Gauging the impact of community university engagement initiatives in India

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Abstract

Today, the world we live in is challenged with the co-existence of 'prosperity and poverty'. In India, in particular, although we are witnessing staggering increase in various economic indicators, our Human Development Indicators (HDIs) remain unenviable. It is in this context that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have assumed profound importance as having the potential to offer sustainable solutions to such societal challenges. As a result, the practice of Community University Engagement (CUE) has gained prominence, as a phenomenon seeking a two-way discourse between the communities and the universities, in an attempt to produce 'socially relevant knowledge' which is inclusive and sustainable. Considering the importance and value of such an initiative, an attempt was made to tap such engagement practices between the HEIs and communities in India. In addition to plain documentation of such engagement, another highly crucial parameter in this regard is the measurement of the impact of such initiatives, on all the stakeholders involved in the process. However, academic literature related to this is still limited. In an attempt to fill this gap, the study at hand involved impact assessment of CUE activities as an important component. Using qualitative tools of impact assessment, this paper documents the empirical evidence of the impacts on various stakeholders, arising out of CUE activities, undertaken at various universities in India. The results generated through primary data, show that although it appears to be the case of binary stakeholders (Community and University), CUE envisages engagement, integration and cross linking among a number of sub-stakeholders, getting impacted in a multitude of ways. Students get an opportunity of experiential learning; while teachers can take up socially relevant research, as part of the curriculum. Communities benefit by way of empowerment and sustainable livelihoods, while universities get a chance to project themselves as 'socially engaged' institutions. Indirect and subsidiary stakeholders like Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Government, respectively also take away several benefits from the process. Therefore, in essence, the paper makes the case of CUE by demonstrating the positive and mutually beneficial experienced enjoyed by the stakeholders involved in the process.

Keywords: community; university; engagement; stakeholders; social responsibility; impact

1. Introduction

As the world progresses towards increased development, boosting economies and materialistic growth, human development has somewhat lagged behind. This is particularly true in the case of India, whose economy continues to grow leaps and bounds, yet it fares poorly with respect to Human Development Indicators. This statement is verified by our economic and human development indicators respectively. While the former continues to grow significantly, our position with respect to the latter remains unenviable and stagnated. As per the global GDP (Gross Domestic Product) rankings released by the World Bank in 2015, India secured the 7th position, among a total of 199 countries (World Bank, 2015), while it ranked at 131 out of the 188 countries, as per the UNDP's (United Nations Development Program) Human Development Report' 2016 (UNDP, 2016).

As a result, we live in times where 'prosperity and poverty', and 'plenty and scarcity' co-exist. Along with this, staggering industrial growth and urbanization have been accompanied by degradation of our natural resources; increasing political prowess exists

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simultaneously with insecurity and likewise, democracy has been coupled with exclusion. The co-existence of such contrasting processes questions the sustainability of our societies and our existence itself. As the social concerns slowly but gradually overweigh other significant achievements, the time has come for us to introspect the social relevance of our actions and initiatives, and the ways and means by which we can seek answers to such pressing problems. Although there is a need to re-examine the role and activities of various stakeholders in the society, who have the potential to contribute in the process, one of them which stands out are our Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). HEIs have a crucial role in a country's development, along with addressing various social concerns. Termed as '*Social Responsibility of Universities*', it is this role of the University that has the potential to erase the discrepancies and inequalities in our societies. Recently published GUNI Report has clearly argued:

> "*Social responsibility emerges as the need to reconsider the social relevance of universities in light of the encounter of the local with the global, regarding priorities, demands, impacts and knowledge needs in the context of globalization* (Grau et. al., p. 41)*.*"

However, today, in India, it is easy to sense the alienation that has crept into the University premises and made it 'islands of plenty amidst scarcity'. As we witness enormous massification and globalization of education, there has been an enormous increase in the number of students enrolled into the Universities and Colleges, and the empire has expanded in manifold ways. This massification of Universities, in an era where they are mostly owned and run by political/business power centers, has led to their essence to fall into oblivion. With increase in business like practices and the Universities responding to the needs of the corporate world, or vested interests, questions regarding the social relevance, identity and the purpose of such Universities and the knowledge/education imparted therein are starting to be raised. Along with this, the other parameters that are put to scrutiny and critical analysis are the quality of education imparted, relevance of curriculum and significance of pedagogy practiced in the HEIs today.

