

Community Engagement as an Ubuntu Transformative Undertaking for Higher Education Institutions

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Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) stand at the junction of increasing social and economic challenges in a pandemic era. The focus of this study is to substantiate to an extent what CE implies and what HEIs can and should do. A probing question is whether HEIs can effectively respond to needs identified within the communities in which they operate? The purpose is to interrogate how CE by HEIs can shape and be shaped by its role-players. A qualitative literature study and an interpretivistic paradigm were utilised in this study to deliberate upon the debate on Community Engagement (CE) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. It is a global truth that a university has an important role to play in responding to a range of societal needs. In South African universities, this is also the case, but the notion and practice of community engagement by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in general, is a persistent transformational requirement. What is meant by the term Community Engagement (CE) may differ from institution to institution but broadly speaking it relates to how an institution interacts with a community in which it operates in ways that result in a win-win situation for all parties involved and positively influence the quality of life within society in general. Viewed from a South African Higher Education milieu, it is clear that CE is an instrument through which transformation is supported through social responsiveness and it is thus in essence far more than mere community service or outreach as in most universities abroad. Having CE engaged universities is vital for a strong social and economic South Africa. CE's role is then to promote skills and knowledge to those alienated during the apartheid era. For a higher education institution, the benefits accrued would most likely be in inter alia joint projects, research initiatives and teaching opportunities to help redress past evils. Although community engagement often brings with it a range of challenges, it remains a fundamental role required of HEIs in South Africa and beyond. This article thus presents a brief overview on inter-alia, the direction and theoretical development of CE practices and suggests some possible aspects to consider applying to CE. A desktop literature review methodology and an interpretivistic paradigm were used in this brief study.

Keywords: *community engagement, higher education, South Africa, transformation, ethical duty*

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Introduction

The character of this brief study is that of a generally philosophical discussion paper which explores and builds upon the concept of Community Engagement (CE) in a South African context. We start our study with the important aspect of defining what CE means in the context of Higher Education (HE) in South Africa. Essentially, the term ‘community engagement’ is defined as: “Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the HE institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. Furthermore, it is argued that community engagement, as a scholarly activity, is of critical importance both in shaping our students and future citizens and in producing knowledge that is the most relevant and useful to the South African context” (CHE 2004). Furthermore, it may also assume diverse guises including “...distance education, community-based research, participatory action research, professional community service and service-learning. In its fullest sense, community engagement is the combination and integration of service with teaching and learning (e.g., service-learning), professional community service by academic staff and participatory action research applied simultaneously to identified community development priorities” (CHE 2004). CE is also defined as nurturing reciprocally advantageous connections between HEIs and diverse peripheral stakeholders or communities.

The objective of CE is normative and it is intended to support and thus advance sustainable development by HEIs working in tandem with local communities. It is thus commonly implicit that CE is to be striven for. This process should invariably include good cooperation and the exchange of resources at all levels in society (Carnegie Foundation 2006). HEIs have a civic role in the regional development of South Africa and should of necessity enhance their relations by concentrating on the many prevailing local socio-economic needs. Johnson (2020) suggests that in South Africa, several terms are used when speaking of CE, these include inter alia “volunteerism”, “service learning” and “engaged scholarship”. She states that in all cases however, the common thread is a university extending itself beyond its “...internal community to its external non-university communities for various purposes and in a variety of different ways”.

University community engagement is not to be viewed as being philanthropic but rather is critically important because all HEIs are called upon to be progressively concerned primarily with persuasive socio-economic issues as core business. First and foremost are the vexing problems of unemployment and alleviating dire poverty. There are of course numerous other challenges to be considered such as inter-alia health issues and enabling local community economic development. The challenges posed can best be faced through collaboration with other HEIs in order for extensive developments to be effected.

Driscoll and Sandmann (2016) explain that CE is a process via which HEI association with the community receives consideration and it is an engagement process and practices in which numerous people co-operate to achieve set objectives through their commitment to a shared set of values, principles and

criteria. CE can also be motivated by epistemological advances, and a changing socio-historical context in which an HEI finds itself. For example, shifts in the local political landscape in 1994 created space for CE that was more integrated into HEIs modus operandi. Before this period, CE was viewed as an outreach and extension service programme in HEIs. The idea was that academics would in some or other manner seek to support communities with the plethora of social, economic and political needs but not in any direct partnership sense.

