Working Paper

ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) IN PROMOTING SDGs THROUGH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A Study into the Various Models of Community Engagement in Indian HEIs

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1. INTRODUCTION

A higher educational institute is a place of cultivating intellect and propagating theoretical concepts. These activities, however, come off as paternalistic as these concepts are seen to be residing in an ivory tower, circulating among academics as abstract concepts. Community engagement implies reciprocity, a flow of these ideas into the communities surrounding these metaphorical, often perceived to be inaccessible, centres. The current study seeks to identify the different approaches or models of community engagement (C.E) observed in the Indian higher education system. The main aim is to draw out the role of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in promoting awareness and building capacities with respect to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) as they interact with various communities in their own ways.

Succeeding the Millennium Development Goals, the SDGs present integrated goals that envision a future based on social, economic, and environmental equity. India is committed to the SDG agenda, with policies that are framed to bring holistic development to every Indian. NITI Aayog (the Government of India's think tank) oversees mapping of schemes and also identifies the various ministries and supporting offices that relate to the goals. However, El-Jardali, et al. (2018) call for action and not just policy analysis from a distance as they talk about possible "fatigue" in regarding the SDGs and their implementation due to disconnect between the government, the academic community and the key actors which, the writer suggests, is a reason for the slow pace of their achievement. Franco and Derbyshire (2020) propose an understanding of "Education for Sustainable Development" (ESD) policies, formulated at an international level, and how they fit into a national, institutional, and a local discourse. The authors draw conclusions about possible inconsistencies and reasons for failure of ESD policies by thoroughly analysing stakeholder partnerships and collaboration.

Engagement between higher educational institutions (HEIs) and communities has been defined by Bender (2008) to include "initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community". Bender uses three models of community engagement to describe approaches various institutions might employ in order to exist in a symbiotic relationship (Jacob, et al. 2015) with the community at large. It is largely acknowledged that HEIs are centres of research, innovation, and teaching. But the third "silo", as Bender describes, is community development. In the 'silo' model, these "silos" exist independent of each other and community engagement is predominantly a separate and, often, voluntary endeavour, both at an institutional and individual level. Intersecting model presents C.E. to be an "irreducible and unavoidable" part of the existing institutional activities, be it course work or the establishment sponsored co-curricular activities.

"Scholarly publications, research reports, media coverage and public forums are also modes of engaging with communities, which could be seen as a natural extension of the core work of universities in teaching and research."   *~Bender (2008:88)*

Where the intersecting model doesn't pre-suppose the need to make sweeping efforts to indulge in C.E, the cross- cutting or the infusion model puts engagement with these "specific, local, and collective interest groups" in the forefront of the functioning of an HEI.

A "community engaged university" envisions engagement to be engrained within all learning and research and not as a by-product. Proponents of this approach to C.E argue that service of the community and engagement should be held as essential for improving the relevance of what is taught and not relegated as something separate like a charity.

Through this paper we seek to identify the different approaches or models of community engagement (C.E) observed in the Indian higher education system. The main aim would be to draw out the role of Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in promoting awareness and building capacities with respect to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) as they interact with various communities in their own ways. Towards these objectives, this paper has referred previous literature and policy documents pertaining to the Indian higher education ecosystem. What follows in the next sections is a brief sojourn of the Indian higher education CE approach and how it was shaped. Through the methodology, and the empirical data collected , this paper is a step towards analysing and adding to the discourse around community engagement in HEIs in India. We have attempted to formulate emerging trends and styles of community engagement being practiced in Indian higher education classrooms in the sections on Findings and Discussion/Conclusion.