Therefore, there is a need to re-visit and re-examine the essence, relevance and credence of the Universities, as stakeholders in societal development and the ones contributing to its sustainability. Notwithstanding the facts mentioned above, it is also important to note that the education institutions are facing both challenges and opportunities. The challenges are in the form of issues such as growing inequality, problems of migration, urbanization, health, sanitation, access to drinking water, etc. While the 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 can therefore, utilize the opportunities at hand to re-establish the connection between themselves and the society, and in the process, bail the latter out of the churning it is witnessing today. Community University Engagement (CUE) initiatives help HEIs achieve just that. CUE as a concept forges mutually beneficial relationships between the universities and communities, by adopting a bidirectional flow of information between the two. This engagement can be at the local, regional, national or even the virtual levels, and is aimed at the co-creation of knowledge, which is beneficial to the society at large. Such engagement therefore deviates

from the normal outreach/extension functions, to a more participative approach that is committed to the creation and sharing of knowledge (UNESCO Chair, 2015: 3).

Fg. 1 Community Engagement
Source: National League of Cities (NLC); Sustainable Cities Institute ᔆᴹ (2013)

CUE can essentially take six forms: *linking learning with community service, linking research with community knowledge, knowledge sharing with the community, devising new curriculum and courses, including practitioners as teachers and social innovation by students* (Tandon, 2014: 9). An analysis of illustrations and experiences from India and other contexts suggests that several innovative forms of such CUE have already begun taking place in different HEIs across the country. These have been largely individual efforts from members of the institutions, and support from certain civil society actors (Tandon, 2014: 8). In order to operationalize CUE it is important that an institutional mechanism is developed to adopt a holistic and functional approach to community engagement based on the following core principles (Tandon, 2014: 8):

(i) Mutually agreed interests and needs of both communities and institutions be articulated and respected;
(ii) Engagement must encompass all the three functions of institutions of higher education—teaching, research and outreach/practice;
(iii) Institutional engagement cutting across disciplines and faculties should be mandated, including natural sciences, and not restricted to social and human sciences alone;
(iv) Participation in community engagement projects by students should earn them credits and partially meet graduation requirements and it should be integrated into their evaluation systems;
(v) Performance assessments of teachers, researchers and administrators in such institutions should include this dimension of community engagement.

Therefore, CUE can be considered to be an umbrella concept, which encompasses several mutually-beneficial engagement initiatives between the university and the community. Impacts from such CUE activities assume special significance for the stakeholders involved and the expectation associated with it. However, as Bivens (2011) notes, documentation of the intermediary processes that occur between the articulation of

normative visions at universities and the assessment of the subsequent impacts of engagement is infrequent and superficial (Bivens et. al., 2015: 13). This calls for an increased documentation and open data demonstrating the value and impact (both local and global) associated with such engagement and community based work (Lepore, 2016: 49). Hence, this paper aims to fill this gap, by analyzing the impacts on stakeholders in a CUE initiative undertaken in India. This paper essentially puts together the results of a qualitative impact assessment of the CUE practices undertaken at select universities in India. The study, sponsored by the British Council, India was focused at 'strengthening CUE practices in India', by way of identifying the best ones, documentation of their impacts, and providing recommendations and policy prescriptions of scaling up such activities in more universities around the country.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. The Impact of Community University Engagement

