Chapter 11 Research and University Social Responsibility: During and Beyond COVID-19



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Abstract In the popular imagination in many countries, Universities became associated with the notion of the "Ivory Tower", i.e., a place where people can remain happily engrossed in their own intellectual, artistic or spiritual pursuits, disconnected from the rest of the world. The connection that we find in Tagore's (1934) writings about the University's social responsibility towards the local and the global community in its pursuit of knowledge and various forms of art and beauty to foster mutual understanding and progress of humanity, has been somehow missing in the popular imagination. Only recently, faced with the major sustainability challenge of our collective home, the planet Earth, global organisations, such as the UNESCO, have doubled up their efforts in advocating for realigning the mission and vision of the University to become more socially engaged in research, and other creative as well as artistic pursuits. The European Union has also come up with a Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) 2020 framework to promote "science with and for society". This chapter will discuss the key challenge for most Universities to make the connection with the community. It will discuss the role that practice-based teaching and community-based participatory research can play to make this connection with the community, as promoted by the UNESCO-Chair in community-based participatory research and social responsibility in higher education. This will help to identify research problems relevant to meet the community needs and to work with the communities to find relevant local solutions to solve global problems prioritised by the Sustainable Development Goals.

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Introduction

University is there to offer us opportunity for working together in a common pursuit of truth, sharing together our common intellectual heritage, to enable us to realize that artists in all parts of the world have created forms of beauty, scientists discovered secrets of the material universe, philosophers solved the problems of existence, saints made spiritual truths organic in their lives, not merely for some particular race to which they belonged, but for all mankind.

When we understand this truth in a disinterested spirit, it teaches us to respect all the differences in man that are real, yet remain conscious of our oneness, and to know that perfection of unity is not in uniformity, but in harmony.

-Tagore, "The Ideal of Education", Visva-Bharati News, January 1934, p. 5

The above ideal of the University, envisioned by Tagore during colonial British India, has remained unfulfilled even in the postcolonial India. The modern Indian universities were built in the model of the University college, London during colonial British India. They were not built in the model of Humboldtian research universities that emerged in the early nineteenth century in Europe. In fact, as Macfarlane (2021) argues, even the oldest English universities, i.e. Oxford and Cambridge, were teaching and training establishments for clergy and various professionals in the field of medicine, law etc. "Research was not considered a priority and was even looked on with some suspicion as the refuge of academics with inferiority complexes stemming from humble backgrounds and those trying rather too hard to prove themselves in a leisurely culture rich in the traditions of British middle class and aristocratic life (Halsey & Trow, 1971)" writes Macfarlane (2021). Reform in the Humboltdian model emerged within British academia towards the end of the nineteenth century since the setting up of research laboratories in the 1870s and the Oxford university becoming the first British university offering research doctorate in 1917 (Macfarlane, 2021, p. 2).

Though reform within the colonial Indian context also emerged in the late nine-teenth century with the Calcutta University granting its first Ph.D. in 1877 (Jalote, 2021), Indian Universities have remained primarily teaching-oriented "retailers of knowledge" (Jayaram, 2007) even in the contemporary times. This has led to a system of higher education, which has increasingly become disconnected from the needs and realities of the people, economy, society and the environment. In recent years, a number of scholars have highlighted the problems of many State-run public universities. In many of these higher educational institutions syllabus had not been changed for decades. Hence, the mainstream higher education system mainly produced unemployable graduates because of the textbook-oriented system that promotes rote-memorising textbook knowledge for gaining high scores in exams (Agarwal, 2009; Chandra 2017; Jayaram, 2003, 2007). However, the notion of a university is meant to bring about a culture of knowledge creation. When stakeholders do not take knowledge seriously, universities cannot create knowledge necessary to solve the problems of the world. In this age of sustainable development, generating knowledge through

research to solve the most pressing local and global problems will be the most important social responsibility of universities. We need to re-think the aims and objectives of the Universities in the twenty-first century. We need to transform the existing universities and establish new ones, not just with a Humboldtian ideal of holistic combination of research and higher studies but, with a twenty-first century vision of University Social Responsibility (USR).

