I.7 CIVIL ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Over the past century, the world has seen many social, economic and political transformations. A largely colonial era has given way to a largely democratic one. Yet, while the democratization of the political culture guaranteed citizens’ rights and freedom, it did not result in the democratization of learning and knowledge production. Changes in education systems have been slow in coming. Economic trends and civil society movements in the past decade have changed perceptions of what constitutes ‘knowledge’ and redefined the mission and mandate of higher education institutions (HEIs). With increasing demands to scale up their teaching and research functions, HEIs are facing new challenges in contributing to human and social development. The meaning and agenda of human and social development have also changed, and new civil society actors have been closely associated with this phenomenon.

This paper looks at how the engagement of civil society organizations with the world of higher education has resulted in interesting trends in social policy formation and knowledge production. It presents examples of effective engagement between HEIs and the social and human development efforts of civil society (PRIA in Asia and Mpambo Multiversity in Africa), draws lessons from these interventions and highlights future potential for HEIs. Advocating the view that the research and teaching functions of HEIs should serve the larger mission of human and social development, it looks at the gains to be obtained from such partnerships. By exploring alternative sources and modes of learning and knowledge production, the paper provides a vision of the possibilities that engagement with civil society can open up in terms of HEIs’ contribution to social and human development in the coming decades.

CONTEXT

Around the world, higher education (HE) and HEIs such as universities have been experiencing the forces of economic and social transformation. The forces of globalization are affecting HEIs in many complex ways, including the supply of students and the expectations of graduates. The growth in supply of HE and the proliferation of HEIs, both public and private, has raised questions about the quality of their teaching and research functions. HE is no longer viewed as a public good, and its contribution to the labour market has been commonly advocated. Nevertheless, humanity is now facing ever-increasing challenges to its own survival. New human and social development priorities are posing new challenges for policymakers and political leaders. Societal development issues (such as multiculturalism, sustainability and so on) have become so complex that new knowledge is needed in order to address them. HEIs are expected to generate this knowledge. Further, rising expectations from growing numbers of young people in many parts of the world put pressure on HEIs to include human and social development in their teaching and extension functions. In this changing and complex context, HE is challenged to rearticulate its future relevance to society. The introductory paper of this volume very clearly and comprehensively outlines the contours of this challenge. In responding to such challenges, HEIs need to explore new forms of civil engagement. This paper attempts to address this question in some depth. It argues that human and social development should be addressed in a democratic framework and suggests that civil society, in its myriad manifestations, could become an active partner of HEIs. It then identifies ways in which HE and HEIs could explore the possibility of engaging with civil society in order to broaden and deepen their contributions to human and social development.

DEMOCRATIC SHIFTS

In various regions of the world, access to and coverage of HE has historically been limited. In India, a few elite social and economic classes had the privilege of access to HE. This historical Brahmanical order legitimated the notion of stratification in human development. It was assumed, until as recently as the turn of the 20th century, that certain higher class and caste
groups would inherit governing responsibilities; hence, members of such elite groups were expected to be adequately prepared for this function intellectually. Thus, through their teaching function, HEIs catered to the preparation of the ruling elites.

Over the past century, and more significantly in the 21st century, the above assumptions about the teaching and research functions of HE have been systematically challenged. Democratic political systems began to gain currency in many countries of the world, especially after liberation from colonial regimes. Ruling elites based on aristocracy, landed property or Brahmanical privilege were gradually replaced by ‘mass’ leaders elected on the basis of universal franchise. A new class of political leaders emerged. In many developing countries, many of these leaders did not have access to even secondary education. The role of HEIs in the intellectual preparation of these new political elites became somewhat uncertain.

Post-colonial governments opened up new possibilities of support for HEIs. Public funding of HE became more common in many post-colonial countries. Gradually, private support (largely from rulers, kings and chieftains) declined and HEIs (especially universities) became publicly funded institutions. In countries where national public resources were scarce and multiple development agendas were competing for them, public funds for HE remained limited. In some countries, like India, earlier allocations of public funds for HE were reasonably high, even in relation to allocations for primary and secondary education. By the mid 20th century, the changing nature of HE created new partnerships between states and HEIs. In many countries, HE was only available in publicly funded (governmental) universities and institutes. Political decision-makers (not necessarily with academic credentials) became the new kingmakers of ‘deans’ and ‘vice-chancellors’.

During this period, the universalization of primary and secondary education as state policy in many countries increased the demand for greater access to HE among the masses. Many more HEIs came into being as demand increased rapidly due to both the popular aspirations of the masses and the requirements of the labour pool. With a growing economy – changing in nature from agriculture to industry and services – the labour factor changed dramatically. Employment conditions in the marketplace came to require a much higher degree of HE training. Liberal democratic aspirations for education further fuelled the demand for HE in many societies. As a result, HEIs developed new partnerships with the private sector. By the end of the 20th century, privately funded HEIs began to increase in number in many countries.