CUE refers to a combination of practices that impact on many higher education institutions, scholars and students. CUE takes the form of new approaches to the co-construction of knowledge that link community activists to university researchers, and to the engagement of students in community action projects or movements (Hall & Tandon, 2017: 17). The increasing importance and value of CUE in HEIs around the world has led to a strong emphasis on evaluating and measuring the impact of these activities, particularly as it relates to the mutual benefit between community and the university, and other related stakeholders, such as government, civil society etc. Also, any particular initiative has the responsibility to prove its worth and to justify its applicability in a given setting. The same stands true for CUE. Thus, assessment of the impacts arising from CUE activities provides the evidence and justification for the use of resources for achieving said objectives (Onyx, 2008: 98). Developing an impact evaluation framework therefore is currently a high priority for many HEIs across the world. A growing body of literature has developed in this field as universities across the world have clearly defined CUE as a visible part of their long-term strategic plan. However, less literature currently exists not only on how universities with clear CUE agendas are attempting to measure the impact of community engagement within their university (see Hart et al. 2009; Hart 2010 for similar findings), but also on how universities are attempting to define what the impact of CUE might actually look like, or how impact of CUE is perceived by the community itself (Tremblay, 2017: 59). Despite widespread acknowledgement that universities should contribute to the development of the society of which they are a part, the problems in measuring CUE include: a lack of focus on outcomes; a lack of standardized instruments and tools; and the variety of approaches currently being adopted (Hart, 2010: 3). The lack of standardized measurement instruments for evaluation of civic engagement is widely noted (Rowe and Frewer, 2000; Granner and Sharpe, 2004).

Nonetheless, pressure for greater accountability has led to the growth of benchmarks and performance indicators designed to enable universities to demonstrate their socio-economic and cultural contribution at local and regional levels (Hart, 2010: 4). However, there has been less of a focus on developing tools to evaluate the processes by which higher education institutions establish community partnerships and how they are sustained (Kezar, 2005; Buys and Bursnall, 2007). As a consequence, there have been few attempts at
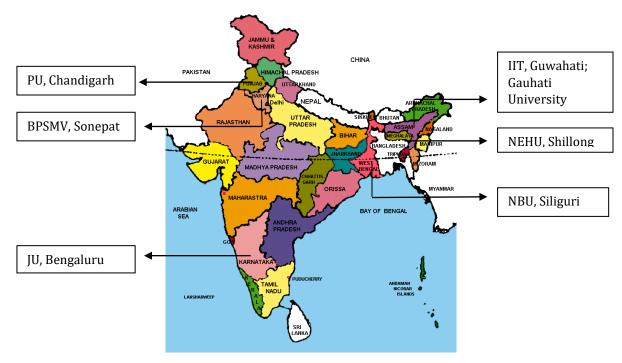
development of robust measures for impact assessment of CUE practices, reflecting the benefits that flow from such partnerships to both universities and communities with which they engage. Essentially, impact assessment is about making a difference and identifying what changes have resulted from these partnerships. Usually there is no one-to one relationship (cause-and-effect links), but reflected in a variety of connections involving influence, contributions, and benefits –economic performance, competitiveness, public service effectiveness, new products and services, employment, enhanced learning skills, quality of life, community cohesion and social inclusion (Tremblay, 2017: 62).

CUE and related activities are generally understood to involve and benefit four audiences (Ferman & Hill, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000): educational institutions; faculty; students, and communities. CUE activities benefit the students by way of career preparation, awareness of community problems, and the connection of theory to practice. It also strengthens student's academic achievement, as it has a positive impact on academic learning and critical thinking. For faculty, CUE is a way to apply theory and knowledge to local problems. For administrators of educational institutions, it is a way to improve relationships between campus and community, while service to the community is a way for campuses to address public perception that higher education exists for its own good (Erickson, 2010: 8). Furthermore, another impact of CUE, which often goes unstated is its immensely benefit to the community. Apart from these, there are also allies such as civil society and government, who get positiveimpacts in different ways.

Therefore, such is the amount of impact that engagement activities can have over the stakeholders and the society as a whole. In this process, the empirical evidence of the impact on each of these stakeholders assumes great importance and significance. This then serves as the yardstick to determine the relevance of such initiatives and determine 'ways-forward', and helps design a framework on how to take this initiative further across global circles. Therefore, the impact of such 'engaged initiatives' needs to be tapped for each stakeholder involved in this process, and much importance is accorded to the documentation and the quantification of the impacts of such engaged initiatives. Considering these factors, and also the limited literature in this regard, this particular study assumes profound importance, as not only it adds to the scarce literature, but also provides first-hand primary data of impact of CUE practices, which is quite uncommon across HEIs. The sections outlined below presents the study which intends to capture such impacts and the accruing benefits on the related stakeholders.