2. METHODOLOGY

The methodology adopted for the study is largely qualitative. Using pre-prepared questionnaires, one for the institution and one for individuals within an HEI, the researchers were able to conduct semi-structured but free-flowing interviews, which meant that though the flow of the conversation was guided and structured there was room for adding open ended questions. The initial plan was to use the "institutional forms" to gather responses from faculty representing various institutions, spread all across India. The "institution" specific form was sent to faculty and people in a management or administrative role, like the Director, Vice-Chancellor, Head of Department, etc. After collecting a couple of piloted forms, the public health crisis due to COVID-19 suddenly escalated and the flow of responses ceased. It was then decided to send the individual forms to faculty members, who were willing to participate in the study. But instead of using these as institutional responses, it was decided to treat them as standalone responses. By doing a thematic analysis first, we picked up repeating themes or vocabulary, which were then segregated into the pre-decided "SWOT analysis" framework. Based on the framework, it was understood that the responses would be categorized as followed: -

TABLE 1: SWOT MAPPING

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS

• internal/present or existing
   o Strengths are factors, elements and/or aspects that are supporting or enabling the project/activity for increasing community engagement and addressing the SDGs at the local level.
   o They include, but are not limited to, funding, innovation, addressing community needs, policy, dedicated human resources, capacity-building, resource materials, diverse stakeholders, etc.
	• internal/present or existing
	   o Weaknesses are factors, elements and/or aspects that are limiting the project/activity's community engagement for addressing the SDGs at the local level.
	   o What does the researcher/institution want to improve if she/he/they were to do the project/activity again?

OPPORTUNITY	THREATS

• external/future
  o Opportunities are factors, elements and/or aspects that can be utilized or mobilized to strengthen the project/activity in the future.
  o How will the researcher/institution do things differently in the future or in the next project?
  o What else can help increase community engagement? Are there any trends, resources, or emerging aspects that can strengthen the project/activity's community engagement
	• external/future
	  o Threats are factors, elements and/or aspects that can undermine the project/activity's sustainability in the future.
	  o What can undermine the project or institution's future community engagement?
	  o They include, but are not limited to, competition among the university researchers, focus on academic achievement over community service/action, government budget, political changes, institutional priorities, bureaucracy, etc.

Given the paucity of responses related to the growing Covid-19 cases in India, the researchers had to adapt in order to mould the project methodology in such a way that still brought forth maximum, relevant data. It was decided that instead of aiming for a higher quantity of responses we would focus on "individual" forms and through them identify cases that stood out among the rest as "case studies". Through a case study an investigator is able to analyse an issue in a multi-faceted, detailed way, which has the potential to stand through time and serve as a cornerstone for further research. It was realized that "Focus Group Discussions" (FGD) could yield a lot of qualitative data and also "permits a richness and a flexibility in the collection of data" (Mishra, 2016) that might be missed during individually administered surveys. FGD was conducted with faculty members in an online mode using MS-Teams. This virtual discussion was recorded and transcribed and then analysed thematically to extract the commonalities among the distinguished speakers along with any unique perspective that came up during the discussion. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the Covid Task Force members and PhD scholars/researchers at various higher education institutions. This helped substantiate the case studies, while throwing light on innovations and best practices and the ideas of collective action, reiterating how CE is embedded in social and organizational cultures.

PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS

For the purpose of this study, we categorized the HEIs as "public" (govt. funded) and "private" (other sources of funding; deemed & autonomous). Given below is the list of participating HEIs.

TABLE 2: LIST OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

S.NO.	Institution/Individual Interviewed	Type (Public/Private)	Position of survey participant
1	BIMTECH, Uttar Pradesh	Private	Assistant Professor
2	Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi	Public (Centrally Funded)	Assistant Professor
3	GITAM University, Hyderabad	Private (Deemed to be)	Director in charge, Professor
4	Indian Institute of Management-Ahmedabad, Gujarat	Public (Autonomous)	Professor
5	Indian Institute of Management-Kashipur, Uttarakhand	Public (Autonomous)	Assistant Professor & Assistant Dean