This trend towards privately funded HE further increased due to two associated phenomena. First, many national governments began to reduce their budgetary allocations for HEIs as their public resources became subjected to more egalitarian allocations in the welfare state framework. Somehow, many policymakers began to construe HE as a ‘privately affordable’ good. Second, the forces of globalization began to transnationalize economies and labour supplies. Migration of skilled labour, within and across countries, grew rapidly in the past decade. More service-sector and knowledge-based economies generated – and continue to generate – enormous demands for more varied and open access to HE by a growing number of young people. Demographic realities began to shift this demand for HE into the younger populations of Africa and Asia, as the European populations stabilized.

The partnership between HEIs and state institutions also included government funding and sponsorship of research. As new forms of collaboration with the private sector became more widespread, private funding of research also increased. This was particularly so in disciplines where new processes, inventions and products could be commercially exploited through patenting. Thus, in many southern countries, declining public funding for HE also affected research capabilities and outputs. Private funding did not come into the social and human disciplines with the same volume and speed as it did in the natural sciences, engineering, biotechnology, information technology and management. Thus, the quality of research on issues of human and social development at HEIs in such countries had declined substantially by the turn of the 21st century.

Due to growing democratic aspirations, the demand for ‘massification’ of the HE supply has increased significantly. Old, established ‘Ivy League’ types of HEIs (which exist in all societies) now face increasing competition from new, privately funded, career-oriented HEIs. Teaching and research on social and human development issues has therefore begun to shrink in many developing countries.

Thus, the reality of today’s HEIs presents a somewhat blurred and confusing picture, when viewed from the perspective of social and human development. HE is largely viewed as a ‘private good’ linked to the forces of economic development. HEIs have built systems and mechanisms for engaging with governments and public authorities; they have also created linkages, interactions and partnerships with the for-profit private sector in both teaching and research functions. Nevertheless, the interactions of HEIs with civil society have been somewhat undeveloped and inadequately conceptualized. Thus, civil engagement in HE may be particularly relevant from
the perspective of human and social development in the 21st century.

HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The quest to improve life has been an ongoing human enterprise. Discourse on human and social development gained currency among policymakers and political leaders after the Second World War. The dominant human development agenda in these past few decades has focused on economic growth and associated improvements in the standard of living, as largely manifested by per capita GNP. The meaning of human and social development, however, has gradually evolved over the past three or four decades. The discourse on ‘basic needs’ was initiated by the International Labour Organization in the late 1960s. These needs – characterized as food, health, water, shelter and housing – became one of the early benchmarks of ‘good’ human development. Even today, the fulfillment of basic needs continues to be a pressing concern for nearly one billion people around the world, despite the considerable and remarkable progress that has been made. In a recent study on the conditions for a good society, conducted in 45 Commonwealth countries, citizens universally asked for the fulfillment of basic needs (Knight et al., 2002).

During the 1980s and 90s, human and social development issues became further refined. Issues of gender justice gained widespread recognition in policy circles. Environmental issues gained visibility after the UN Rio Conference in 1992, although its climate change agenda has yet to be adequately grasped by the G8 leaders. The rights of children, indigenous communities and socially excluded minorities were brought to the forefront of policymaking in the past two decades. The ‘development as a human right’ perspective brought new energy to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (adopted in 1948). As democratic political processes have gained wider acceptance in most societies, new, democratic aspirations – equality, justice, participation and so on – have gained ascendency in many societies. The recent discourse on democratic governance, with its emphasis on transparency and accountability in the public sphere, has opened up another important aspect of human and social development in the 21st century. Citizenship and democratic governance are the twin pillars of human and social development; they address the phenomenon of human actualization from the demand side (participatory citizenship) while also focusing on democratic governance from the demand side of development (Tandon and Mohanty, 2002).

Thus, the key points on the human and social development agenda for the coming century are the following:

- **Inclusive globalization**
  It has been widely acknowledged that the forces of globalization have benefited some and victimized others. Growing inequalities within and across societies have generated resistance to and protest against globalization. Human and social development require new, more inclusive ways of harnessing globalization.

- **Sustainability and climate change**
  Widespread exploitation of natural resources has resulted in ecological changes which may be unsustainable, irreversible and damaging to human life. This challenge requires new approaches, technologies and lifestyles.

- **Peace and global citizenship**
  The world today is insecure. Various forms of terrorism are affecting life, livelihood and development. Global forces of violence require new solutions for peace and global citizenship based on mutual respect and shared responsibility.

- **Human rights and social inclusion**
  Despite various compacts on human rights and the rights of women, minorities, children and indigenous people, large-scale violation of basic human rights continues around the world. Unless vast sections of the world’s population, hitherto excluded, receive their entitlements, they will remain unaffected by mainstream human and social development.

