returning from Malaysia. This, he stated, depicts a case of how nation to nation knowledge sharing can lead to a quick response on part of the government.

Malaysia is currently in the fifth week of MCO and during this period, the government has issued an economic rescue package of 10 billion ringgit. This package covers almost everyone including the unemployed as well as those who were previously employed but had to leave their jobs due to the current situation. Measures to look after the homeless has also been undertaken by the government.

At the university level, Dr. Mustapha shared how the teaching learning hospital of the university is helping with the non-COVID 19 medical cases. It has also put in place a COVID-19 task force team which has been helping

the university to think about their teaching and learning innovations as there has been a shift towards the virtual modality. He shared that the university has also rescheduled the academic calendar while attending to the needs of the undergraduate and postgraduate students and is also looking at the return to campus plan post the pandemic.

Furthermore, an institutional fund has been set up by the university for the students, the health care staffs as well as the '*underneaths*' that are emerging with this new normal.

With social distancing, Dr. Mustapha believes that the public is now the frontline and the healthcare providers are the last line of defense.

Prof. Wahidah Siregar
UIN Sunan Ampel, Indonesia
K4C Hub- Surabaya, Indonesia

Sharing the experience in Indonesia, Prof. Siregar stated that the government has imposed an SBB in larger cities. This SBB, rather than a complete lockdown, imposes a strict mobility of people in large groups. The decision to steer away from a complete lockdown was taken by the government with the realisation of the large economic impact it could have on the daily/weekly wage earners.

The university, taking an early step, began its lockdown 3 days after the first death case related to COVID-19 was announced on 11th March. This, Prof. Siregar shared, was initially a short-term lockdown of 2 weeks but as the situation took a turn for the worse, the lockdown was extended.

Some of the major concerns that are being faced with the transition to online education has been the lack of access to internet for the students.



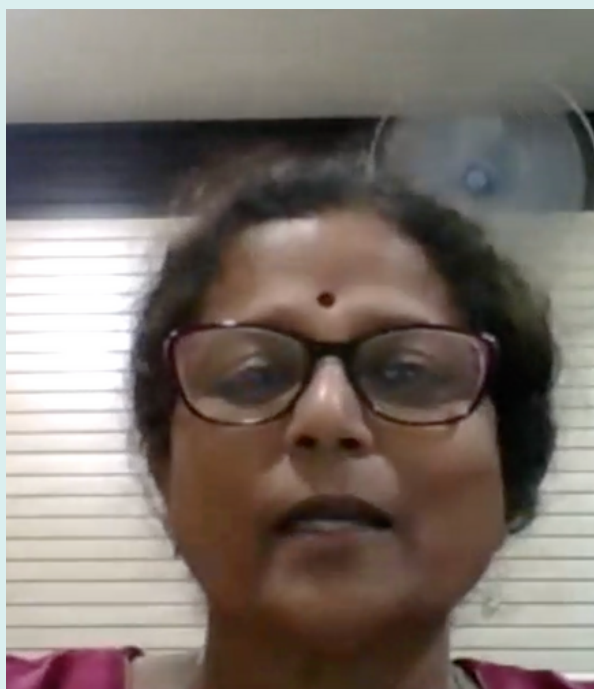
In order to tackle this, Prof. Siregar shared how the university had requested the government and internet providers to let the students have access to free internet. While this was availed, the data limit attained was small thus, students still face an out of pocket expenditure for data services.

The shift towards online learning platforms has led to difficulty in smooth transition for many faculty members as well. In order to tackle this, a guide for the online resources for teaching and WhatsApp groups have been created.

While students were encouraged to go home at the beginning of the lockdown, those who lived overseas or whose homes were far away, could not do so. Under these circumstances, Prof. Siregar shared that the university has taken the decision to cut the salaries of the staff to collect money to provide food for these students. A part of this fund has also been utilised in providing protective gears for the local healthcare workers.