3. Methods

With the aforementioned background, and as a part of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, we conducted an empirical study to map the CUE practices in the HEIs in India, and their impact. For the purpose of this study, the Universities which were selected included *Punjab University (PU)*, Chandigarh; *North Bengal University (NBU)*, Siliguri; *Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishvavidyalaya*, Sonepat, Haryana; *Indian Institute of Technology*, Guwahati, Assam; *North Eastern Hill University*, Shillong, Meghalaya, and *Jain University, Bengaluru, Karnataka*. The reasons for choosing the universities include: project demands; representation from all major zones of India (North, South & East; we did miss out on covering universities in the west zone) & giving visibility to the regional HEIs performing well on the 'engagement' front, so that their practice models can be scaled up at other levels (eg., NEHU, BPSMV etc.).

Fg. 2 India political map, indicating the project sites
Source: Cyber journalist

The qualitative study made use of a several instruments. They are:

3.1. Survey questionnaire

The questionnaire aimed at seeking answers with respect to the kind, nature, and most importantly, the *impact* of the engagement practiced by the respective University. It was shared with students, faculty & officials from the university administration. We shared the questionnaire online, through emails, and the respondents reverted back with the filled-in questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into four parts: the first, dealt with general information about the university/college; the second part asked about exclusive practices of CUE (in line with its six forms) being followed at the university/campus (linking learning with community service; linking research with community knowledge, knowledge sharing with the community, devising new curriculum & courses, inviting practitioners as teachers, and social innovation by the students). The third part dealt with the operational details of CUE (such as external collaborations, assignment of credits, etc.), and finally, the fourth section of the questionnaire invited personal reflections from the respondents on the challenges for CUE, prospective solutions, and impacts arising out of it.

3.2.Personal interviews

In addition to the questionnaire, personalized experiences and view-points were collected through face to face interviews with academicians and the students. This gave an opportunity to capture individual perceptions and feedback, which was crucial to the essence of the study. The personal interviews were conducted in all universities. This gave an opportunity to complement the online sharing of perspectives, and to fill the gaps where

the questionnaire did not yield satisfactory answers. For instance, the questionnaire mode did not work for universities like NEHU, BPSMV. Here, conducting personal communication with faculties and students gave firsthand information on their thoughts and ideas about the practice of CUE and its impact.

3.3.Dialogues/Consultations

Complementing the questionnaire and the interviews were the dialogues/consultations, in the respective universities. It led to exhaustive deliberations, sharing of model practices, and zeroing in into concrete and significant action for promoting CUE in HEIs in the future. The idea behind conducting these dialogues at the host university was to bring different stakeholders together for a collective effort at discussing CUE and its impacts. This is because the first two methods, which were conducted in exclusion, gave us segregated views. These dialogues gave opportunities for contradiction and the various stakeholders to listen to each other's perspective.

Combination of the various instruments used, helped integrate the results in a comprehensive and holistic manner. It also facilitated the use of a particular instrument, as applicable in a particular setting. Use of more than two methods also helped in triangulation of the results, for ensuring authenticity and correctness. Also, validation from more than one source, helped verify the results for further documentation and citation. The following section collates all the findings that emerged from the use of different set of tools, with respect to the impact of CUE practices on various stakeholders.