- **Democratizing governance**
  Despite the rise of democracy as a political form in many countries, systems of governance at local, national, regional and global levels continue to face enormous democratic deficits. New processes, forms and institutions need to be developed to address these deficits urgently.

ROLES OF CIVIL SOCIETY

It may therefore be pertinent to ask the following questions: Where has HE been in the discourse on human and social development for the past five or six decades? What roles have HEIs played in the emerging fields of human and social development?

A critical review of the processes shaping the human development agendas would suggest that HEIs have been mostly followers of this discourse, rather than its creators or champions. Of course, many individual scholars have contributed immensely to shaping these issues; their contributions must be acknowledged. Nevertheless, in national and transnational debates on these issues, the
new player has been civil society. Citizen groups, associations, NGOs, not-for-profit research institutes and independent think tanks (as civil society actors) have been most active in identifying, analysing and articulating these issues of equity, justice, inclusion and rights. Through studies, campaigns, grassroots mobilizations and structured policy dialogues, these civil society entities and their national/global coalitions have been the most significant and central actors in ensuring that these issues of human development become part of national and global policymaking (Edwards and Gaventa, 2001).

Some HEIs have responded to these opportunities by opening new centres for the study of gender, the environment and so on. Some HEIs have started teaching these subjects in undergraduate and graduate-level courses. Some have systematically begun to conduct research on these emerging issues of human development. By and large, however, HEIs around the world have not been able to engage adequately with these central concerns of human and social development. The critical question, therefore, is: Why is this so? Why have HEIs not been at the forefront of new priorities and concerns in the human and social development of tomorrow?

Historical analysis and available experience suggest several reasons for this disconnect between HEIs and contemporary issues of human and social development. First, these issues (such as gender justice and environmental sustainability) emerged from specific social mobilizations and actions aimed at improving the conditions of the exploited and the marginalized. As this social activism progressed, hitherto hidden and suppressed human realities began to surface. The growing presence of independent media in many countries gave wider publicity to these issues, thereby bringing them to the attention of policymakers and ruling elites. For example, the reality of domestic violence against women could only be expressed in a way that challenged accepted tenets of knowledge. Likewise, the practices of local elders in water harvesting and forest protection could only be communicated with reference to indigenous knowledge frameworks. Thus, popular knowledge — indigenous knowledge — generated through the practices of countless generations became the basis for articulating these new issues. As explained by the participatory research movement, this knowledge faced negation and rejection from the dominant modes of knowledge production valued by most HEIs. The epistemological conflict underlying these various traditions of knowledge production, dissemination and utilization became one of the main reasons for the disconnect between HEIs and issues of human development (Tandon, 2002a).

Second, in most of the world, civil society’s championing of these issues distanced it from HEIs. Historical antagonism and apathy between grassroots organizers, citizen leaders and social activists on the one hand and HEIs on the other led to a situation of disconnect. As Brown (2001) has argued, this disconnect between the world of research and the world of practice has many different roots in different regions of the world:

Practitioners and researchers at first blush march to very different drums. Stereotypical practitioners are action-oriented, focused on immediate and concrete problems, and concerned with having direct impacts on those problems. Stereotypical researchers are theory-oriented, focused on long-term conceptual issues, and concerned with producing knowledge and conceptual results. Practitioners are embedded in institutional contexts that press them to solve practical problems; researchers work in institutional contexts that reward contributions to theory or knowledge. These differences set the stage for misunderstanding and poor communications at the practice–research boundary, even when the participants share many concerns and values.

How can the various roles of HEIs be performed through new forms of civil engagement in pursuit of the emerging human and social development agenda?

Before addressing this question, it may be worthwhile to describe what civil society means in the contemporary context. Civic associations, community-based groups and local socio-cultural organizations have existed in all societies throughout human history. Many have been based on a culture of mutual help and collective responsibility. Furthermore, all religious and spiritual traditions have called upon their followers to make philanthropic contributions for the well-being of fellow citizens and society at large. With the emergence of welfare states and the rise of the private sector in the past century, this civic phenomenon has gradually become invisible.

The reappearance of civic associations in developing countries began to be noticed in the 1970s as development issues and models began to be articulated by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In developed countries, failures of government and excesses of the private sector gave rise to activities such as social economy and housing, on the one hand, and consumers and environmental associations, on the other. By the late 1980s, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, ‘civil society’ emerged as a new actor in discourse and policy circles, both in the developing countries of the South and in the developed countries of the North.

Numerous definitions of and arguments about civil
society have emerged in the past two decades. The concept of trinity – state, market and civil society – is useful to understanding institutional arrangements in society (Tandon, 2002b). Most societal functions and activities could be classified as predominantly emanating from, and largely based on, the state sector (from local to national governments); market institutions (the economic functions of production and consumption, organized in various ways); or civil society (arts, culture, sports, leisure, religion, welfare, civic action and so on). All individual and collective initiatives for the common public good can be considered part of civil society. Thus, welfare, service, care and mutual-help activities are included in this sector. Early conceptualizations included academia and media as part of civil society, as well (De Oliveira and Tandon, 1994). This conceptualization recognizes that education – including higher education – is a public good.