Expressing her views on the current situation, Prof. Siregar said, *"COVID-19 has sent a reminder to us that we live in the same world. Thus, while we find local solutions, we also need to work together to solve the problem"*.

Dr. Reeta Venugopal
Pandit Ravi Shankar Shukla University, Raipur
K4C Hub-Raipur, India



The story of COVID-19, Dr. Venugopal stated, is the same in each part of the world- it is now a global as well as a local story. At the national level, she described how there had been a quick response by the government with the lockdown. Various initiatives had been undertaken by the NGOs and private institutions in order to provide food and other essential goods to those in need.

With the lockdown beginning from 21st March, Dr. Venugopal shared how the

shutdown of the university led to an initial phase of confusion with regards to future proceeding of teaching and learning. Slowly, there has been a shift towards conducting online courses by various means and the hub decided to conduct a Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) online course for the students.

With the lockdown forcing all to be in the premise of their homes 24x7, according to Dr. Venugopal, there is a need to monitor the changes and shift in the roles played by women. The hub has a toll-free number as well as an established sakhi center for reporting domestic violence crimes. The report from these, she shares, has shown that in Chhattisgarh, there has been a decline in the domestic violence and drug abuse cases.

Ms. Nandita Bhatt
Director-Operations, Martha Farrell Foundation

COVID-19 is local reality with a global dimension to it. Thus, there is a need to work together. Ms. Bhatt shared how interactions with the community lies key in the CPBR methodology and the current pandemic challenged this very human interaction, thus, challenging the consortium members as practitioners in their future endeavors.

Sharing some of the initiatives of the Martha Farrell Foundation, Ms. Bhatt discussed how it is pertinent to question whether the facilities and packages provided by the government during these trying times is actually reaching those in need, those in the last mile. The organisation has been covering the stories which depict the reality of the situation on-ground and trying to build linkages between those providing the essential services and those in need.



Realising the consequences of the lockdown on the mental and emotional health of children, another initiative undertaken by the organisation has been through a “rooftop poetry session”. This involves teaching the children

how they can express their emotions through words, thus providing them with a support mechanism through the tough times.

Ms. Bhatt also mentioned how there was a need to identify the forms of violence other than domestic abuse that the women are facing in times of the lockdown and start a conversation around the same such that more of such cases are discovered and reported.

Discussions

Orfhlaith

We need to use the episodic interventions to boost the structured ones thus listing them out would be helpful. It needs to be understood that it is not an either-or situation but rather working on both together.

David Monk

Surveys are being conducted with the help of the task force in Gulu to analyse the worst affected section of the community- the daily wage earners. This survey aims at understanding the food viability and availability of the people. One of the hub community partners has also developed a system of recycling plastic and making visors for the hospital workers.

Anshuman Karol

As the migrant workers have been the worst affected, PRIA is playing the role of a knowledge institution and trying to create networks of regional civil society organisations through which correct information can be disseminated and those in need can be reached out to.

Irma Hinojos

One initiative of the Faculty of Education has been through working with the students to talk and engage with their families regarding what is happening at home as well as guiding the parents with home schooling. Effort has also been put into trying to get information about abuse faced by women and children and the university is trying to provide training to the teachers about how they can respond in such cases.

Moving Forward

Realising the need to continue the discussion forward, the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education has set up a [discussion forum](#). This provides the members of K4C Global Consortium with a means to share their experiences, ideas about how we can move forward together and provide support to one another in the times of need.

What can we share to continue this discussion forward?

- Lists of episodic interventions that we are involved in
- Celebration of arts-based, song, poetry, theatrical interventions
- Examples of how we have engaged with our communities – asking them for direction moving ahead
- Examples of how we have ‘enlarged the questioning community’ about today and tomorrow
- Practical ideas about bridging the digital divide
- Why engagement is critical now and critical in the future
- How to make sure that our higher education institutions do not drop engagement from their work in the face of keeping teaching and learning going