			(Academics)
6	Indian School of Business, Telangana	Private	Assistant Professor
7	Institute of Rural Management Anand (IRMA), Gujarat	Autonomous	Professor
8	Nalanda University, Bihar	Public (Centrally Funded)	Professor and Dean
9	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Assistant Professor
10	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Lecturer
11	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Associate Professor
12	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Research Scholar (PhD Student)
13	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Research Scholar (PhD Student)
14	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Master's Student
15	TERI SAS, New Delhi	Private (Deemed)	Master's Student
16	Xavier School of Rural Management, Odisha	Private	Associate Professor

IMAGE: MAP OF PARTICIPATING INSTITUTIONS (India Political Map from alamy.com)

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LIMITATIONS

A worldwide pandemic for the better part of 2020 meant that everything was thrown into disarray. With changing modes of teaching, learning, and communication as well as pressure on faculty members to adapt to changing demands and take on multi-tasking roles, response rates were drastically low. The research approach was adapted by including institutions and individuals who showed interest in the study, and adjusted the study to include multiple sources of data- combining survey, interview, FGD, and review of secondary literature.

Another limitation was the necessity to brief the participants on the subject matter of the proposed research for more nuanced responses. Often, they wouldn't be consciously compartmentalizing activities into community engagement , which helps in the furthering of the UN SDGs. So, while telephonic interviews provided the opportunity to delve into each question and discuss with the participants, the surveys we received without any prompt of ours could be slightly lacking in information.

3. FINDINGS

3.1. CHANGING CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN INDIA

One thing that was agreed upon during our focus group discussion with faculty members of various Indian HEIs, was that "community" means different things than what is generally associated with "community service". It is not synonymous with the "poor, disenfranchised, marginalized", but rather has fluid boundaries which pose the biggest challenge in limiting your definition but also broadening it enough to be inclusive. Another stark agreement is that a community shares a "commonality", a shared identity, which can be "interest-based, geographical, practical, circumstantial, social, political, or economic, etc.", which is more often than not, intersectional. So, before starting on C.E. visions and missions, it is important to identify the overlapping, all-encompassing communities that can exist. Another major theme that emerges is laying out the capacity to engage. "Engagement" can only be defined by what an institution, or an individual, can practically accomplish and not what is theoretically prescribed as "engagement". An example given by one of the participants threw light on how there are numerous societal and environmental problems that plague the State where the institute is located. But engagement can materialize only by factoring what is achievable and whether the institutions want to engage with the given problem, regardless of policy mandates.

In the following sections, the analyses of ProSPER.Net survey questionnaires is discussed. It gives us a peek into the strengths and barriers facing CE in Indian higher education institutions through SWOT mapping. Findings of this analysis are discussed further followed by mapping the UN Sustainable Development Goals that find precedence in the individual responders' immediate concern. Another major component is a case study of the "Covid Task Force" of TERI SAS, which is a model example of a student-led CE initiative.

3.2. SURVEY ANALYSIS

This section presents as composite table of the responses received from all participating institutions. The responses were analysed using a predefined SWOT matrix (see Methodology for more details).

