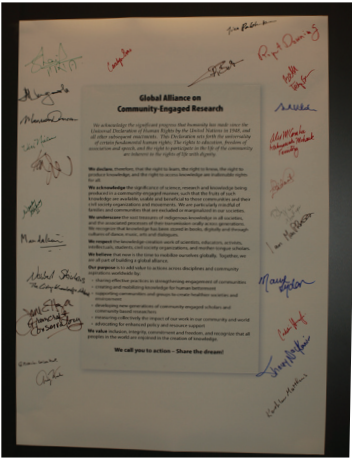


HIGHER EDUCATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE WORLD WE WANT

A Policy Brief to the World Conference on Higher Education, July 5-8, 2009



Global Alliance on Community Engaged Research
June 2009

Summary

At this critical time in human and sustainable development for the world, it is imperative that we harness the potential of community higher education partnerships to inform progress. There is a large aggregate trend to unite civil society and higher education institutions and networks in common efforts to co-create knowledge, mobilize it to inform practice and policy, and enhance the social, economic and environmental conditions of people, communities, nations and the world. However, these efforts are fragmented and face many unnecessary barriers. We therefore propose an Action Plan for University-Community Engagement for Societal Change and Development, one that unleashes the resources of higher education and government, in collaboration with civil society and its socio-economic development actors to create the sustainable world we want.

1.0 Preamble

1.1 The Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER) was created by representatives of universities, networks and civil society organizations in May 2008 at the Community University Expo Conference in Victoria, BC, Canada, hosted by the University of Victoria. The International Development Research Centre of Canada funded a specific Global Networking meeting on May 5th 2008 at which representatives of 14 countries throughout the world developed a Declaration of The Global Alliance (attached), which was then endorsed by many of the 600 delegates at the conference.

1.2 The Alliance is producing this policy brief to the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education to share findings and propose next steps in the effective utilization of higher education partnerships with communities and civil society to address the social, economic and environmental challenges that the people of the world face.

1.3 Specifically we are concerned to raise with Member States and stakeholders the importance of community university partnerships in learning and research to strengthen the role of higher education in sustainable development, social responsibility and civic engagement. As UNESCO has noted in the convening of this World Conference

“Owing to the scope and pace of change, society has become increasingly knowledge-based so that higher learning and research now act as essential components of cultural, socio-economic and environmentally sustainable development of individuals, communities and nations.”¹

We believe that it is essential that higher learning and knowledge creation involve effective partnerships between academic and non-academic learning institutions and communities (geographic and population-based) to create and apply learning and knowledge with stakeholders (including local governments and small and medium sized enterprises) that are managing and creating sustainable development initiatives. We suggest examples of initiatives that are carrying out this task that could be scaled up and adapted by Member States and stakeholders.

1.4 To create effective partnerships we suggest that a more systemic approach is required by Member States, United Nations agencies, higher education institutions and civil society networks (including those representing cooperative and small/medium sized enterprises that contribute to sustainable livelihoods) to generate strategies and outcomes that are effective in meeting the global challenges of sustainable development.

1.5 We therefore propose to the UNESCO Conference some recommendations for action based on real experiences in Member States by stakeholders for strengthening community university partnerships in achieving collective goals for reforming the role of higher education in sustainable development. We believe these recommendations could contribute to the success of UNESCO’s forward planning for global collaboration on the future trajectory of higher education’s role in contributing to the challenges facing our nations, people and world.

1 (http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-url_id=40215&url_do=do_topic&url_section=201.html)

2.0 A Troubling Global Context: Importance and Need for New Knowledge:

2.1 In 2000, amid great fanfare and optimism, the UN World Assembly endorsed a set of Millennium Development Goals to eliminate world poverty by 2015. In 2008, the scene is more somber: the World Bank says, “no developing country is likely to meet the Millennium Development Goals” (Tandon, 2008). Violence and armed struggle persists killing, wounding and displacing large numbers of people in several regions of the world. In dealing with post-conflict areas, new research strategies and kinds of knowledge are needed, since “post-conflict recovery policy must begin with a robust understanding of the indigenous drivers of recovery” (UNDP, 2008, xix).