Initial Drivers of CE

At the outset we should state that CE essentially supports the Brundtland Commission findings, wherein it is stated that there is a dire need to contemplate the important "... needs of the world's poor, to which overriding priority should be given" (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987, Ch. 2, §1). The White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (1997) set the tone for CE becoming a fully-fledged operational feature in higher education institutions and student awareness of their role in social and economic development would thereby be bolstered via designated community service programmes (Netshandama and Mahlomaholo 2010). In addition, in 1998 the Joint Education Trust carried out a survey of community service in South African HEIs which led to the unveiling in 1999 of a Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP) project (JET Education Services and Community Higher Education Service Partnerships 2004) with the objective of contributing to "the reconstruction of South African society through the development of a socially accountable model for higher education. Central to this model is the development of partnerships between communities, higher education institutions and the service sectors to address national development priorities (Hall 2010).

However, little was realized beyond the CHESP programme because there was no funding allocated to support academics to extend community engagement work in the same manner in which research and teaching and learning were funded" (Netshandama and Mahlomaholo 2010). The South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF), was initiated in 2009 (Botman 2010), and Community - Higher Education Service Partnerships, was launched in 1999, as a response to the call of the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education of 1997 (Lazarus et al. 2008). The latter laid the foundations for CE becoming a fundamental part of higher education. It was to inter-alia promote and develop social responsibility and awareness among students through community service programmes all aimed at augmenting equity and a democratic ethos. Empowering policies, effective funding, expertise and solid preparations are needed for CE to flourish remain sustainable.

Since then numerous HEIs have firm policies and strategies in place relating to CE activities. Some HEIs remain apprehensive about the value of CE from an academic perspective (Hall 2008). The primary function of HEIs is teaching research and service to a community and they should be interrelated and essentially shaping each other. The curricula of HEIs and the courses offered

should be organized in such a manner that once students graduate they will immediately understand the service they will be able to offer to the local community and beyond. This means that students need to understand from the outset what the problems are that beset the community and these should be reflected in the courses presented as well as in any research that is undertaken by them. It is the duty of universities to support the communities and this service should be expressed in the entire corpus of university endeavour.

Lyons and McIlrath (2011, p. 6) demarcated CE as being a “mutually beneficial knowledge based collaboration between the higher education institutions, its staff and students, with the wider community, through community campus partnerships and including the activities of service learning/community based learning, community engaged research, volunteering, community/economic regeneration, capacity building and access/widening participation”. Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) explain a triple helix approach that includes local government, industry, and HEIs as engaging collaboratively with communities. This should also be demonstrated by permeability in university boundaries which can promote a spirit of entrepreneurship between an HEI and a community (Etzkowitz 2012). The National Plan for Higher Education established CE to be a requirement and the Higher Education Quality Committee also required explicit reporting on CE through institutional audits. It is also a HEI’s obligation to make meaningful contributions to the development of the local communities in which they operate and this must be carried out via the integration of teaching, learning and research (Walters and Openjuru 2014).

How HEIs Tackle CE

In Higher Education, CE thus invariably relates to a transformative approach of forging sustainable networks or, partnerships with local communities that have for the most part been marginalized through the repressive historical past that has left indelible scars. CE is thus in part an attempt to redress some past wrongs in society by HEIs engaging in a wide range of activities in communities at both the local and national levels. There are of course cases where some HEIs indulge in CE on regional and international levels. The United Nations’ Organisation drive to support and attain the 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 4 of Quality Education, is mounting (<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>). Owens (2017) states that it is essential for HEIs in particular, to realize the fundamentally important and socially responsible role that they have to play in the communities in which they operate. Additionally, Waghid (1999) asserts that HEIs have not been all-encompassing partners. However, in all fairness, HEIs in the post-apartheid era have had a myriad of additional transitional challenges to deal with and many continue to have a rough time as they seek to prepare graduates with the necessary skills for employment in South Africa and the globalised world. Hall et al. (2017) emphasize that CE must be considered to be a public good when looked at by HEIs and that also argue that HEIs are morally

and ethically duty-bound to humankind and thus communities through supplying useful and transformative scholarship, research, and other social accountability.