TABLE 3: COMPOSITE SWOT ANALYSIS

STRENGTH	WEAKNESS
- Vision and Leadership: Presence of a dedicated department/centre/division that overlooks and promotes C.E. - This includes an enabling leadership that not just supports C.E. initiatives but also prioritizes the well-being of its staff. - A separate budget for C.E. activities. - Impact/Outcome: Tangible impacts that address the needs of a community like education, public health concerns, conservation, etc. - Stakeholder engagement: Diversity in stakeholder engagement; HEIs not limited by geographical or technical challenges. - Proactive engagement that targets community issues with ever evolving methods, which have the capacity to increase outreach (especially in the aftermath of COVID-19). - Curricular embeddedness shows sustained and deep engagement	- Incentives/rewards: Lack of incentive for the time invested by the staff/faculty. No reward mechanism. No recognition beyond regulatory guidelines. - Relation with government: Scarce engagement between HEIs and regulatory authorities, often stemming from mutual distrust. - Funding support: Lack of funds at institutional and local/national government level. - Mode of engagement and sustainability: Interdisciplinary collaboration, learning, and understanding required for a sustained and sustainable engagement is inadequate. - Embedded engagement is overlooked and taken for granted, as C.E. is not an explicit goal of some courses. Impact that is being generated is lost.
OPPORTUNITY	THREAT
- Space for innovation: To promote social entrepreneurship, break disciplinary barriers, and further collaboration between academic and other communities. - Trust and Reputation: HEIs have greater acceptance among various stakeholders and their active engagement has greater potential to reinforce principles of gender equality; social equity and inclusive societies; their ethical stance also helps long-lasting relationship - Digital age: Leveraging IT and closeness to the local communities. - Ways to engage and sustain: Building upon the "lessons learnt" during the pandemic, a future action plan can be charted so that C.E sustains even during unforeseen circumstances. - Network with NGOs/CSOs: can help in understanding and approaching communities; and in participatory planning - C.E can be leveraged as a strength and a differentiating factor for institutions to set them apart in the job ecosystem	- Funding: Inadequate funding. - Missing trust/Sustainability: Distrust and disillusionment within a community regarding the extent of material or immediate impact. - Infrastructure: Challenges in terms of access to people and communities and dissemination of information (e.g., during COVID infrastructure has come up as a limitation for particularly the economically and geographically disadvantaged groups) - Impact of C.E. through curricular activities overlooked. This may dissuade interested students. - Lack of incentives for staff supervising the "service learning" assignments can derail C.E activities if the supervisors feel that the gratuitous benefits are not worth the effort. - Market pressures and reducing student interest could make C.E. centred courses archaic. - Non recognition of C.E and its forms as a measure of achievement can have a subduing effect on zeal of the staff and others towards future C.E exercises. - Relationship with the government: Clash between government and institutional mandate for engagement might derail meaningful engagement.

With a thorough reading of the individual forms in an effort to discern the "strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats" that emerge during an institution's C.E activities, certain points of discussions also emerge. One of the most prominent caveats we would like to highlight is the fluid boundary between the four categories. While analysing the surveys we found that the lines between 'strength, opportunity, weakness, and threat' would often be blurred; what could be considered a strength for one participant was presented as a weakness for another and so on. It was interesting to note such dichotomies that emerged as displayed in the above table.

3.2.1. SUPPORT OF THE INSTITUTION/AUTHORITIES

An oft-sighted commendable observation was the enabling support of the institution and/or governing/administrative bodies. Support in terms of funding, infrastructure, logistics, or just incentives and recognition, were seen as enabling factors. On the contrary, it was also interpreted as weakness where the said stakeholders did not fill out this enabling role. We also gathered evidence in the interviews of some distrust between academia and governing structures. In the responses from our various data collection methods, government intervention, or lack thereof, restricted an institution's activities. In the surveys, administrative and governmental bodies featured the least as "stakeholders" or active enablers for an institution's C.E efforts. Some respondents pointed out that this distrust could be fatal even for successful C.E activities. During the FGD, the extent of governmental interference was brought to contention as some felt that regulations and mandates provide a basic groundwork for any institution. On the other hand, some also felt that HEIs being wary of regulations could blunt the benefits of schemes and programs laid in place to help promote programmatic agendas like "women empowerment", "education of girl child", "habitable surroundings", "development for all/ rural development" etc. Some respondents, in the surveys and the FGD, cited such governmental schemes and said that these could become a springboard for extrapolating unique engagement opportunities and activities.