2.2 The economic meltdown now spreading into all parts of the world calls into question the capacity of market strategies to reduce poverty, close the gap between the rich and the poor or even provide a stable economic base for trade and development. Overall, global GDP is estimated to have contracted by an alarming 6¼ percent (annualized) in the fourth quarter of 2008 (a swing from 4 percent growth one year earlier) and to have fallen almost as fast in the first quarter of 2009. All economies around the world have been seriously affected, although the direction of the blows has varied. (IMF, 2009:4)

2.3 In effect, a new knowledge strategy and networking capacity is being called for. “In a globalized world, in which public issues and social problems stretch across wide spaces, affecting ever larger numbers of people, it becomes increasingly important for individuals and communities to learn together” (Gurstein and Angeles, 2007, 3). Knowledge must be mobilized and activated by all social and economic actors, in new and creative ways. In alliance with the communities in which they are based, and through the use of community-based research strategies, higher education institutions need to align and focus their considerable capacities on promoting innovative and effective government policies and civic action. Community-university research partnerships are emerging as an important strategy mobilizing just such research and action (Global Alliance on Community-Engaged Research, 2008).

3.0 Community University Partnerships in Sustainable Development and Social Responsibility

3.1 Community-University partnerships in research, learning and knowledge mobilization are a growing trend in countries around the world, in both the South and North, as nations and regions seek solutions to inter-related social, economic and environmental issues and challenges to their sustainability.

3.2 In its report, *New Paths to Social Development* (2000), the World Bank concludes: “The development community now recognizes that it needs greater understanding of community institutions, networks, norms, and values to enable people to capture the benefits of development and build their capacity to help themselves.”

3.3 Amongst universities there has been a growing focus on curriculum, programs, research and knowledge mobilization activity to apply the resources of faculty, students and researchers to the needs of communities and civil society active in applying knowledge to planning and action in society to manage and create change.

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3.4 The 2008 World Report on Higher Education, researched and written under the direction of the Global University Networks for Innovation (GUNI), focused on the role of higher education in strengthening social integration and democracy, economic well-being and sustainability. They report on the growing discourse around the world on engagement and renewed examinations of the relationship of higher education to the societies within which they are located. One of the contributors to the GUNI report, Dr. Rajesh Tandon, President of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia and Chair of the Global Alliance in Community-Engaged Research has noted:



Inside the universities many more changes are needed. First of all, they must consider the different civil society actors as legitimate sources of knowledge and work together with them. There is a lot of analytical reflection and educational work outside the university. Secondly, universities have to reform their curriculum, including practical work as an element of learning. In many of our countries, universities only do classroom teaching, without practical immersion. In every subject you can learn from experience, from the field. Finally, the internal incentive structure for professors and researchers must include civic engagement and the co-production of knowledge with civil society.¹

3.5 In the 1970s in the Netherlands, a structure for linking academic research to communities needs was created called Science Shops (<http://www.livingknowledge.org>). In Tanzania, India, Latin America and elsewhere, a new research approach called “participatory research”, which recognized the knowledge creating capacities of community, organizations and social movements, was also gaining visibility (Hall, 1975).

3.6 More recently there has been a wave of research and knowledge mobilization initiatives that build on the early work of the Science Shops and the Participatory Research practitioners and others. It is promoted and supported by a new set of networks and structures such as Sciences Citoyennes in France (<http://sciencescitoyennes.org>); the Living Knowledge Network based in Germany (<http://www.scienceshops.org>); The Popular Education Network based in Scotland (Crowther, 1999); Community-Based Research Canada (<http://uvic.ca/ocbr>); Community-University Partnerships for Health in the United States (<http://depts.washington.edu/ccph/>); as well as the National CBR Networking Initiative (<http://www.bonner.org/campus/cbr/home.htm>) and the University-Community Partnership for Social Action Network (<http://www.igloo.org/ucpsarnet>). Additional networks and structures include the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (<http://www.pria.org>); The Global University Network for Innovation in Barcelona (<http://www.guni-rmies.net>); the Sub-Saharan African Participatory Research Network in Senegal; the Developing Research on Citizenship network based at the University of Sussex (<http://www.drc-citizenship.org>); Observatory PASCAL on Place Management, Community Engagement and Learning Regions (<http://www.obs-pascal.com>); the Australian University Community Engagement Association (Temple et al, 2005) Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (<http://www.aucea.net.au>), Academe Civil Society Network in SEAsia (ACSN), University Social Responsibility Alliance (USR) and there are many other emerging networks.