It is often the case that HEIs do not have any well-thought-out dialogue with their communities which is critical for CE. The communication aspect is crucial to consider (Habermas 1984). HEIs and their communities need to have meaningful dialogue from which a common understanding is arrived at which is totally inclusive and which results in a win-win situation for both parties (Netshandama and Mahlomaholo 2010). HEIs can of course cooperate with local communities in different ways. The key issue is to have collaboration that ultimately results in partnerships that add value and from which emanates knowledge transfer and exchange, as well as commercialization of intellectual property, the formation of supplementary companies, and joint undertakings between the university and community partners (Hoy and Johnson 2013). HEIs have online repositories and resources which empower them to share material with communities and communities provide employees for HEIs. Community engagement thus offers a space for the comprehensive interchange and co-working between HEIs and their communities working together. Thus, we maintain that any advances in knowledge development *per se*, in HEIs is then intrinsically at the nexus of the divide which exists between HEIs and communities they serve. We need to put aside the notion that scientific knowledge can only be produced by academics, scientists, or theorists and realise that communities too have knowledge to impart (Zuber-Skerritt 2015).

Van Eeden et al. (2021) state that “Community engagement research in South Africa is relatively new compared to, for example, the Americas. However, South Africa is viewed as a leader in the field in Africa...Currently, HEIs show effort in embracing the needs of communities with whom they form a reciprocal partnership of mutual benefit.” There exists an obligation for HEIs to dynamically participate in research relating to the communities in which they operate and beyond in order to mitigate for example, social decline (Erasmus et al. 2015). Bender (2013) points out that HEIs support CE not only in partnership with community entities but also via the curriculum. An ASHE Higher Education Report (2014, p. 48) asserts that HEIs are habitually a critically important role-player part in communities. Community engagement should not only encompass a range of projects, or sharing of some facilities or other support, but should be reflected in relevant teaching, learning and research by the university in and for a community.

Naidu (2019) demonstrates that CE is but one of three fundamental responsibilities of a HEI in conjunction with teaching and research. Community engagement in HE should be regarded as a stage for networking and amalgamating where apposite, forms of indigenous and global knowledge in a community of practice. In a global context there are of course numerous barriers to traverse for universities. In some HEIs the approach to CE was a one-way street in which there was knowledge dissemination from an institution to the community (Johnson 2020). The current modus operandi suggest that there is now a far greater consideration of addressing societal needs in a two-way approach in which there is inter-connectedness and solid engagement on issues dealt with between HEIs and communities (Weerts and Sandmann 2008). CE must be a

two-way relationship (Weerts and Sandmann 2008) and have mutual interchanges (Hammersley 2017). Johnson (2020) refers to this as “interconnectedness”. Community engagement, research and innovation, as well as teaching and learning, are critical in Higher Education (Duke 2008, Lazarus et al. 2008). Welch states that engagement is part of the original purpose of HEIs and that there are many opportunities for them to engage with the community.

Goddard (2007) states that it has become conventional for yearly evaluations of faculty to contain a review community service and students are also required in some HEIs to participate in regular CE projects. Bender (2013) opines that HEIs have always to an extent integrated CE and need not do anything new in their approaches towards it. Awuzie and Emuze (2017) argue that CE gives HEIs somewhat of a competitive edge as they are thus involved in sustainable development.

In real terms, the core responsibility of HEIs is to address at least some of the myriad of developmental, socioeconomic, and environmental needs existing within the communities in which they operate (Welch 2016). Ogunsanya and Govender (2019) maintain that a community can denote various entities including “...governments (both national and local), businesses, non-governmental organisations, cultural organisations, social entrepreneurial enterprises, schools, and other citizens including community leaders.” Invariably communities deprived of needed resources and those with inadequate skills and other constraints are targeted. Faculty of urban and rural universities consider wide ranges of actions and prospects to contribute to the greater wellbeing of their contiguous communities. This invariably involves engaging in a range of formal and informal activities within communities including inter-alia collaboration in projects of mutual interest, creation of firm relationships, research initiatives, business partnership, and conferencing. In numerous countries, it is now commonplace for faculty in HEIs to be evaluated on community engagement activities in annual appraisals. Even students are called upon to be involved in community engagement in some HEIs (Jacob et al. 2015).