4. Result and Discussion

Prima facie, the process of CUE appears to include only the community and the university (as *direct/primary stakeholders*). However, in due course, and as indicated by Erickson (2010); Ferman & Hill (2004); and Ward and Wolf-Wendel (2000), it unfolds many more sub-processes, which again incorporates a number of *sub (indirect/secondary)-stakeholders*. Therefore, apart from the academics and the community which appear as upfront stakeholders in the process, there are many others involved in varying capacities. The survey findings and interviews give clarity and empirical evidence of the impact on each of these stakeholders. The primary stakeholders that are involved in the process include the teachers, researchers, students, and the community. Alternatively, sometimes this engagement is facilitated through civil society groups/voluntary organizations, who then get accounted for a stakeholder in the process themselves, although an indirect one. Further, the government and its departments function as *subsidiary stakeholders* in the process, by way of their involvement and key role in designing the whole governance and policy framework. In line with the ideas suggested by Tremblay (2017); the results emerging from the impact assessment of CUE as part of this study does not reflect one-to one or a cause and effect relationship which can be quantified. The impact on various stakeholders are more on the lines of economic benefits, enhanced learning outcomes, improved quality of life, professional development, developing a sense of citizenship and social responsibilities. The same stands true for all categories of stakeholders involved. Further, considering the limited literature in this context, the findings and learning's from this study plays a crucial role in consolidating primary and valid literature to the field of impact assessment of CUE. The section outlined below provides a detailed account of the

construing impacts on all stakeholders, as emerging from the survey findings, interviews and dialogues.

4.1. Students

Students are the centre point, around which such initiatives revolve. They are impacted by such engagements with the community in a multitude of ways, as outlined by Erickson (2010). From this study, it emerged that the process enables their learning process in ways which enhances their curricular objectives by giving more meaning and value to their classroom theoretical knowledge. The practical experience gained during the process enhances their employability quotient and broadens their career choices, post their university degree. Being in sync with societal realities and the challenges of sustainability and livelihoods inculcates among the students, a sense of citizenship and responsibility towards the society they live in. Thus, they gradually evolve to be 'good ethical citizens' instead of merely a 'good workforce'.

4.1.1. Case study: Indian Institute of Technology, Guwahati

Under the framework of linking learning with community service, the students and teachers apply their knowledge and skills in a chosen community to improve the lives of people in that community by providing various engagement opportunities. The students at the mechanical engineering department at IIT-G have formed a facilitator group named *Rural Technology Action Group-North East (RUTAG-NE),* aimed at upgrading rural system to most effective levels for boosting the rural economy, along with providing Research&Development (R&D) solutions to technical problems in the rural sectors. For example, by engaging local artisans and communities, the RUTAG group has set up a pilot project on production of plain Muga Silk fabric with power loom at the Export Promotion Industrial Park in Amingaon, Guwahati. This has helped students apply their theoretical knowledge and serve the communities around them, which in turn benefit on account of time saved and increased production. Meanwhile, engagement with communities enhances their practical know-how on the indigenous techniques of silk production. This combination of indigenous and academic knowledge yielded mutual benefits for the students and the communities alike. This, in essence laid the foundation of 'service learning', i.e. combining community service and learning goals, which in turn enhances student growth and benefits the society as well.

4.2. Researchers

Researchers are another important actor in this regard. As an important part of the University structure, and the projects they embark upon, their participation in such engagement ought to have a significant impact, both on themselves and the communities. By researchers, we refer to the senior doctoral, post-doctoral fellows at the university, pursuing their respective research. In the field of research, great emphasis is laid on first-hand field experiences, which gives the research much credibility and validation in national and international academic circles. Therefore, CUE gives such researchers an opportunity to connect with the realities while pursuing their research, which in turn broadens their

knowledge base, contributes to their personal academic trust-worthiness and enhances their professional credibility.

4.2.1. Case study: North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong

Since its inception, social science research at NEHU and the respective researchers have been oriented towards the problems and issues pertaining to the different aspects concerning the lives of the local communities. The researchers at the department of Political Science and History, in particular, have been carrying out engaged research on such themes, an example of this being *regionalism, ethnic identity politics, culture among the local communities*. Direct engagement with the community in the course of such research takes the form of documentation of the traditional arts, crafts, folk dances by way of documentary films, video clips, which are then used as important evidence to support the research work. This sort of an engagement provides an opportunity to the researchers to step out of the University premises and experience and witness the social relevance of their research. Such engagement also gives their work validation and credence, as it offers the research an opportunity to integrate with the lives of the subject of the research itself.