3.6 A recent study “The Funding and Development of Community University Research Partnerships in Canada”² identified a growing trend amongst Research Councils in that country to invest in community university research partnerships in health, social and economic development, ecological stewardship and other areas of multi-disciplinary research. The Community University Research Alliance program of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada is cited as an example of new funding arrangements to support these partnership models, now being applied to international research and development partnerships through the International Development Research Centre of Canada.

1 Tandon, Rajesh, Interview in the May 2009 GUNI electronic newsletter (<http://www.guni-rmies.net/>)

2 The Funding and Development of Community University Research Partnerships in Canada, (Hall, Tremblay and Downing), University of Victoria, May 2009.

3.7 There is evidence of systemic investment by higher education institutions in extension and community engagement activities as institution-wide commitments to social responsibility and mutually beneficial partnerships with civil society. Some are the result of targeted funding by Research Councils encouraging universities to engage in community partnerships.

The Canadian Social Economy Research Partnerships funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council brings together social and economic development actors with universities across the country to strengthen the use of the third sector in producing socio-economic and environmental outcomes for sustainable development. The Partnerships are structured as a Community University Research Alliance involving over 12 universities across a range of faculties with community and civil society partners in every region of the country. Universities engaged in the Partnerships commit to join management of the research and knowledge mobilization activities with their community partners, through six regional alliances and a national centre or “hub”. Students, practitioners and faculty are jointly involved in and responsible for research activities.¹

The National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement is part of the Beacons for Public Engagement project which was launched in April 2008 and funded by the UK higher education funding councils, Research Councils UK and the Wellcome Trust. The four-year project aims to work with universities to increase the quality and quantity of their public engagement activities. Public engagement goes beyond the facilitation of research partnership to encompass a huge range of activities that bring university staff, students and the public together in two-way interactions that are mutually beneficial.² They stress the importance of strengthening what they refer to as engaged research (including the co-production of knowledge with end-users), knowledge exchange and engaged teaching and learning. There are six “Beacons” of public engagement in the UK at the Universities of Bristol, University of the West of England, University of Newcastle, University of Durham, University of Manchester, University College London, University of East Anglia, University of Wales and Edinburgh Beltrane.
<http://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/>

3.8 Others are the product of commitments by universities to enlarging the opportunities for “service learning” for students in communities.

The service learning movement in the United States involves colleges and universities across the country in partnerships with community based organizations to create learning opportunities for students that also contribute to community well being. Students receive credits for service learning as part of their curriculum, are supported in reflecting on their experiences in working in community, and contribute to real priorities for applied research in the communities they work with. Disciplines involved in service learning include science, technology, engineering, public health, social work, and many others. Six hundred and thirty-five colleges and universities were recognized in 2008 for their civic engagement through service-learning.
<http://www.servicelearning.org/>



1 www.socialeconomyhub.ca
2 www.publicengagement.ac.uk

3.9 A third category involves institution-wide commitments to community engagement as an explicit mission of universities across a range of research, learning and knowledge mobilization activities to advance their social responsibility mandate.

The Community University Partnership Programme¹ was created at the University of Brighton in southern England in 2003 with an initial grant from the Transatlantic Foundation and in the context of a visionary Rector at the time, Sir David Watson. CUPP currently has an annual central university grant of \$500,000 for its core operations. It has engaged 130 academics, 1000 students and 500 community partners over the period of its existence. They support community needs in research, strategic planning, evaluation, and access issues in terms of negotiating the university. Projects engaged include mental health studies, health promotion, urban gardening, art and social integration, citizen action on climate change, family unemployment strategies and a large regional project covering three counties in the south of England, the Southeast Coastal Communities Project.