Today, millions of civil associations are active in societies around the world, addressing the entire range of issues related to human and social development. They provide welfare and charity, supply services, undertake independent research, build coalitions to address issues and make demands, and partner with governments and the private sector to develop specific solutions. They operate at the very local village/neighborhood level and also at the transnational/global level. Salamon (1994) calls this the ‘global associational resolution’ and analyses the economic contributions of civil associations around the world. This phenomenon of civil action by civil associations is a new reality of human and social development in the 21st century.

ROLES OF HE

It is generally acknowledged that HE performs three sets of roles: teaching, research and extension. In the context of human and social development, the most frequently discussed role is that of extension. HEIs extend their knowledge and expertise to the communities around them, with the objective of helping these communities. While community extension (or extramural) activities of some type are prevalent in most HEIs around the world, this practice is most widespread in North American HEIs, where community-service learning programmes place students in a community (or company) to work there for a fixed period. Many students who participate in such programmes find them useful in advancing their education and careers.

Boothroyd and Fryer (2004) present a somewhat mixed picture of the popularity of these programmes in North American universities over the past two decades:

These efforts did little to link regular curricula and research programmes with social issues. Few could conceive of education for a university degree as including learning from and with people without degrees, or of advanced research as including average citizens and officials in formulating research questions, let alone in the devising of methods and the analysis of results. Much of the professorial activism at that time was in the form of their lending to political movements their superior knowledge and intellectual credence – a kind of intellectual noblesse oblige.

Despite its growing popularity, community service has largely remained the third leg of HE, and remains overshadowed by the two core functions of teaching and research.

Despite the limited popularity of service-learning programmes at HEIs in developing countries, some large-scale examples of engagement between HEIs and civil society actors have begun to emerge in these regions of the world. The following two examples from developing regions of Asia and Africa illustrate how civil engagement can help link the teaching and research functions of HE to the advancement of the human and social development agendas.

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**BOX 1.7.1 Service-learning in ancient times**

Learning from the community, and in turn contributing to it, has also been practised elsewhere. Interestingly enough, community service was the mission of some of the first universities of human civilization. Taxila, the oldest known university, functioned from the 7th century BC to the 8th century AD in what is now Pakistan. At its peak, Taxila – whose name means ‘rock of reflection’ – had 1,800 scholars and nearly 8,000 students in residence. The leitmotif of this university was ‘service to humanity’. Its scholars and students came from Arabian, Persian and Mediterranean societies. It produced pioneering scholarship in such fields as grammar (credited to Panini), economics (pioneered by Kautilya) and medicine (Charaka was Taxila’s first and most famous physician).

A later contemporary of Taxila was Nalanda University, which functioned from the 5th century BC to the 11th century AD in the eastern sub-Himalayan region of India. At its zenith, Nalanda – whose name means ‘lotus of learning’ – had 2,000 professors and 10,000 students. Its professors and students came from such distant places as China, Mongolia, Siam, Sumatra and Japan. Students at Nalanda University had to be sponsored by a community, with the promise of returning there to serve. It made great innovations in the fields of mathematics (the concept of zero was invented there), astronomy and metallurgy. Its most famous teacher was Buddha himself.
REVITALIZING SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION IN INDIA
From 1995 to 1999, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), in collaboration with the Association of Schools of Social Work in India (ASSWI), was involved in a unique development intervention with Indian social work educators. This initiative was significant in that it trained social work professionals, who comprise the potential human resource base for NGOs, government agencies and the corporate sector. More than 70 schools of social work formed part of this process, creating a sizable impact at the national level. The intervention widened its outreach by working in close collaboration with regional associations of social work educators, thus making the impact more sustainable.

The intervention included a series of interprofessional dialogues at the national and regional levels. The dialogues provided opportunities for social work educators, renowned academics and experienced practitioners of participatory development (PD) and participatory research (PR) to agree on a common platform. The dialogues examined the status of social work education, assessed the implications of PD and PR in social work education and practice, and promoted efforts to incorporate PD and PR in the social work curriculum. The dialogues were designed to be interdisciplinary, with practitioners and educators sharing and learning from each other’s experience.

As part of this initiative, a fund for research on participation was created by PRIA in order to encourage faculty and students at schools of social work and other institutes to conduct field research on community participation issues.

Building on the lessons of this five-year collaboration initiative, PRIA and ASSWI initiated a new phase in 2000 in order to strengthen research and teaching on participation, democratic governance and citizenship. This intervention was intended to address the growing need for greater and more concentrated efforts to strengthen social change initiatives and the insufficient supply of trained professionals to contribute to them.