3.2.2. RELATIONSHIP WITH THE COMMUNITIES

Where an opportunity presents in the form of HEIs being places where social entrepreneurship flourishes, disciplinary barriers are broken and space is created for HEI and communities to collaborate. A threat looms in the form of inadequate funding and support to actually realize these lofty aspirations. Another opportunity to be harnessed to further the reach of HEIs in communities is the acceptability these institutional spaces have within our society. In India, HEIs are generally perceived by the public to be "temples" of great intellectual inquiry and there is potential to reinforce or even introduce principles of environmental sustainability, gender, and social equity, climate crisis, etc. Antithetical to this is the issue of disillusionment among the community and its members, and concerns over how conscientious it is on the part of researchers and institutions to carry out their activities, gather data, and leave? The interviewees talked of distrust among community members as they have seen surveyors for government schemes, NGO/CSO workers, researchers and students come and go after collecting information from them while the communities are left behind in the same predicaments as before.

3.2.3. INCENTIVES FOR THE INSTRUCTORS

From most of the responses, support of the institution is deemed a primary strength. The institutions play an enabling role in nurturing an 'engaged' outlook towards the community. However, we see a uniform trend of little to no support given to the faculty members and staff in terms of engaging with community centred projects. The predominant

theme that emerges across the surveys is the absence of incentives for the teachers regarding C.E. and that could stem from the largely popular perception of C.E. activities as being part of a HEIs core function. Students, however, are often incentivized in the form of academic credit and/or formal acknowledgement of their work in the form of internships, which in turn helps them get primed for a competitive job market. At GITAM School of Gandhian studies, when students were incentivized to work on biodiversity conservation, programs like the Olive Ridley Turtle Nesting Program came to fruition. The enabling prowess of the institution and other administrative players like the local government, municipality, CSOs, etc., can be largely regarded as the biggest strengths in promoting C.E activities. Enabling can be monetary help, credits, infrastructure, and something as insignificant as providing a space for any endeavour which brings an institution closer to the community in a beneficial way.

3.2.4. COVID-19 AND A NEW AGE OF RESEARCH

The Covid-19 pandemic was considered the biggest threat and a hindrance for the foreseeable future, to the programs already in place and future activities that had potential to create linkages between institutions and community stakeholders. During this time, what emerged as a major theme, which could be classified as strength of a higher educational institution or a potential opportunity ripe for harnessing was "resilience of the researcher". We collected responses which divulged instance of how students, faculty, or HEI as an entity rose to this crisis to continue their efforts to engage with the communities and to beget change, even if small, in order to help the communities. For instance, IIM- Ahmedabad created a whole network to identify those beneficiaries who will slip between the gaps of government assistance schemes for the poor. The entire process was well documented and is available on their website. Creativity and will of any HEI is displayed when we see innovative methods of establishing contact despite the circumstances. Use of technology in the form of affordable mobiles and mobile internet to achieve C.E. agendas showcase not just the perseverance of an entity to work but also presents with an opportune way of connecting during times like the present.

3.3.SDG MAPPING

From the responses we were also able to map the UN Sustainable Development Goals that were directly or indirectly addressed via the practices of the HEIs (these are however based on only individual responses from participating institutions and do not represent entire CE profile of HEIs mentioned here). From the available responses, we saw a higher concentration around the goals 3, 4, 10, and 11, which are "Good Health and Well Being", "Quality Education", "Reduced Inequalities", and "Sustainable Cities and Communities", respectively. It was felt that there is a need to draw attention to SDG 5 (Gender & Equality), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequality), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). The respondents cited these specifically keeping in mind the past year's pandemic devastation which led to a "daily wage workers' mass migration" bringing to light societal inequalities, and the consecutively intensifying cyclones around coastal India. It was acknowledged that SDGs being interconnected, action on one goal means simultaneous effect on others but these few goals need urgent attention.

3.4.POLICY ENVIRONMENT

The role of governing authorities often emerged in the responses and also during the focus group discussion. It was either lack of support from the local/union government, non-pliability to academic suggestions, or excellent support, which helped in achieving big C.E.

goals. In the surveys collected, the enabling role of the authorities was touted as one of the strengths of an institution's foray into C.E. The governmental/administrating bodies of any country have huge stakes in the success of their HEIs for which they roll out regulations and mandates. The need for engaging with communities was realized in 1969 when the National Service Scheme was established. It was a way to get students of schools and universities to volunteer in villages, slums, and other voluntary communities to complete a set number of hours during an academic year, which also became an extension to teaching and learning (Singh and Tandon, 2015).