USR aims to foster equity, justice, and academic freedom in higher education to promote a more prosperous knowledge society required for sustainable development. It should be applied to various aspects of the higher education experience, such as teaching, research, governance, community engagement, and environmental management, because universities have a real moral obligation to produce students, who will ultimately lead to a better world for current and future generations. University stakeholders can demonstrate good practices of social responsibility to their communities. They must be role models, demonstrating responsible behaviour to contribute to a better future for their universities and communities. In brief, USR is an ethical perspective that sees universities as places where positive social, environmental, technical, and economic growth can occur. USR can function as a major catalyst for social change, since it emphasises establishing an ethical standard of university management. Higher education management, in an interactive conversation with society and its communities, is used to support sustainable human development through education.

Practice-Based Teaching Pedagogy and USR

The role of contemporary universities in meeting the sustainable development goals has been widely acknowledged and accepted. Making social responsibility a priority across the university curriculum and activities can fulfil this role, and it should become essential metrics for universities' internal quality assurance. Practice-based teaching complements the curricular priorities, as it connects teaching and research with the needs of the society and economy.

Teaching at a university indirectly serves society by developing high-quality applied capabilities. Applied skills must develop robust humanistic values and theoretical knowledge. Practical teaching develops several applicable skills through diverse activities. Indirectly, practical teaching promotes scientific research. New ideas are discovered every day as the world around changes.

Academia's skills such as raising critical questions to research and find solutions to problems should be acquired at the lifelong learning level. First, instructional materials should limit the number of verification-based experiments. Students should be permitted to develop and carry out their own experiments. Different kinds of pedagogic approaches could be taken involving student activities in higher education. Project-based teaching includes projects and activities that integrate teaching and practise. Generally theory and practice are not always seen as aligned in the workplace. This creates all kinds of problems in the workplace when people enter

with just theoretical knowledge. Hence, students should engage, implement, and achieve diverse instructional tasks to apply theory into practise. Through practise based teaching, teachers can facilitate students to choose their own projects, develop their own materials, and use their own methods.

Science can be taught through the use of experiments, training, practise, and internships. Scientific findings may be obtained in class by doing experiments or off-campus field work. Practical teaching projects, course design, graduation thesis, and co-curricular research contests must match the professional training goals of students. This will help solve the major problem of unemployability of university graduates in countries, such as India to a great extent. Though people might fear Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics, nothing can yet replace the human brain. We need to realize that the unemployability problem is not directly connected to the technological developments. Rather, it is the failure of our education system to align with the priorities and needs of the contemporary times that has created these problems.

Teaching is one of the most convenient and inexpensive methods for higher education institutions to understand and serve society. It encourages teachers and students to build a cooperative community and introduce social practises that create epistemic and positive changes among communities. For incoming university students, their global orientation, outlook on life, and values are all at budding stages. Social duties are key to developing self-confidence. Universities may give students practical teaching services to the community as part of service-learning projects. It includes, for example, community projects, volunteering, and community training. The overall seamless development of practical teaching promotes social responsibility for universities and also help students gain necessary skills for their future workplace. Therefore social responsibility may be better realised through practical teaching, talent nurturing, scientific research, and service to society (Shen, 2019).

Role of Research

Many scholars, such as Tandon and Hall (2021), believe that if the heart of higher education is an epistemological contribution, then its influence is derived from its social value. Anything a teacher does should consider its social context, but everything teachers do should also be both socially conscious and sensitive to the environment they meet. Research should not be jeopardised at the price of a university's duties. Prioritizing higher education entails putting it first and prioritizing research. Research prioritisation provides a space for a philosophy of conversation. Research is critical for teaching and learning. Research helps universities maintain and progress their intellectual, social, and ethical projects into the sphere of the public (Davids & Waghid, 2018).

Universities are venues of socialiation for students, teachers, and scholars coming from diverse backgrounds. In this sense, universities can become platforms for providing education to become a global citizen capable of greater concern for and commitment to the needs of others (Martínez, 2010). Universities are places that support socially responsible acts with a primary focus on the educational community's constituent groups (González & Gómez, 2009). Within this environment, it is critical for the institution to build internal and external cooperation agendas, therefore fostering cooperation networks that have a positive societal effect.

The educational impact refers to the extent to which universities guide the development of experts in their educational and social environment, strengthen the research skills and abilities they have to contribute to the globalised world and focus their interests on increasing respect for each other and for life (Ayala-Rodríguez et al., 2017). de la Cruz-Ayuso and Santos (2008) say that one of the university's tasks is the promotion of social justice through teaching, enhancement and research. There has been rising awareness over the years, aimed at aligning teaching and research activities within Universities, and consequently mapping these activities with the needs of the society at large.