To effectively plan and implement this intervention, PRIA and ASSWI developed a strategy to strengthen five social work education institutions as regional nodal centres (RNCs). The RNCs were envisioned as becoming centres of excellence in the field of participation, democratic governance and citizenship, and offering specialized courses on civil society and citizen participation at the bachelor’s, master’s, M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels. In order to promote the study of participation, citizenship and governance, the libraries of these short-listed institutions were provided with many field-based documents and other knowledge resources.

PRIA’s ongoing efforts to influence social science research and teaching were streamlined in the form of a programme called ‘Strengthening Linkages with Academia’. These interventions now include many different disciplines of social science. The programme aims to influence the nature of academic pursuit in Indian universities, particularly in the social sciences, in order to make them:

- open to knowledge coming from the field
- adopt new research methodologies
- engage in research on contemporary issues that have the potential to influence both policy and development practice
- impart new insights to students through teaching.

What are the larger implications of this experiment in India? From a global perspective, it appears that, in many practitioner-oriented disciplines such as social work, professional education can be made more relevant and practical through creative partnerships with civil society organizations. Through civil engagement, the teaching of professionals may become organically linked to the realities in which they would function. In addition, such partnerships can enhance the HEIs’ contribution to the production of socially useful and practical knowledge. A partnership of this variety can therefore mutually benefit both the HEI and its civil society partner organization.

MULTIVERSITY FOR INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE IN UGANDA
This second example involves an innovative research and teaching initiative in a contemporary scenario in East Africa.

The concept of Mpmambo Multiversity is an outgrowth of debates and deliberations among hundreds of African scholars, social leaders and activists dedicated to the cause of building a better Africa.

The ‘multiversity’ concept is the antithesis of the concept of ‘university’. Uni means one and versity comes from versal, meaning all. In other words, universities promote the prevalence of one form of knowledge everywhere. Universities promote the belief that this universal (and primarily Western) knowledge is closer to the truth than any other form of knowledge. The ‘multiversity’ concept challenges this understanding of knowledge by asserting the existence of ‘a multiplicity of knowledges concomitant with communities, their ecology, history, language and culture’ (Wangoolaa, 2007). It emphasizes a paradigm in which knowledge systems are seen as horizontal rather than vertical. All knowledge systems, whether indigenous African, Chinese, Indian or Western, are assigned equal relevance, space and identity in the global knowledge pool. None are seen as superior or inferior.
‘Multiversity’ is a space to affirm, promote, advocate and advance the multiplicity of thought and knowledges as a necessity to vitalize the world’s knowledges, as well as human knowledge as a whole. It is a concrete valorization, celebration, application and popularization of pluralism at the intellectual level, and at the level of thought and knowledge.

In the context of Africa, this means focusing on the development of African indigenous knowledge, which was subverted through years of colonial rule.

In this endeavour, Mpambo adopts an integrated approach to promoting the development of indigenous scholars, knowledge and teaching. It does so by:
- promoting mother-tongue scholars
- providing mother-tongue higher education to help the younger generation develop a sense of respect and learn from indigenous knowledge
- collecting and documenting indigenous knowledge, thereby giving it a high level of quality and sophistication.

By providing a space for people to explore the dimensions of their own community’s knowledge, Mpambo Multiversity facilitates their empowerment. This empowerment encourages a shift in the knowledge paradigm as people learn to use their own knowledge to chart their future, innovate on traditional knowledge in order to adapt to and counter the changes around them, and spearhead innovations for development.

By promoting the development of indigenous knowledge, Mpambo Multiversity seeks to bring about cognitive democracy in Africa and this helps to generate self-belief among its students and scholars and motivate the creation of indigenous social and human development paradigms that will help bring the African people out of their prevalent derelict socioeconomic conditions.

What lessons of global relevance can be drawn from Mpambo? Contestations between indigenous knowledge systems and the more modern ‘scientific’ enterprises are now becoming universal. The global ecological movement has reaffirmed the ‘scientific’ value of herbal medicines and traditional water-conservation techniques. Under the intellectual property rights regimes of the World Trade Organization (WTO), commercial patenting of such indigenous knowledge is moving ahead at a rapid pace. Gallopin and Vessuri (2006) have analysed, in some detail, the phenomenon of multiple knowledge systems in the context of sustainable development. Ironically, some HEIs are now using their research expertise to facilitate the ‘privatization’ of knowledge they once criticized for being ‘unscientific’. In a world of global trade and economics, private control over indigenous knowledge, through scientific enterprise, increases the importance of restoring and reviving the scholarship of indigenous knowledge. This further illustrates the possibilities of linking the research function of HE to such local practices, networks and associations within society. This form of civil engagement can broaden the contributions of HE to human and social development in areas such as multiculturalism, sustainability and inclusion.