Another push for practicing CE was from the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (an autonomous body funded by the UGC) in 2006, when it surveyed and laid out the best practices of CE in 15 Indian HEIs. In 2012, the erstwhile Planning Commission's 12th–Five Year Plan mapped out some guidelines for "Centre for Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement" which established "engagement", and not "outreach", as a core value for places of knowledge dissemination. This Five-Year Plan endorsed problem-centric scholarship at institutions, an approach where community engagement and service learning take the forefront in every aspect of the university.

In 2018, the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan was evolved from this wherein a "Subject Expert Group" on educational institutions' social responsibility was set up. This group developed a report on "Fostering Social Responsibility and Community Engagement in HEIs in India". It vied for HEIs bringing in social responsibility and C.E in their vision and mission and recommended development of institutional mechanisms to achieve a holistic and applied approach to C.E. in order to encapsulate the three functions of HEIs: teaching, research, and service.

3.5. CASE STUDY- Covid Task Force

COVID TASK FORCE (CTF)

The "Covid Task Force" came into the picture on 22nd April 2021, as a way to help the faculty, staff and students of TERI SAS affected by the brutal second wave of Covid-19. What initiated as an eight-member Eco-Club effort started receiving requests for help from outside the bounds of the institute and is now approximately 450 members strong and operating in states like Uttar Pradesh, Hyderabad, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, and Punjab working in conjunction with villages, NGOs, individual volunteers like doctors and lawyers, etc. The initial goals of this enterprise were to help the people of TERI through the second wave when it was getting difficult to get medical help and treatment. As the members started arranging for hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, and even financial help, this operation grew to help out people in Delhi/NCR and gradually built a network, which then started getting requests for help from places like Ajmer, Lucknow, and other nearby villages. The group tried to deliver basic ration needs, awareness about things like where to get medicines (as there was a rise in the number of fraudulent people selling counterfeit or fake drugs ex. Remdesivir) and government/ ICMR guidelines regarding Covid treatment, etc. through videos. Soon they had volunteers and other community members reach out having identified, for instance, villages that needed help.

Of course, this wasn't an easy undertaking, especially as mostly students of the institute helmed it. In an interview session with three core members of CTF, we gathered the following summary of the challenges they faced:

- **Verifying the genuineness of a resource**: There were reports of severe shortages of drugs, hospital beds, and oxygen supplies in many places in India. People were scrambling for procuring anything to save the lives of their loved ones. It was noticed that there were many duplicitous people who were taking advantage of such a crisis, which proved to be a big challenge for the CTF as well. To substantiate the leads for drugs, oxygen and hospital beds, the members engaged with only those sources who accepted "cash-on-delivery" payment.
- **Financial troubles of patients**: The pandemic has seen people lose their employment, lose a breadwinner, and unexpected hospital admissions, further burdening their finances. Often the people CTF helped would run into financial troubles. This became a challenge as despite promoting various fundraisers the demand for assistance was quite high and it became increasingly difficult to find donors.

- **Trouble identifying hospitals**: Initially the team ran into dead-ends finding available hospital beds for critical patients. It was a tough undertaking as after verifying the availability after numerous calls, the beds would be gone within 1-2 hours.
- **Scepticism regarding blood/plasma donations:** Although now not an ICMR recommended treatment for critical Covid-patients, plasma of recovered Covid patients was being used for critical patients. Calls and pleas for donation were desperate but were often met with lukewarm response as people were sceptical.

The students were supported by the institute and the faculty and staff along with finding partners like Srishti Rana (former Miss India) and Master Fact (Instagram handle with massive following) who helped increase the reach of their efforts. Others included Kranti NGO, Foundations like Milaap and Run, and TERI alumni and faculty who set up a "Students' Welfare Fund" for those who were facing financial difficulties due to losing their breadwinner or losing their jobs due to Covid. TERI even emptied their industrial grade oxygen containers to be filled with medical grade oxygen in order to help those in desperate need of oxygen.