Universities and Society

According to the advocates of USR, education is supposed to be socially significant. There is a raging debate over the social and ecological relevance of academic work in the context of sustainable development goals. However, whether the pursuit of quality on theoretical and methodological grounds can co-exist with attempts to ensure social and ecological relevance of education is also a matter of debate. Most academics are regularly accused of being out of touch with the society living within their own "Ivory Towers" of theoretical knowledge (Teichler, 2015). These "Ivory Tower" academics believe that appeals to any kind of relevance attempt to subordinate higher education, rather than facilitating contributions to society.

However, in recent years, the phrase 'service function' or 'third function' has been often used by the proponents of USR (Teichler, 2015). They propose that education should serve society by doing more than only teaching and research, but also help in carrying out different social initiatives. Social responsibility demands colleges to investigate how active civic engagement can be incorporated into teaching, research and outreach activities of the university. The discourse on social relevance and social responsibility implies that higher education can only operate effectively when a balance of inward and outward gazing is sought. If inward-looking is dominant, as the phrase 'ivory tower university' implies, the world does not profit much from internal knowledge development. By contrast, if universities are only motivated by the need to 'deliver' to society, their real contributions to society may be devoid of creativity, innovation, and constructive criticism. Therefore, a balance approach is required between the internal logic of knowledge creation by universities and external

civic engagement. A creative balance of social isolation—von Humboldt's 'solitude and independence'—and social engagement is required (Teichler, 2015).

However, the concept of social in the age of globalisation is ever expanding. Every local problem in the twenty-first century has a global manifestation, as our lives are increasingly interconnected and interdependent. The recent COVID-19 pandemic and its disruptive impact on every walks of life, including higher education around the world, is a good example to prove this fact. Yet, higher education is seen as the locomotive of progress, a stronghold of the highest degree of human intellect, a source of investment, and a source of personal and social growth. With the consequences of the new global system, the acceleration of the ICT revolution, micro-electronics technology, and the rise of massive economic blocs, higher education must become more globally concerned, while being locally relevant (Khouj, 2020).

In recent years following the global UN mandate of the sustainable development goals, Social Responsibility (SR) has been driving organisational work being concerned about the good of society and accepting responsibility for the repercussions of its operations that affect consumers, staff, shareholders, the community, and the environment. This obligation goes beyond legal duties to include developing relationships with stakeholders. When it comes to USR, it is absolutely important for the University to establish a strong relationship with all internal stakeholders of the university, i.e. with the students, parents, teachers, administrative staff and, externally with the local community, where the university is located. This includes establishing relationships with local schools network and K-12 education system, healthcare system and local government. These relationships will help to establish an organic connection between the research, teaching, and outreach activities of the University and the needs of the community outside (Khouj, 2020).

EU-Horizon 2020 Responsible Research and Innovation Policy

Following a workshop for invited experts hosted by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation in May 2011, the EU launched the Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI) framework. RRI framework was incorporated into the EU's Horizon 2020 as a policy framework for the European Research Area to ensure that technological innovation will be shaped towards social good. It implied that societal actors (researchers, citizens, policy makers, business, third sector organisations, etc.) should work together during the whole research and innovation process in order to better align both the process and its outcomes with the values, needs and expectations of society (Saille, 2015). Thereafter the EUUSR Benchmark Standards for University Social Responsibility across the European Higher Education Area have been developed for the purpose of measuring, assessing, and evidencing institutional progress and attainment in a manner that is compatible with the essentially autonomous nature of higher education institutions

while also taking into account the substantial amount of public funding and other support that these institutions receive. Thus, the Benchmark Standards provide a Common Reference Framework that is mainly concerned with self-assessment and ongoing (self-) development.

Simultaneously, it provides an opportunity for the further development of evidence based policy and practise in the specific sphere of University Social Responsibility, recognising the distinctive nature of the European University and the contribution it can make to the broader social responsibility agenda by exemplifying and modelling the sort of values, principles, and practises that are valued in the broader social responsibility agenda (Dima, 2017).