What lessons of global relevance can be drawn from the above experiments in linking HE to the social and human development agenda? Given the largely positive outcomes of promoting civil engagement with HEIs in these examples, we should ask ourselves: Why aren’t such civil engagements by HEIs common around the world? Why has innovation not been more widespread, given the challenges facing human and social development today? In examining these questions and possibilities, including the experiments in Community Service-Learning, several issues become critical. The first issue relates to the meanings and visions of knowledge, as well as its production and dissemination. Collaboration between HEIs and civil society flourishes where respect for different forms of knowledge and varied epistemological frameworks is manifest. Acknowledgement of indigenous knowledge systems and their contemporary relevance helps to build bridges across traditional divides. Boothroyd and Fryer (2004) describe the reasons for the relative success of certain experiments, such as the Learning Exchange:

The Learning Exchange is built on the premise that many different kinds of knowledge have value and legitimacy and they all need to be incorporated into attempts to resolve social problems or implement effective development strategies. The Learning Exchange tries not to privilege academic knowledge or scientific knowledge over knowledge developed through experience or wisdom gained through the navigation of difficult life situations. This perspective is at odds with the views of many, perhaps most, in the academy.

In general, HEIs and their academic culture hinder efforts to co-construct knowledge with other civil actors in order to address emerging challenges to human and social development. Where such co-construction has been stimulated, positive outcomes for human and social development have been attained.

The second issue relates to the relative power and resource differentials between HEIs and civil actors. Var-
ious efforts by HEIs towards genuine civil engagement falter due to the enormous power and resources that HEIs can bring to a partnership, in comparison with what civil actors can muster. Such power differentials contribute to the aforementioned difficulties experienced in the co-construction of knowledge for human and social development. In this respect, many HEIs need to develop innovative methods and structures that transcend these power differentials. A very interesting and recent example in this regard is the decision by the University of Victoria in Canada to make community-based participatory research (CBPR) one of its core competencies. The University has set up a CBPR office to act as a focal point for promoting such civil engagement in both the Canadian and international arenas. It has brought community leaders and academics together in decision-making structures to overcome these power differentials.

The third issue relates the different approaches to applying research to address specific local human and social development problems. A common issue faced in civil engagements by HEIs is the manner in which research questions are framed. Some HEIs have successfully contributed to actual solutions to real problems that communities face by devising a joint problem-framing and analysis process in which university experts and local residents work together to design the research process. The ‘science shop’ movement in continental Europe (the Living Knowledge Network) reflects some of these practices; this is especially remarkable in that many experts in these science shops are natural scientists whose general predisposition is to ‘avoid any contamination’ from the real world when conducting their research. Physicists, chemists, metallurgists, biologists and so on, have created outlets to jointly identify, with the community, practical problems faced in the particular locality; these outlets then bring research expertise from the HEIs and collaborate with civil actors in the community to carry out research on these practical problems.

Thus, HEIs can promote and encourage co-construction of knowledge and joint teaching of students through various approaches to civil engagement. The examples mentioned above suggest a variety of ways in which practical arrangements for civil engagement have been made by some HEIs. In the final analysis, the overarching purpose of such civil engagement is to deepen the contributions of HEIs to human and social development through the research and teaching functions of HE.

**NEW FORMS OF CIVIL ENGAGEMENT**

What potential new forms of civil engagement can HEIs pursue in order to deepen and widen their contributions to the future agenda of human and social development? This question can only be answered in a specific historical and political context; however, an analysis of the aforementioned examples suggests broader contours of civil engagement possibilities. The future agenda for human and social development is so vast and challenging that no social actor – be it the government, the private sector, HEIs or civil society – can address them alone. The potential for advancing this human and social development agenda increases if these actors work together to develop new ways of collaborating.

The three functions of HEI have traditionally been defined as teaching, research and extension. We need to redefine them as *education, knowledge and service*. ‘Teaching’ establishes the centrality of teaching and the teacher, whereas ‘education’ argues for the centrality of learning and the learner. Viewed in this perspective, *education* in contemporary society should be *lifelong*. HEIs in most societies need to redesign themselves to support the lifelong education of a growing number of people. In this mode, HEIs can contribute to the learning of citizens, practitioners, officials and future researchers in many different ways. Distance- and open-learning approaches can complement classroom instruction; HEIs can reach learners where they are, rather than the other way around. The contents of lifelong learning, however, cannot be based on disciplines alone; they must address the practical needs and aspirations of learners. This opens up a huge possibility for civil engagement. HEIs can partner with civil actors, community elders and practitioners to design appropriate learning curricula and facilitate such educational processes.