4.3. Teachers

Teachers assume importance by way of being the pioneers in such a practice. They take up innovative pedagogic techniques and encourage students to get involved in innovative interventions. As a result, their role in the process of CUE assumes huge significance. In addition to the enhancement of knowledge from the viewpoint of practical realities, integration of practical implications gives the teachers an opportunity to think more holistically and deploy more learner-centric pedagogic techniques in the classroom. Moreover, community engaged activities provide a social relevance to their efforts, thereby contributing to its authenticity. Such engagement increases their recognition and respect among academic and professional circles. Further, direct engagement with the community opens avenues for joint collaborative initiatives such as workshops, where there can be a two-way disbursal of information between the academics and the community.

4.3.1. Case study: Gauhati University, Guwahati

Professor Nani Gopal Mahanta, Associate professor, at the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University has been the key person behind the design and execution of the concept of a two year post-graduate diploma programme on *Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS),* at the Centre for peace and Conflict Studies, at the Department of Political Science, Gauhati University. An initiative under the UGC's innovative program, it aimed at mapping of the conflict, how people coped with it, their plight in the displaced camps, how they negotiated conflict situation and the role of the state in the same. Therefore, this program attempted to merge the interests of the students, HEIs and the communities. As the coordinator of the centre, Professor Mahanta gained immense respect and credence in the academic and social circles alike. In an interview with him, he shared that his involvement in such initiative, has enabled him to get political leaders, media personnel, significant members of the civil society, and senior academicians involved in the process. As a result, today, Professor Mahanta is a known name in various circles of Assam, and this has also

added a number of research papers and publications in esteemed journals to his credit, which in turn increased the academic credibility of the inspiring academician as well.

4.4. Community

Being a primary stakeholder in the process, the communities are in a 'win-win' situation in this context. Engagement with the Universities impacts their lives and improves it for the better in a multitude of ways, the most important being the beneficial results, which emerge through such engagements contributes to the well-being and better sustenance of livelihoods. CUE accords due recognition of their indigenous knowledge instills in them a confidence, which encourages them to participate in more such interventions. As a result, they are motivated towards self-initiated endeavors, in attempt to better their living. Engagement in a give and take, mutually beneficial relationship with the HEIs, plays a role in integrating them to the mainstream of the society, thereby putting an end to their exclusion. Being awarded with respect, recognition and value in academic circles, opens for them a multitude of opportunities for the future, both personally and professionally.

4.4.1. Case study: North Bengal University (NBU), Siliguri

The Department of Biotechnology, North Bengal University, through its various agri-based initiatives has been engaging with the local rural community for knowledge exchange and dissemination of best practices in agricultural sector. The *Centre of Floriculture and Agri-Business Management (COFAM)* has been the key factor behind such practices and initiatives. 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 is engaging with the nearby communities, in order to strengthen their capacities in the field of floriculture and agriculture. It also sought to use the indigenous local knowledge and expertise of the communities in the plantation of different types of crop varieties. The unit has also supported the community by helping them find a market for their products and earn a sustainable living in the process. As a result of such engagement, not only did COFAM expand its technological data-base, the communities too experienced a sea change by way of secure and sustainable livelihoods. New technologies, which combined academic expertise and traditional knowledge, resulted in increased returns from agriculture and, consequentyly, a better and sustainable mode of living of the local communities.

4.5. University as an Institution

In addition to the individual impacts on respective stakeholders, the CUE process helps the university, emerge as an institution of academic and social relevance, thereby breaking the glass ceiling associated with academic knowledge. Amidst the emerging consensus and thrust on '*University Social Responsibility (USR)*', it is able to project itself as an institution complying with this important principle, and contributing to societal development in the bargain. Apart from gaining respect, recognition and popularity among national and international university circles, CUE also gives the universities an opportunity to improve

on its rankings, both nationally and internationally, considering the growing importance placed on the generation of socially relevant knowledge, while ranking the universities.