COVID-19 and USR

COVID-19 has disrupted the higher education experience of many first-generation learners, particularly those belonging to socially, economically poor and disadvantaged groups. As such, higher education stakeholders are dealing with how to best support first-generation students in adapting to a university environment during online education. First-generation learners are more likely than continuing-generation students to experience financial difficulties with increased living and technology expenses.

Universities, in collaboration with NGOs, government agencies, and external organisations, must train their faculty to understand the needs of the first generation learners while providing an online learning platform that is flexible, inclusive, and culturally relevant. It is really challenging for universities to deal with youngsters' transition to college and create a sense of community in a virtual mode.

According to a study of first-generation students in the Student Experience in a Research University (SERU) Consortium in the US, students are less likely to live in secure settings free from abuse (physical, emotional, drugs, or alcohol), and more likely to suffer from food and housing hardship. First-generation students have a greater incidence of mental health issues than their classmates. According to their research, first-generation students are more likely to face difficulties in adapting to online education, such as missing study places and lacking appropriate equipment (Soria et al., 2020). Similarly, universities need to provide a platform for first generation learners, including faculty, to share their difficulties during the pandemic and try to find solutions, as part of USR.

In the last decade, the discussion about higher education has revolved around quality, funding, and mobility. The recent series of extraordinary events, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis has given rise to the call for decolonisation, end of gender violence and authoritarian regimes, since the lockdowns following the pandemic has witnessed a rise of authoritarian nationalism, gendered violence

and colonial tropes. We cannot see where we are headed, but we must have an unlimited ability to take care of each other and the earth, and we are only a small part of it (Hall & Tandon, 2021).

The 1997 White Paper published by the Department of Education, Pretoria explained that the university's wider transformation goal requires students and the community to collaborate and interact with each other through community university partnerships. Gandhi's and Ubuntu's philosophies emphasise individual growth, in accordance with natural and ethical principles, in order to create a better society. When it comes to South Africa's youth, these socially conscious characteristics provide them with a solid base to build on and get engaged with the community as part of University Social Responsibility (Padayachee et al., 2021). Even in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic with lockdowns and restrictions of social distancing, CBPR was found to be a very useful approach of doing research with civil society organization founded by local HIV clinicians and people living with HIV, to understand the physical and psychosocial needs of the first cohort of aging HIV positive patients in the US (Nguyen et al. 2020).

Higher education institutions are places where new information, skilled people, instructors, and researchers congregate. They serve as a training ground for the future workforce, since they are also a place where theoretical information is taught. Higher Educational Institutions serves to educate and provide new knowledge that is of value to the greater community. The University must make an effort to create an impact on the society by using their expertise in the surrounding communities for sustainable development (Anand, 2021).

Importance of Community-Based Participatory Research

Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) is a bridge between universities and the local community, in which researchers engage with people, who are impacted by the problem they are researching upon with the goal of making progress or making a difference. Hence, CBPR can be an organic way in which universities can connect with the local community and garner their resources for local community development. In addition, individuals from the community, who will utilise the findings to influence practise and shape policy, are welcome to participate. CBPR's main objective is to advance "Knowledge Democracy" and "Knowledge for Change" in the society for sustainable development. Most CBPR initiatives in collaboration with academic partners are financed through research grants. As academic and professional research institutions and researchers find it difficult to share information and resources or to directly interact with the community and other local stakeholders, community-based civil society organizations and other stakeholders must play a role in communication engagement. Intermediary partners, who are good friends with the local community and local government officials may have a significant impact in practice (Krishnan et al., 2020) (Table 11.1).

Rural communities have persisted for centuries by generating and sharing their own methods of creating knowledge through practise and apprenticeship within the family. Community-based participatory research begins with the recognition and appreciation of such knowledge as it is available in the community, whether practical, local, or indigenous (Krishnan et al., 2020).