3.10 A fourth category of community university engagement involves leadership by civil society networks and organizations to bring together university-based representatives with community representatives to achieve social and sustainable development objectives.

Fondation Science Citoyennes (Citizen Science Foundation) was created in 2002 as a non-governmental organization for the democratization of science and scientific research. It aims to promote and extend the issues of democratic citizenship through debates, discussions and networking activities that seek to strengthen and better link science with the goals of a democratic and just society. Its board of directors is made up of distinguished scientists in France. Science Citoyennes has three central focuses for its work. First, bringing scientists and civil society actors together in issues of critical contemporary concern (social, medical, environmental). Second, create a common space for science and civil society to work together in areas that are fragmented politically and disciplinarily (ie: nanoscience, genetic modification or organisms, indigenous knowledge). Third is increasing the research or knowledge creation capacity of civil society organizations, regulatory bodies and trade unions, the creation of what they call “a third science”.²

The Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)³ has been promoting for the past three decades innovations and practice of such research approaches that make communities stakeholders in generating and mobilizing knowledge. It has engaged with nearly one hundred higher education institutions in India, South Asia and Southeast Asia to enable researchers to partner with communities for joint investigations and mutual learning. Students from the faculties of social work, humanities, sociology, political science, environment, public administration, management, rural development, regional planning, economics, public health, education, etc have been trained by PRIA in situ, as well as in classrooms. PRIA has stimulated and brokered partnerships to address such problems as illiteracy, girls’ education, drinking water, forest conservation, occupational health, women’ livelihood, local planning, urban sanitation, etc. It has coached researchers and teachers in methodologies of community-engaged research from numerous institutions of higher education.

<http://www.pria.org/>



1 <http://www.brighton.ac.uk/cupp/>
2 <http://sciencescitoyennes.org/>
3 <http://www.pria.org/>

The Centro Boliviano de Estudios Multidisciplinarios (CEBEM)¹ is conducting an initiative, “Cooperation, Knowledge & Development: A North- South Project for Cooperation and Training. Latin America – The Caribbean – Canada” in partnership with six university centres and a civil society network in Canada. This initiative promotes visibility and access to sources of knowledge with the purpose to update professionals that are working in the front line of development projects and policies. This approach is supported by a system that combines a (virtual) learning platform for delivery of short term updating courses on cutting-edge issues, and a portal with information resources and communication tools. The thematic focus is on virtual education; local and regional development; intercultural relations; human and social Development; community economic development; international relations and; participatory research methods. Specific objectives are to consolidate a model of North-South and South–South collaboration for the design, exchange, adaptation, and delivery of short online courses for professional updating; to provide short-term work and learning opportunities to Canadian and Latin American graduate students, professors, and practitioners; and, to contribute to furthering the development of participatory research methods. This initiative includes a Newsletter that reaches over 130,000 professionals, university professors, researchers, policy makers, and development practitioners across Latin America and the Caribbean.

The Sub-Sahara Africa Participatory Research Network (REPAS) promotes the use of participatory action research to meet the needs of people and communities in achieving sustainable development throughout Africa. It develops popular knowledge through university community partnerships in areas such as: community development; women’s issues; poverty alleviation; health; education and literacy; sustainable development, and; culture. The Network has been particularly active in Senegal, Gambia, Mauritania and Chad.

4.0 Outcomes

4.1 Collaboration and research amongst partners in the Global Alliance for Community-Engaged Research suggests that community engagement with higher education institutions on every continent has reached a critical mass and momentum. There is significant evidence of beneficial outcomes from these forms of engagement.

4.2 Knowledge being co-produced and applied to real challenges to human development and sustainability is offering pathways and solutions that would not otherwise exist. Communities and their social and economic development actors are directly benefiting from their engagement in research and learning partnerships, obtaining access to participatory action research and learning opportunities that build their capacity to manage and create their own evidence-based strategies for sustainable development.

4.3 Knowledge mobilization from research partnerships are being applied to real-time (?)policy creation by governments across the globe who need multi-disciplinary evidence-based strategies for public policy development that includes scientific rigor and the knowledge and engagement of civil society actors (their citizens) in solutions to sustainable development.