4.5.1. *Case study: Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishvavidyalaya (BPSMV), Sonepat, Haryana*

BPSMV has been involved in exceptional efforts for promoting holistic community engagement within its regular academic curriculum. It is one of the very few universities in India, which has institutionalized its community engagement initiatives through a structure known as the *Centre for Society University Interface & Research (CSUIR).* Established in August 2010, the centre was based on the premise that there needs to be a connect between the University and the society. As a result of such outstanding initiatives, BPSMV has been increasingly attracting attention in not only the national academic circles, but it has also gained prominence in international academia. At the national level, BPMSV is involved in a number of projects/interventions, in collaboration with the civil society and the government, in order to further its objectives. In recognition of its efforts, BPMSV has also featured numerous times in the international academic circles, and its authorities have been invited to prestigious international conferences, such as the First International Forum on Social Responsibility, held in Seoul, South Korea in March' 2014, to present their model which can be followed and adapted to others contexts.

4.6. Civil Society Organization (CSO)

Often acting as a connecting link between (community and university), the civil society actors play a major role in facilitating such partnerships all across the globe. In India, PRIA has taken up this cause for a long time, in an attempt to bring the university and the community on a common platform. This results in the CSOs gaining recognition and respect from academic circles, and credibility among the communities. This also gives them an opportunity to expand its horizon and work area, which allows more exhaustive networking and dialogues. This then positively contributes to its work in other sectors as well.

4.6.1. *Case study: Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi*

Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) began in 1980 as a network of practitioners involved in awareness generation, community organizing and adult education to empower the poor and marginalized. In order to bridge the divide between the world of practice and the world of research, PRIA undertakes a number of initiatives to promote engagement of higher education institutions with civil society and local communities to foster knowledge generation and mutual learning. CUE has given PRIA an opportunity to fulfill its broad objective of attaining participation and democracy, by the championing the cause of community university engagement, as it facilitates 'participation' and promotes 'knowledge democracy'. Such a form of academic engagement gives PRIA, recognition as a CSO, who is actively involved in making the world a better place, through cross sectoral engagements and partnerships. This in turn brings a lot of advantage to the institution's brand name and credibility, both inter and intra sector.

4.7.Government

Government as an actor, in CUE is often viewed from the lens of policy developments. Although a subsidiary actor in the process, partnership between the university and the community (in the CUE process) opens opportunities for involving both the stakeholders in development plans. This bottom up approach ensures better execution of programs and mutually beneficial results. The emerging positives of such an engagement process also feeds into the process of policy making, and contribute to the designing of policies which can further the scope and opportunity for such practices.

4.7.1. Case study: Government of India

Recognizing the growing importance of social relevance of the Universities and their responsibility towards the society, the Indian Government has been closely following the international developments in this regard. Taking cue from international experiences and national requirements, the policy makers have been involved in conceptualizing and designing numerous policies, considering the social responsibility aspect and the gradually emerging framework of CUE. The Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD) has recently announced a policy on '*establishment of world class universities*', which categorically mentions '*tangible and intangible contribution to the society*' as one of the essential characteristics of a world class institution/university. Another important higher education regulator in India, the University Grants Commission's (UGC) scheme on '*Establishment of Centres for Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement*' has been a landmark development in the country's higher education policy. Its emphasis on '*participatory research, community-university research partnerships' and cross cutting collaborations between universities, NGOs and other institutions*, etc. advocates the case of CUE. Further, the National Assessment & Accreditation Council (NAAC) has also recently revised its *Quality Indicator Framework* (QIF) for assessment of universities; which as a first, talks about '*institutional ethics & social responsibilities*'. It seeks to assess universities on its '*engagement with the communities, for addressing its locational disadvantages and making use of advantages for their betterment'.*