Strong CBPR relationships are hard to build and sustain because they need a skill set that is also necessary for policymakers. The initial stages of establishing a partnership are networking with stakeholders and defining a "mutually beneficial agenda". In addition to agreeing on goals, participants in the stages of CBPR engage in bargaining among their respective partners. These include prioritising projects based on their different goals and benefits, and coordinating schedules, as

Table 11.1 Comparison between traditional and community-based research (Krishnan et al., 2020, p. 259)

	Traditional research	Community-based participatory research
Research objective	Issues identified based on epidemiologic data and funding opportunities	Identifying issues of greatest importance to the community with their full participation
Study design	Design based entirely on scientific rigor and feasibility	Community representative involved with study design
Recruitment	Approaches based on scientific issues of random sampling and maintaining high response rate	Community representatives provide guidance on recruitment and retention strategies and aid in recruitment efforts
Instrument design	Instruments adopted/adapted from other studies; tested chiefly with psychometric analysis method	Instruments developed with community input and tested in similar populations
Needs assessment data collection	Academic institution's responsibility	Academic institution and community's responsibility
Intervention design	Researchers design interventions based on literature and theory	Community members help guide intervention development
Analysis and interpretation	Researchers own the data, conduct analysis, and interpret the findings	Data are shared; community members and researchers work together to interpret results
Sustainability	Usually sustainability plan is not included	Sustainability is a priority the begins at a program's inception
Dissemination	Results disseminated in scientific forum, published in peer-reviewed academic journals	Community assists researchers to identify appropriate venues to disseminate results; community members involved in dissemination; results are also published in peer-reviewed journals

well as distributing resources fairly between academic and community researchers. The method of doing CBPR as an academic research, which naturally challenges both practitioners and policy makers, may offer an edge in influencing local policy. The effective management of research, as well as its translation into policy, relies on similar abilities (O'Brien & Whitaker, 2011).

To achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), social change is required. In order to achieve the SDGs by 2030, everyone in the society must participate. CBPR encourages this kind of broad based participation through partnerships between researchers, the community, and civil society. This contributes towards social impact of research. CBPR may be used to tackle local concerns, which can lead to increased ownership of those problems and solutions by local stakeholders to contribute towards the sustainable development goals.

Demand for research that focuses on community-based solutions to complex social problems has risen with academic and practitioner interest in devising novel methods of research and intervention. CBPR allows for collaborative and thorough research, with an emphasis on community needs. It encourages researchers to pay attention to, learn from, seek the views of, and share credit for successes with the populations with whom they are working.

In order to meet the SDGs, we need a significant social change and all stakeholders must be involved. Strong cooperation among academics, communities, and civil society is necessary in order to promote the social impact of research. CBPR helps society use new information and insights to face different problems, as well as offer long-term solutions. CBPR may be used for addressing local concerns, such as water, sanitation, resource management, gender equality, and, in that process, results in the acquisition of more control over local problems to generate locally relevant solutions, what is referred to as "sustainable development", as opposed to growth (Hall & Tandon, 2017).

Three practical ways can be readily adopted under Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) according to Hall and Tandon (2017, pp. 8–10).

1. Frame locally usable research

Topics and questions for research abound; the key to effective local framing is 'stepping outside the boundary' of HEIs to interact with local actors so that they become stake-holders in such research.

2. Build knowledge in partnership

If a mutually beneficial partnership with local communities and institutions—business, government, civil society—is built, research partnership may become supportive of new knowledge and its use.

3. Learn new competencies

In order to be able to undertake such partnerships and locally relevant research, students and researchers at HEIs need to develop certain additional competencies such as critical thinking, conscientization and ethical orientation.

Conclusion

Universities have a duty not only to the individuals who live on their campuses, namely the students, faculty and staff, but also to the area and the community within which they are located. In the event of a global pandemic, when communities must deal with issues like unemployment, the migrant crisis, and the digital divide, it is critical to examine what universities are doing to fulfil this duty. Universities are responsible for assisting students in their process of learning, not directing them. However, universities should avoid a rigid, formal teaching methodology and start rethinking of pedagogical methods and curricula that are required in universities to meet the practical demands of society.

It is significant for universities to disseminate accurate health and hygiene information, conduct post-crisis trans-disciplinary research to better understand the physical, mental, social, and economic consequences of the pandemic, and strengthen local institutions' capabilities to cope successfully with future uncertainties. The interconnected character of education, research and service makes higher education socially responsible. Society, its problems and demands should serve as the framework for self-assessment of the relevance of universities (Tandon & Hall, 2021). It would be critical for universities to be socially responsible by promoting community-based participatory research in the twenty-first century. In this way the universities can use their teaching, research knowledge, and public activities to serve the social and economic well-being of their local communities and meet the global Sustainable Development Goals.

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