What is required are a series of equitable partnerships between HEIs and communities which result in long-term commitments from researchers and communities and the development of co-learning which nurtures capacity building and sustainable development (Smith et al. 2015). The modern global and knowledge society, promotes the notion that research with community stakeholders can in some way or other help to mitigate socio-economic issues and challenges impacting adversely upon communities. Community engagement has a participatory nature which is advantageous for bottom-up initiatives especially in areas including innovation and sustainability, technology transfer and local or global connectivity (Dumova 2015). The extent of CE diverges substantively between various HEIs. There are HEIs that place a great stress on CE and there are even some that maintain that CE transpires organically as academics are engage with the community through their research initiatives. There are of course numerous universities with sound and effective CE reputations and solid networks within a wide range of communities (Goddard and Puukka 2008, Goddard and Vallance 2011). Daniels et al. (2013) asserts that

CE should must be connected to discernible needs of HEIs and the communities where they operate. Calhoun (2006, p. 19) argues: “Public support for universities is based on the effort to educate citizens in general, to share knowledge, to distribute it as widely as possible in accord with publically articulated purposes”.

Ubuntu and Community

In traditional African society and thought systems, communities tend to play a very important part and there are normally expectations from the community that entities will be supportive. In essence there is a metaphysical question to answer. Can a person be self-sufficient or must he or she depend on relationships with others? African culture has a very strong communitarian ethos. Menkiti (1984) suggests that a community defines individuals and Mbiti (1970) asserts “I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am”. Thus a communal existence must of necessity take precedence over individuals, so that CE for example, has a natural role to play. People are intrinsically communal entities within a social relationship context in which where is a need for interdependence. HEIs as entities need to then not live in isolation from persons in their communities but should naturally be inclined towards them. The pursuit of the common good is the key objective of shared relationships such as CE between HEIs and the community, and this should take precedence over individualistic preferences. HEIs that do not involve themselves in their communities could be viewed as detracting from the desired common good postulated by Ubuntu. Wiredu (1992) has argued that the community must of necessity be the locus of deontology and this implies that the community should always be a strong reference point in teaching, research and engagement initiatives that are undertaken in HEIs. If CE is to drive sustainable development in any way at all, it needs to augment and stimulate scholarship via solid win-win partnerships with HEIs (Daniels et al. 2013). There is a need for solid knowledge creation with communities by HEIs (Scull and Cuthill 2010). Nonetheless, all university - community collaborations and projects should involve the community as learners and teachers so that solutions can be found (Bhagwan 2017). It is also evident that communities are generally distinctive and each has diverse needs and challenges. This implies that HEIs need to tailor their CE initiatives to meet a variety of needs in a spirit of solidarity and partnership. HEIs should strive to work with communities to discover reciprocally beneficial solutions. Freire (2007) states in his work the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that our ontological calling is to seek to transform the world and serve ourselves and the collective.

A Reflection on Examples of Some Current Effective HEI in Community Engagement

The Grassroots Collective publishes an online Community Engagement training module in which one is able to glean a comprehensive understanding of proficient Community Engagement and the development of effective projects. In

the 2nd module of the course – it delivers the concept of situational analysis. The module outlines Situational Analysis in a five-step process (Grassroots Collective 2022).

In the first step of the process, it advises that a general understanding of the context of the community is an essential preliminary step. What this entails is a genuine examination of the circumstances and demographics of the community in which the project will take place. Before a project begins there are various factors that need considering for example – what is the population profile of the area, how are the literacy and education levels, what is the economic situation of the community, what kind of landscape and environmental conditions does the community exist, it is important to take note of the cultural values, cultural conflicts, political alignments and trust in political structures. Once the circumstances of a community can be understood in this way, a project can be uniquely adapted to suit and service said community.

The second step of the process is identifying the overarching problems or challenges for that particular community. This is an important part of the process as often very good ideas for Community Projects do not work, because broad root problems or challenges were not addressed and instead the project was in a sense foisted on a community who did not necessarily need that type of intervention. It is necessary to engage the community itself in the identification of challenges that they feel bear on the community. A point to take note of is that even if the project designers hail from a certain discipline, a broader scope of identification of challenges that extends beyond the discipline is encouraged. Once the challenges are identified – the investigation into the specifics of the challenge may be developed further.

Step three involves examining the human resource availability, skills capacity and of the proposed community project developers in the effort to locate the best way in which the organisation may help the community based on the developing organisations expertise.

Once step two is completed, then the identification of step 3 goals will lead to assist the organisation in determining which of broad challenges it is most suited to address, thereby increasing the efficacy of the engagement. Thus step four is about selecting a broad project goal that is efficiently aligned with the capacity of the organisation.