Therefore, the aforementioned account on the impact of CUE on various stakeholders (direct, indirect, and subsidiary) on qualitative terms shows how the CUE agenda scores on various fronts. This qualitative impact analysis also brings out the difference between 'community engagement' and 'plain outreach/extension' activities, which universities normally undertake. While the former involves respecting multiple epistemologies of knowledge, and enables learning through a cycle of knowledge sharing, action, participation & reflection; the latter only focuses on one-dimensional execution of functions from the university's end, which neither leads to any knowledge production, nor fulfills the university's social responsibility functions. Also, it demonstrates that CUE does not only contribute to the advancement of knowledge in any particular field, but proves to be mutually beneficial to all involved in the process; as compared to plain extension, which is mainly one-way, and serves to fulfill extra-curricular requirements. It is these very principles of community engagement, which makes the impact of the process so meaningful and valued to all the stakeholders involved. This impact measurement exercise also helps give more value to CUE practices, and makes a case for curricular engagement through

integration into the core HEI missions of teaching, research and service. Another major point is the wide variety and spectrum of stakeholders involved in the process. Mostly, the universities function in isolation, as their interaction with the world outside is restricted by their own campus boundaries. CUE helps universities overcome this barrier. The impact analysis within this study documents how the process involves stakeholders from beyond the campus, and how the latter's involvement further enriches the learning process of the stakeholders. Therefore, we see quite a number of cross-cutting and multiple purposes getting achieved through this exercise. Not only does it helps us value the CUE process, it also helps us appreciate a number of cross-cutting linkages associated with it. Qualitative means of impact analysis also helps us to understand the impacts easily by mere observation & discussions, without having to apply any quantitative tools of analysis. This makes it an easy to use tool in various interventions, activities, etc.

5. Conclusion

The role of 'higher education'- which has been historically recognized as a public good – has assumed increasing importance, especially in light of its function of producing knowledge for societal development and sustainability. In recent decades, global development agendas and institutional initiatives are highly challenging HEIs need to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with external stakeholders and co-create knowledge for addressing various socio-economic challenges in society, and achieve the sustainable development goals. The accelerated challenges that our society faces today, necessitates the re-emphasis of principles of CUE as priority areas in our higher education framework. Therefore, the importance of impact of any CUE intervention is uncontested. It is this impact which determines the sustainability and value of the concerned activity, and provides prescriptions for future actions.

It is with this background that the need was felt to document the CUE practices in India, and its impact on all related stakeholders. We were aware of the reality that the 'engagement' concept is still a 'new' idea in India, with most universities still stuck with age old 'extension' activities, which view engagement from a charity and extra-curricular point of view. It is this notion that we wanted to challenge. This encouraged us to take up this study, so that we are able to record the best practices that are scaled up at different levels and places. Documentation and impact measurement of such engagement practices emerged as a natural corollary to our effort, since we realized that until we demonstrated the mutually beneficial impacts on multiple stakeholders that CUE offers, it would be difficult to make a case for the latter. Use of qualitative means to demonstrate impact, was also chosen on purpose, so that it encourages others to assess their engagement efforts on similar grounds to ensure that the intended objectives were being achieved. Often when we talk about 'measurement tools', we tend to focus on quantitative methods, and in the bargain miss out on the value that qualitative tools offer. Therefore, we also wanted to project this mode of assessment as a valued methodology for analyzing and assessing the performance/impact of a particular activity.

The aforementioned account on CUE practices in India and its impact on all stakeholders provides an opportunity to gauge its benefits and relevance in today's times. The socially relevant knowledge that such an engagement aims to produce is of tremendous importance to the society which is at crossroads and amidst turmoil. Illustration of positive impacts, as a result of engagement initiatives provides a lot of incentives for scale-up. It also provides

positive reinforcement for such activities and enthuses the stakeholders with increased vigour and confidence. Such incentives along with boosting individual efforts, also goes on to influence larger networks, such as the policy framework of the country. Good results drive the enforcement of supportive strategies at the policy level, which, in turn, re-energizes such efforts. In addition to this, impact measurement as a monitoring mechanism, also helps reflect, review and improve the framework, in a way which allows for better results. By analyzing how the impact of a particular engagement is shaping up, it can be better contextualized to suit a particular situation, for boosting the positives emerging out of it. Any social enterprise looks at bettering the lives of the people and the society as well. It is here that judging the empirical evidence of impact of CUE practices assumes great significance. Further, impact measurement, along with functioning as a yardstick to tap the relevance of an initiative, is also a true indicator of the promise of a particular action, its significance and potential in the future.

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