In another form of partnership in the teaching function, HEIs could invite civil society inside the institution. This invitation could include experienced practitioners acting as professors and teachers. In doing so, practical expertise and emerging developmental trends could be made available to students and faculty alike. The University of Victoria Faculty of Education, for example, regularly invites elders from first-nation communities to teach courses on marine ecology. In the examples presented above, similar arrangements with local practitioners and indigenous experts were effectively marshalled. Co-teaching with practitioners can help to systematize the practical insights of human and social development as new theories emerge that may have much wider applications in other societal settings. Such arrangements could also help energize and inspire students to explore their own professional contributions to human and social development.

HEIs have enormous intellectual and infrastructural resources to support increasing educational demands and...
aspirations. Civil engagements by HEIs would enable them to respond to such demands and aspirations in a more relevant, ongoing and effective manner.

Thus, various forms of civil engagement related to the teaching function of HEIs can contribute to human and social development.

The second main function of HEIs is research. If this function were redefined to focus on knowledge, then several new possibilities of knowledge production, knowledge mobilization and knowledge dissemination could be explored.

The knowledge production and mobilization function of HEIs can make immense contributions to the future agenda of creating incentives and enabling systems for students and professors to engage in socially relevant research. Civil engagement by HEIs in the promotion of knowledge production and mobilization can take several forms. HEIs can acknowledge the multiplicity of knowledge traditions and create spaces and opportunities for practitioners (from government, community and civil society) to engage with scholars in HEIs in the co-production of knowledge. Research problems and questions can be framed by scholars from HEIs in consultation with the community. This may help to identify a research agenda with greater societal relevance from the perspective of human and social development. By enabling scholars from HEIs to embed themselves in community problems, the Living Knowledge Network (www.livingknowledge.org) has attempted just this through its ‘science shop’ movement in Europe.

Joint research projects with civil society actors are another form of civil engagement in the knowledge production and mobilization function of HEIs. Scholars from HEIs and civil actors (trade unions, cooperatives, community-based organizations, NGOs, issue-based social organizations and so on) apply for joint research funding. In so doing, HEIs identify mutual responsibilities in advance; the sharing of tasks and resources is mutually negotiated at the start of the research project. Such an approach to designing research projects also helps to clarify, in advance, the manner in which research findings will be disseminated to multiple constituencies and utilized to advance the shared agendas of scholars and civil actors. In this regard, the Canadian Social Science and Humanities Research Council has a very innovative programme for funding joint research projects that has been active for more than a decade. Community University Research Alliance (CURA) funds are only available for research projects that involve both an HEI and a civil actor. Such research funding mechanisms can provide incentives for planned, long-term and enduring civil engagement by HEIs.

Partnership between HEIs and social movements and campaigns by civil actors can also be built around an ongoing need for knowledge production and mobilization. For example, the Global Call to Action against Poverty (GCAP) is presently operating in several countries around the world. It focuses on the challenge of achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in all countries of the world by 2015. The GCAP therefore seeks to generate a concrete, empirical analysis of the achievement status of each MDG in each developing country, and an understanding of the causes and constraints that impede progress. In some countries, certain academics have begun to engage with the GCAP knowledge requirements. It is worthwhile to explore how HEIs can form institutional partnerships to advance the GCAP agenda globally.

Such partnerships with specific civil coalitions of campaigns or movements can be built over the medium or long term. Each coalition has a clear knowledge agenda to which HEIs can make enormous contributions. The intellectual resources of HEIs can thus be systematically mobilized towards the co-construction of knowledge for specific agendas of human and social development.

The third function of HEIs – community service – has already seen many innovative forms of civil engagement around the world. How can the human and social development agenda be advanced through new forms of civil engagement by HEIs? Traditional community service or extension modes of HEIs have been practised through the temporary placement of students in a local community. As has been argued elsewhere, such placements contribute more to the students’ learning than to the service to community. In new forms of civil engagement towards human and social development, HEIs can explore the placement of students and scholars in national and global communities. HEI scholars and students are typically seconded or interned in various government institutions and private companies. But such placements and secondments – from a community service perspective – are rarely made towards civil actors.

One particularly exciting possibility to explore is secondment through civil engagement with new alternatives. Many experiments towards sustainable alternatives – products, services, institutions and lifestyles – are being carried out throughout the world. ‘Another World is Possible’ is the slogan of the World Social Forum, which has been engaged in the mobilization of such alternative visions and models over the past seven years. National, regional and global forums convened under the banner of the World Social Forum are now incubators of such alternatives. HEIs could develop partnerships with such forums, with a view to seconding their scholars and stu-
dents to learn from, and contribute to, the emergence of sustainable alternatives.

Thus, HEIs can systematically explore new ways and forms of civil engagement in each of their core functions of teaching, research and extension. In so doing, their primary goal is to enhance their contributions to the future agenda of human and social development, as explained above. As Peter Taylor argues in the Introduction to this volume, HEIs have an enormous responsibility, and huge potential, for understanding this world. This social responsibility of HEIs can be more fruitfully fulfilled through meaningful and innovative forms of civil engagement.