The three participants feel that it will be too "utopian" to think that educational institutions can do a lot in terms of tackling such a mass crisis, but they can take supportive actions for their own students and faculties. TERI had created provisions to keep checking on students and provided counselling for those affected by Covid-19.

4. DISCUSSIONS and CONCLUSIONS

Beyond academics, HEIs in a neoliberal competitive regime have also come forward and leveraged the opportunities to contribute to change. Several research projects initiated by the HEIs now seek to either build capacities to bring change or directly engage in action projects where communities themselves become harbingers of change. There are several models in the process, for instance typical research projects that examine the development challenges and reflect upon the future possibilities-in the process building capacities of students and stakeholders alike. There are other instances of donor funded research or action projects which includes funding from national governments, international organizations or corporations. Furthermore, there are other models where community engagement happens through extension activities- like neighbourhood projects, or disaster/distress relief activities. The models as illustrated by Bender (2008) give us a springboard to assess where and which type of engagement takes place for an institution. The following section puts forth emerging trends of C.E as observed from our data. There is a need for updating the models of C.E. in a world where there is continuous, dynamic construction of definitions and ideas around community, engagement, and C.E. While Bender's models talk about the different extent of C.E. in HEIs, we want to explore the way HEIs approach engagement with different communities. It is an attempt to add to the discourse on the models of engagement by HEIs based on how they view engagement and how they define a community, and what they *want* out of their engagement.

EMERGING MODELS OF CE

We attempt to explore emerging models from our collected data, which can further explain the C.E. ecosystem based in contemporary research styles. One variation of engagement we have observed is **"embedded"** in the curriculum or coursework of institutions as seen in the anthropological enquiry of the Department of Anthropology (University of Delhi). This sort of engagement is almost omniscient in the syllabi that the faculty and researchers often overlook the impact it may be disseminating. We can think of it in terms of Bender's "cross-cutting" engagement model where C.E. is the end-all of all activities sponsored by an institution. However, the key difference from the "embedded model" is the *intent.* Bender explains cross-cutting approach as when the university is considered to have two fundamental functions- teaching and learning, and research- while

C.E. is a fundamental idea and perspective, which informs and guides most of its teaching, learning and research activities. Engagement embedded in the curriculum was overlooked, as it was an "obvious part" of the syllabi.

Another model we can attempt to categorize is a **"reciprocal model"** wherein we see a process of symbiotic learning. It is often a critique of academic research that it only "takes" from the target communities or subjects, in the form of data and time. Or, doing engagement with the idea of being superior and working in communities with a saviour complex. However, with increasing interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary modes of inquiry, academia is starting to dismantle the power dynamic between itself and the communities, as benefit is a two-way street. Increasingly, the focus is shifting on learning *from* the community or doing *charity for* the community to *empowering* its members in order to address the issues that plague the society. In the survey response, ISB indicated a project that aimed at educating locals on their rights over land as mentioned in the "Forest Rights Act". Similarly, IRMA helped support its students through internships that led to the inception of the "DHWANI Rural Information System" and BIMTECH, where the participant related their part in establishing a theatre group that performs for locals on issues like STD awareness.

Though it is also equally valid that not all engagements are equal opportunity for both parties and becomes lopsided to the advantage of the HEIs or the "funders". In one of the responses received, it was pointed out how the communities tend to harbour a sense of distrust and often, disillusionment. Since they have experienced previous "researchers" come and go after collecting data, or have seen "schemes"/ "programs" launched with great fanfare, without long-term benefits or sustained interaction, there is a threat of failure of future, genuine engagements. We have to be careful of indulging in projects/exercises that help only the HEIs in producing research papers, which leave behind their "subjects" in the same states they were before.