Finally step five – once the broad goal of the project is identified. Then it becomes necessary to revisit the situation in reference to the broad problem. It is at this stage that you can interrogate more targeted information to understand the problem better (Grassroots Collective 2022).

South African HEI's are rising to the challenge of incorporating meaningful Community Engagement endeavours within their structures (Muller 2010). Higher Education institutions in South Africa have an interesting array of Community Engagement initiatives – what follows is a description of the ones that we found very well-articulated and captivating in nature.

The University of Pretoria sees Community Engagement as synonymous with social responsibility. They have publicly committed to aligning their

curriculum, knowledge, skills and research in a concentrated effort to problem-solve and address the more pressing social needs within their communities.

In terms of the United Nations Goals for sustainable development they have selected four areas in which they will concentrate their focus. These include Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well Being, Quality Education and Life on Land.

UP is involved in designing projects to achieve food security, to improve the quality of nutrition and to develop sustainable agriculture. Their greater goal is to achieve an end to hunger. One of their notable community engagement projects is the success of their Reliable House Project. This was an endeavour where the University of Pretoria identified an area close to their campus that had a notorious reputation of being associated with drug-users, criminality and prostitution and the idea that the homeless who lived there were somewhat unsavoury.

In 2016, the University of Pretoria identified an area in Hatfield that had a negative reputation of being a troublesome area. Part of the complaints about the area was that it was a crime ridden area frequented by drug-users and prostitutes. The University of Pretoria regarded the spot as one in which through their community engagement efforts could turn the space from something that was viewed as disreputable into something that would have more reputable value.

Their approach to raising the value and reputation by incorporating multi-disciplinary bodies and community partners in consultation with community occupancy of the area is an exemplary instance in where an HEI's Community Engagement is expertly applied.

Historically, in cases such as this where the intention was to raise the value of a space occupied by individuals of which the society deemed undesirable, the default approach is to employ strong coercion to enforce evictions. Chastisement of these individuals was done so publicly, in a way that further disempowered the individuals, stripping them of their dignity and further abandoning these most vulnerable members of the society. Typically, post-eviction no real attempt is made to follow-up on where these individuals have gone, and whether they have done anything to ensure that the motley-crew of vulnerable societal undesirables is not going to set up a camp somewhere else. As we can appreciate – this doesn't effectively solve problems.

The University of Pretoria's Unit for Community engagement's approach was innovative and comprehensive in terms of addressing multiple issues in a way that held value for all members of the community and created viable solutions that eradicated the problems at the root. The approach was not to rid the area of its homeless, its drug-users and its prostitutes, but to work together with them to find solutions to the problems they experience and that they had experienced that had put them in the positions they were in. This more effectively addresses

The area was cleared and cleaned a clinic, a sickbay and a training centre were installed, and ablution block was repaired and renovated. Nine transitional wendy-houses were erected to serve as transitional housing. Various academic structures of the University of Pretoria worked together to provide support and service the needs of that community.

The focus of University of Pretoria's Community Engagement was to address the community needs. Right at the outset what is evident is that there is clear indication of actual community engagement. The intention expressed was not to denigrate the members of this community but to engage them in a way that their root problems were addressed in addition to providing a solution in which a viable sustainability of problem-resolution could be achieved and maintained.

What took place was that multiple disciplines of the University of Pretoria including Mission-Theology, Psychology, Social Work, Health Sciences, Civil-Engineering as well as Skills training collaborated as a community to "develop" the previously negatively implicated area. That community together with the engagement of the occupant community of the area itself, the development took the tangible form of clearing and cleaning up the area and it was transformed into a transitional support and rehabilitation centre. The rehabilitation centre that was directly accessible to the members of this particular community and beyond to a wider community of this sort that required help of this sort with great success. Members of this community renamed the space 'Reliable House' and renamed themselves "change makers". Community Engagement in this instance involved dignity and hope and met the real needs of the members of the community who needed the most help from the community.

In addition to the immediate stakeholder community, the project engaged community partners such as Community partners such as Community Support Structure for people using drugs, Narcotics Anonymous, Alcoholics Anonymous, Religious Institutions and a Peace Force Security company. The project as described above is an exemplary citadel of complete and comprehensive Community Engagement, that engaged, included and involved all communities working together to address pressing social needs.