4.4 Higher education institutions are benefiting from increased learning and engagement of their students and faculty in real-life learning and knowledge creation opportunities. They are also benefiting from increased support from the public and stakeholders from demonstrating their commitment to social responsibility.

4.5 Public agencies and research councils are benefitting from multiple returns on their investment in research that informs policy, practice and learning across a range of relevant stakeholders, and builds, through student, faculty and community practitioner engagement, a new generation of informed stakeholders.

4.6 Civil society organizations are benefiting from enhanced resource partnerships that inform the public good they are working to achieve while strengthening the scientific rigour they need to demonstrate and use evidence of solutions to the public issues they are working on.

1 http://ccd-ckd.cebem.org/index_eng.php).

5.0 Issues and Conclusions

5.1 The emerging trends in community higher education engagement offer an important knowledge creation and mobilization system to respond to the world's sustainable development challenges. However it is currently fragmented and lacking recognition and systematic means to address its potential.

5.2 The 2008 Higher Education in the World Report provide a wide-ranging global analysis of the challenges and opportunities we face in bridging the gap between communities and universities in human and social development (Taylor, 2008). Bawa (2007) has noted that for developing countries, and we would argue for the richer countries as well, one of the challenges for community engagement strategies is to systematically incorporate capacity building of community participants and communities to be part of networked society (Castells, 1996).

5.3 It is noted that the “agenda has moved on from a desire to simply increase the general education of the population and the output of scientific research; there is now a greater concern to harness university education and research to specific economic and social objectives” (OECD 1999, p. 9), and this raises a series of questions: How can the leadership in Higher Education structures become more sensitized to the needs and opportunities? How do we move community-engaged research from the individual and research centre model to university-wide effective functions? What kinds of capacities are needed within the universities and within community partners in order to create the most productive partnerships? How do we facilitate south-south, south-north and horizontal global collaboration in pursuit of community-university partnerships for sustainable development? How can we ensure that graduates – particularly those involved in policy-making and project implementation in the South – may keep abreast with advances in knowledge? In order to answer these questions effectively, we need a strong global evidence base, and UNESCO with its Member States are ideally positioned to facilitate this at this critical point in time.

5.4 There is also a need to engage Member States in policy development informed by evidence of how higher education can be reformed to scale up successful forms of engagement with community that produce relevant outcomes for social, economic and environmental conditions in their countries. Community and civil society engagement in higher education as a policy focus could unleash multiple returns in sustainable development, but only if higher education policy by nation states provides the flexibility and incentives for that engagement to take place. Member states also have a huge opportunity to benefit from community university partnerships in research and knowledge mobilization for sustainable development if they focus their own investment in research on community university partnership models through their external funding mechanisms and their respective research funding councils.

5.5 Higher Education stakeholders can benefit from collaboration and learning on how emerging models of partnership with community produce enhanced outcomes for their institutions, faculties and students. In particular the extension learning, service learning, applied research functions of higher education institutions are developing models of partnership that could be scaled up. University-wide social responsibility and civic engagement structures are an emerging trend that appears to be producing results that benefit the institutions themselves as well as communities, but on which little dialogue, support, or research has taken place. Incentives for faculty and student involvement in community engagement are lacking, and many traditional academic structures within higher education systems (e.g. recognition, tenure, advancement) are barriers to such engagement. In many regions of the world, specialized NGOs are providing a key role in updating of graduates and professionals after they finish training, to meet the challenges of practice in their real-time situations through upgrading and knowledge transfer – a role that universities rarely play but that is vital to advancing knowledge transfer for sustainable development in practice.

Higher education institutions and their associations could benefit from dialogue and collaboration on models of community and civic engagement and the institutional structures and policies that strengthen such partnerships.