The reciprocal model (along with the next model we attempt to distil from our data) has certain overlaps with Bender's "intersectional model" which states that a university/HEI has three roles- teaching and learning, research and C.E., with some overlaps between them.

The third model involves **"direct action"** or strives for direct change. When an institution has very specific engagements within communities that seek specific results, through volunteer activities, directed coursework, or community outreach, we can see overlay in its teaching and learning, research and engagement functions. This direct-action model differs from the intersectional approach to C.E. in that it strives to take action, which results in tangible impact. We see this in GITAM's "Olive Ridley Turtle Nesting Program" which introduces its students to conservation while taking dynamic action showing impact. Similarly, ISB diverts its research efforts in empowering forest communities to know their rights over land.

CONCLUSIONS

In the face of rapidly globalizing world, HEIs have seen a significant role in deconstructing the complex socio-economic, ecological and political challenges; and, in facilitating changes through community empowerment or through more remedial approaches. This study aimed at understanding various ways of community engagement, while also understanding the enablers, the processes, experiences and the emerging models. The study methods and tools involved focussed review of literature on community engagement by HEIs, along with analysis of responses from experts, faculty, researchers, and students. Through individual survey questionnaire forms, focus group discussions, and semi-structured interviews, this report has tried to add to the discourse of community engagement in Indian

HEIs, and their position in aiding and potentially achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Through this endeavour, we could delineate a broad definition of community engagement in the Indian context as gathered from interactions with the respondents. Our 16 participants, from 10 institutions, encompassed major geographical regions i.e., North, East, South, and West India, representing different categories of institutions– public, private, and autonomous. Of these 16, four of the respondents were affiliated with a public institution, 11 represented private HEIs, and one was a faculty at an autonomous institution.

Despite the brutal second-wave of the Covid-19 pandemic in India, we were able to gather information using a mostly qualitative approach by innovating our research methodology as we went. The pre-made survey questionnaire was distributed to over 60 contacts via email and phone calls, however, the process was not smooth or easy. Due to the chaos of the pandemic, which seemed to be affecting everyone indiscriminately, respondents were hard to reach and often dealing with losses themselves. In the end we could gather responses to the survey from 14 individuals, which we then analysed using the "SWOT" framework decided by the ProSPER.Net members. Following this, a focus group discussion was organized with ten expert faculty members from which we gathered nuanced insights into various aspects of community, engagement, and community engagement. Another unique aspect of this study is the case study on TERI-SAS, showcasing some of the best practices of the institution that highlight sustained and deep engagement with communities. These practices help in furthering the SDG agenda (of which India is a signatory) directly and/or indirectly.

By highlighting the various ways Indian HEIs perceive C.E., this study hopes to bring forth new models of C.E., building upon the existing models. With definitions of community, engagement, and C.E. under continuous construction, the way to classify an institution's activities must also be updated. Thus, this study has attempted to further this discussion through the following three models of C.E.– **embedded engagement model, reciprocal engagement model, and action engagement model**. These models were proposed after observing some emerging trends in the way C.E. is comprehended by the participants and the general trends of their affiliating institutions.

On the subject of the UN SDGs, a mapping was attempted from the collected individual survey responses, interviews, and FGD. Though these responses do not represent the Indian government's policy commitments towards SDGs or the represented institutions' complete engagement profile, it is possible to extrapolate institutional bend and individual sensibilities regarding various sustainable practices. From the survey responses, and as direct questions in the FGD and interviews, we mapped out SDGs fulfilled directly/indirectly via an institution's C.E. activities or an individual's personal project/research work. We also tried to map faculty member's perception on the need for prioritized attention to various SDGs. It must be said that these remain personal views but it will do good to acknowledge that HEIs, and by extension, the faculty, occupy a unique position of influence in the society. Fulfilment of the UN SDGs must be a spearheaded by India's higher educational institutions as they can help disperse knowledge to various stakeholders and also build processes.

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