CIVIL ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS ROLE IN HUMAN AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

FUTURE CHALLENGES

In light of the foregoing discussion, HEIs need to examine critically their missions in relation to contributing to the human and social development of communities in their vicinity and around the world. As the demand for human actualization increases in this century, and as a larger proportion of the population enters HEIs, society will have greater expectations for such contributions. The research and teaching functions of HEIs will have to serve this larger mission of ever-evolving human and social development. This sets up a series of strategic and practical challenges that HEIs must address in their own unique and specific manner.

1. The foremost strategic challenge that HEIs must address is the acknowledgement of other sources of contemporary and advanced knowledge on human and social development. HEIs have operated in isolation within the four walls of laboratories and academia without understanding how new forms of knowledge for human and social development were evolving. Such new knowledge emerged from the world of practice. This is particularly so for social movements, civil society coalitions and think-tanks that have focused on various aspects of human and social development. Such an acknowledgement by HEIs should be accompanied by the acceptance of alternative sources of knowledge and modes of knowledge production. The exploration of such alternative epistemologies in fact deepens contemporary challenges facing human and social development. In this acknowledgement lies the possibility of HEIs exploring new partnerships with social movements and civil society coalitions.

2. In order for such opportunities for partnerships to be made effective, many aspects of HEIs’ current systems and approaches may have to be altered. There has been considerable debate in many academic circles about the non-acceptance of action-oriented participatory research as a valid methodology of knowledge production. Refereed journals and respectable academic publications do not readily provide space for the publication of such research materials, which have not gained ‘scholarly respectability’ in most HEIs. The University of Victoria’s bold attempt to open an office of community-based participatory research as an integral part of the university’s commitment is a rare exception. However, the system of scholarly recognition through publication and participation in conferences needs to be reformed in order to encourage knowledge contributions to arise out of civil engagements.

3. Other incentive systems within HEIs may also need to be adapted and modified for such partnerships to become effective. The teaching function of HEIs could be adapted to compulsorily include field practice, secondment and immersion programmes. These may be linked to local civic initiatives or movements so that students and their teachers may learn about the issues of social and human development while contributing to solving those problems. Academic rewards and research/teaching grants may need to be linked to such partnerships in order to encourage participation.

4. Finally, HEIs may need to re-examine the values associated with the social positioning of their institutions. What are the larger values that HEIs serve in society? Beyond training intellectuals and contributing knowledge, what added value do they bring to deepening democracy in societies? How can they become incubators of more empowered citizenship? What values do HEIs promote in carrying out their teaching and knowledge functions? How do these values become the reference point for new aspirations in human and social development? How can HEIs champion the larger agenda of human and social development in the 21st century?

These and many other questions need to be posed in this discourse. The possibilities and requirements for civil engagement by HEIs are huge and growing. Future human and social development agendas may be better elaborated if civil engagement by HEIs is globally encouraged.

In this perspective, HE must be viewed as a public good. Its provisions and institutions must be supported in the public spheres. Its leadership must articulate the future vision of HE in the context of the demand for deepening democracy and preparation for global citizenship in the contemporary world. In so doing, HEIs can reassert their contributions to emerging human and social development agendas through creative forms of civil engagement at the local and global levels.
However, engagement can also reinforce policy and practice (Brown et al., 2003). At the same time, catalyses innovations in improved knowledge and theory and, at the same time, it can also increase social learning—which creates problem-solving capabilities. Globalization is increasing international interdependence; it can also strengthen the links between university contributions to human and social development (Stokes, 1997).

EMERGING PATTERNS AND PRE

Four emerging patterns or trends are emerging. One important trend is the impact of human activities have posed a range of challenges and successes. The expansion and globalization of knowledge production and citizen participation is increasingly becoming the norm around the globe. Whether universities will fulfill their potential, however, depends on how they respond to the challenges posed by human and social development, especially in the developing countries, for example, will become aware of their differences and their interdependencies. Citizens in affluent countries recognize that they are paying a disproportionate share of the costs of global warming, which is caused largely by the people from very different backgrounds and social activists, business leaders and so on).

PRE includes a wide range of initiatives that are concerned with improving practice with the interest in ways that produce both new research and new knowledge and innovations in practice. Researchers who are concerned with producing knowledge, so that together they are able to learn about problems of mutual concern with human and social development. The last section suggests engagements between researchers and analysts for PRE that contributes to human and social development. The following section identifies some promising patterns in the relations of universities and Civil Society in a Globalizing World. Cambridge, MA: Hauser Center for Nonprofit Organizations and CIVICUS, World Alliance for Citizen Participation.

NOTE

1 Brahmins are the highest priestly caste in India. They alone could study the Sanskrit language and scriptures. They were considered the intellectuals of society.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