Other community engagement endeavours that are more discipline specific at the University of Pretoria include an animal health clinic in which first year students of the BSc intending to apply for the Veterinary Science programme volunteer at the clinic which offers affordable veterinary services including vaccination and sterilisation of animals in the areas of Mamelodi, Eersterust, and Nellmapius. In this example, we see the engagement of the student community, and the engagement of an often-neglected community of animal caretakers.

What is notable here is that such an endeavour has a positive outcome for wider community at large. Running a veterinary clinic contributes to the wellbeing of the community. Often the lack of purpose and meaning in an individual creates a bleak and boredom-filled outlook for the individual. Individuals with bleak outlooks tend to engage in anti-social behaviours. There is also a correlate between lack of purpose and addiction or anti-social behaviours. Taylor writes

"...without a sense of purpose, we are more vulnerable to becoming depressed in response to negative events. We become more susceptible to psychological discord—to boredom, frustration and pessimism. We are more liable to feel the residual pain of trauma from the past (and traumatic past experiences in themselves have also been linked to addiction). Drugs and alcohol are therefore appealing as a way of escaping the psychological problems caused by a lack of purpose. But addiction can also be seen as an attempt to find a purpose" (Taylor 2022).

Recognising the need that communities might need in terms of companionship, affection, loyalty, one can appreciate how this may be alleviated by the expression of care for animals. Once the individual feels more loved, grounded and purpose-driven, this has an effect of creating or fostering calm, emotionally fulfilled psyches within a community, realizes a more content and peaceful wider community.

A way to introduce this kind of fulfilment mentioned above is to adopt or care for a pet. In various prisons in the United States of America programmes have been introduced in which long-term inmates with a bleak outlook have been paired with animals as their caretakers and trainers. The approach departs from an underlying idea that giving men a dignified purpose would psychologically reconcile them to themselves as worthy human beings and in turn rehabilitate the men into productive, peaceful members of society. One such example is the Paws for Life programme in California State Prison in Los Angeles county - a men's maximum-security prison). The programme has yielded phenomenally positive results for both the long-term prisoners and the dogs who demonstrated high transformative levels of rehabilitative socialization. Previous inmates in the programme have in some instances demonstrated such a radical transformation that they have had their sentences commuted and have gone on to organise, facilitate and run various programmes of similar sort in their communities. This type of approach of pairing animals with persons has also been applied in the treatment of post-traumatic stress disorder for veterans (Paws for Life K9 Rescue 2022).

In communities where there is a marked level of social trauma, poverty, and disillusionment there is most certainly a bleak outlook for the individuals within. In this sort of instance, where life itself is kind of dismal prison, it will not be a stretch to assume that many individuals wish to escape their desolate circumstances, it may not be a stretch to assume that in encountering grim conditions of existence that individuals harbour an appreciable level of post-traumatic stress. We can also imagine that a lot of the undesirable and damaging elements in communities have arisen out of such conditions. In such communities or spaces – a programme of a similar ilk like Paws for Life, that introduces the expression of care for animals with community members and this may comport itself to the alleviation of despair and tedium as well as impart a sense of purposefulness, value and self-worth to persons. When person achieves an emotional or psychological state of purposefulness, responsibility and has a useful role to fulfil, one can appreciate that they are not tempted to find escape and belonging in more destructive behaviours. This was evident in the Paws for Life Prison programmes mentioned above.

So what might be the problem? Why might it be difficult for individuals within a community to just adopt a pet? What would be the biggest barrier in committing to a pet? Well, if one thinks about the cost of maintaining a pet, that might be a restraining factor. Animals however require medical care and private care is expensive. People might be hesitant to acquire a pet for the reason that they wouldn't be able to afford its care.

So it somewhat follows that any community engagement project that could offer services to help mitigate such challenges would be a holistically wholesome and multi-pronged intervention.

University of Pretoria's offering of veterinary clinic services is a great example of the kind of multi-pronged problem-resolution that could ultimately address multi-faceted community needs. In engaging the community and making the service available to the community. Not only are they providing fundamental health services for animals in the community that might pose a risk to the communities for example rabies and over-population which could lead to violent mistreatment of addressing over-population of street strays etc., they provide directly accessible and affordable veterinary services, the need for human emotional fulfilment, and also the wider need for communities wellbeing – as expressed in the concept mentioned above – I am because we are.