5.6 Civil society stakeholders have an immense knowledge and expertise in planning and action for sustainable development. As former UN Secretary General Koffi Annan has stated civil society is the emerging world superpower. Networks and organizations at the local, regional, national, continental and global level have contributed major initiatives to create and mobilize knowledge for sustainable development. They also have created space for indigenous and community wisdom and organization as the infrastructure for sustainable development that respects local and traditional cultures – a prerequisite in our experience for sustainable development. However, they are under resourced and fragmented, and lack capacity to conduct evidence-based research and planning in many settings. There is a need to network and harness the knowledge of civil society stakeholders on how partnerships with higher education can be designed to support their efforts and needs, particularly in the context of democratic governance and engagement that rely on grassroots capacity of people and communities to create and manage change.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 At this critical time in human and sustainable development for the world, it is imperative that we harness the potential of community higher education partnerships to inform progress. Our research indicates a large aggregate trend to unite civil society and higher education institutions and networks in common efforts to co-create knowledge, mobilize it to inform practice and policy, and enhance the social, economic and environmental conditions of people, communities, nations and the world. However, these efforts are fragmented and face many unnecessary barriers. We therefore propose the following recommendations to stakeholders at the World Conference on Higher Education.



6.2 UNESCO

6.2.1 The UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education include in its declaration a commitment to supporting community higher education partnerships in research, learning and knowledge mobilization as a strategic vehicle to achieve Member State objectives for sustainable development and societal responsibility.

6.2.2 UNESCO and its Member States initiate and support a participatory process with higher education institutions, community university research networks, civil society representatives (including those from producers), and other appropriate international agencies to profile effective practices in community engagement and their outcomes. The process include:

- Profiling best practices, models and their outcomes in community-based research, knowledge mobilization, service-learning, and civic engagement involving community university partnerships.
- Profiling effective funding models for community university research partnerships amongst Member States.
- Analyzing the linkages between these partnerships and policy development needs of Member States in sustainable development.
- Soliciting recommendations from practitioners in community-based research partnership activity from higher education institutions, government, and civil society on how to strengthen a supportive policy environment for this activity to increase relevant outcomes.
- Convening a special international conference on community university partnerships to discuss and advance recommendations arising from the process.
- Create a UNESCO Chair in Community Engaged Scholarship

6.3 MEMBER STATES

6.3.1 Member states collaborate with the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research, its members in their respective regions and other similar networks/alliances in identifying research funding models that support community university research partnerships to generate applied and evidence-based policy to address sustainable development and other public policy priorities.

6.3.2 Member states support a lead role by national Research Granting Councils (where they exist) in supporting community university research and knowledge mobilization partnerships, and work to strengthen the investment of international development co-funding organizations in stronger and more organic links between higher education institutions and their communities and regions, and strengthen that role by:

a) Investing in analysis and sharing of results and lessons learned of previously funded Community Higher Education research partnerships in many parts of the world and the creation of an ongoing database and resource for sharing of experiences and results.

b) Supporting national and international networks of practitioners to increase excellence in CBR partnerships and practices, knowledge mobilization from CU partnership activities, and enhance tools, resources and outcomes.

c) Increasing the relative allocation of funds to community university research partnerships by Research Granting Councils, including the introduction of civil society partners as eligible recipients.

d) Adjusting grant conditions for CU research partnerships to invest more equitably in community based organizations and ensure that the review and selection process is inclusive of civil society and community interests as well as higher education interests.

e) Increasing funding for International Community University Research Alliance partnerships such as those supported by the International Development Research Centre and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the UK Department of International Development.

6.3.3 Member states work to identify effective higher education policy incentives to increase the relevance and engagement of higher education institutions with community and civil society partners to enhance partnership learning that benefit institutions, students and communities.

6.3.4 Member states engage in collaborative exchanges of knowledge on community university research alliance funding models that are demonstrating outcomes in some jurisdictions and could be adapted to other settings.

6.4 HIGHER EDUCATION STAKEHOLDERS

6.4.1 Higher education stakeholders engage through their respective associations in a specific collaborative study of emerging models for community engagement and the structures and incentives that are working within their institutional frameworks that could be adapted and scaled up within the global higher education sector.

6.5 CIVIL SOCIETY STAKEHOLDERS

6.5.1 Civil society stakeholders in UNESCO and other UN agencies convene to discuss how to enhance collaboration on community-based research, learning and knowledge mobilization for sustainable development, with the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research and other similar networks/alliances.