The University of the Free State runs a “Kopanang le fodise - Unite to heal programme”. This project is an initiative that focusses on community-centered partnership. The goals the programme hopes to achieve include healthcare that is sustainable and holistic while incorporating it into community-based, multidisciplinary and inter-professional groups. In addition to running a mobile health clinic, offering various health screening tests, there is a participatory action learning project. There is a Community Youth Leadership development, and an early childhood development programme. Fourth Year students in the Faculty of Health Science are involved in a service learning module that caters to the community in primary healthcare facilities. The project also collaborates with various faculties at the Central University of Technology (EDCM 2022).

The Creative Change Lab out of the University of Cape Town is an innovative long-term engaged Community intervention in which teams of about 20 young people are given the freedom to creatively experiment beyond the confines of conventional methods to solve problems in their community. The extraordinary feature of this endeavour is that students are able to design their interventions at their creative will and test their original prototypes. This is a novel, creative step adeptly spirited in the ideals of decolonialising education (University of Cape Town 2022).

HEI's Struggles with Effective CE – Some Thoughts

- Translating Community Engagement through HEIs bureaucratic systems is not effective and very often counterproductive. The procedure is long, tedious, and invariably involves a lot of transliteration and it is thereby neutered and given up on.
- The spirit of the idea and service are lost in the long, drawn out mechanics of registering research proposals – which by nature are different to the spirit of a community engagement project.
- Where CE is effectively in place, the dissemination of research results to the broader society is critically important.

- There is a need for CE collaboration with other HEIs especially in areas where there are huge societal issues.
- HEIs need to take care in calling some activities CE initiatives when they are not engagement activities.
- There is often adequate financing and this impedes higher education's capacity to conduct required research, or appoint suitable faculty.
- Some creative freedom with regard to how projects are formulated and implemented could get many more, useful, edifying, sustainable projects off the ground, instead of having to go through the system of burdensome academic administration.
- Reflexive research is often constrained by the prevailing discourse in teaching and research at many HEIs and there needs to be a drive to seek novel ways of knowledge production and new theories are needed to help mitigate problems facing society.
- Greater co-ordination is required between diverse stakeholders in the research relating to CE and this should include all stakeholders including the public and private sectors.
- It is invariably the case that rural communities bear a lopsided burden of societal problems and are plagued by poverty, disease, deficiency and marginalisation.
- HEIs must design curricula that support CE engagement so that socially responsive graduates will enter the workplace.
- We should not assume that academics know what CE means, but rather provide suitable training for effective pursuit of quality CE.
- All institutional engagement with the local and broader community via CE should be formalised and approved via a HEIs quality management policies and procedures.

Conclusions

HEIs should collaborate on CE in order to address the myriad of social and economic challenges and thus more effectively promote the idea of a just social order. HEIs are invariably part of a community of practice. To effectively face the challenges posed by poverty and in order to drive sustainable development, they are morally obliged to serve their communities, first and foremost. HEIs are in many ways places in which the many problems faced in communities can be surmounted through adopting global practices and learnings which can be used to alleviate local community difficulties. We should equally remember that local communities too often possess knowledge and proficiency that HEIs can utilise. African scholarship must be located within indigenous African philosophies so that CE should be viewed as a communitarian activity. A truly dedicated HEI that is cognisant of its role in society will strive to be dynamically involved with a community in its ambit and should fashion its identity and on an Ubuntu approach. It needs to be accountable to an extent of course, but always transparent in all dealings with communities. HEI policies and practices must of necessity inspire

engagement with a focus on an ethic of care for communities. HEIs that do not align with the notion of CE should transform so as to be of true value to society. CE is then a stage for interrelated academic knowledge and that which is evidenced in communities. There is a paucity of research on the subject of CE by HEIs in South Africa, which presents somewhat of a challenge. There is a necessity for a far greater national higher education policy on CE, which can be easily transformed into general policy guidelines for HEIs and hold them accountable as stated by Walters and Openjuru (2014). Nonetheless as stated earlier, HEIs ought to integrate teaching, research, and CE within society so as to enhance it and mitigate socio-economic negative impacts. Of course, there is also a need for HEIs to garner support from private and public entities, and especially Multi-National Corporations, but that is a thought for another study. Currently there is also a distinct need to further research how or whether CE informs an emerging epistemology, is gaining acceptance if at all, and whether it is indeed truly embraced by HEIs. CE is a complex and challenging aspect of education that is sorely needed.

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