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## Inside View IV.2.1

### Community–university engagement in South Africa

Jerome Slamet

In the introductory section of this paper, a brief historical context of South Africa and its development challenges is presented. In the second part, a systems-level view of community–university engagement in South Africa will be offered. The third section puts forward a view of community–university engagement at the individual institutional level. In the next part of the paper, a discussion follows on what is needed to go beyond existing practical arrangements and conceptual approaches,

and in the final section, pertinent conclusions and final comments are made.

#### INTRODUCTION

South Africa has a bitter legacy inherited from its colonial and apartheid past. All aspects of life, including higher education, are somehow shaped and directed along its current paths because of this history. The euphoria of the advent of black majority rule in 1994 was tempered by the realization of how huge

the task would be to address the widespread poverty, inequality and unemployment that is the plight of largely the black majority. It was incumbent on the Mandela administration and subsequent administrations to intervene to address the huge backlogs experienced by black South Africans. Over the nearly two decades since 1994, a succession of developmental plans (the Reconstruction and Development Plan, Growth, Equity and Redistribution Policy, National Development Plan, and

so on) were formulated and implemented (with mixed results) in order to fulfil the aspirations of the black majority. All these plans and implementation efforts are aimed at creating 'A better life for all', which was an election slogan of the ruling party, the African National Congress. National development and reconciliation was and still is an extremely ambitious but very necessary project in South Africa.

### SYSTEMS-LEVEL VIEW: A DIFFERENTIATED HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY

South Africa currently has 23 public universities and a number of private higher education institutions. As part of the democratization process, new legislation governing public higher education was promulgated and restructuring of the sector occurred through processes of mergers and incorporations. The result of the restructuring process is that South Africa has a differentiated public higher education system featuring 11 traditional universities (offering theoretically oriented university degrees), 6 universities of technology (offering vocationally oriented diplomas and degrees) and 6 comprehensive universities (offering a combination of both the aforementioned types of qualification). However, there are also other bases for differentiation between universities that include the distinctions between historically disadvantaged universities and historically advantaged universities, rurally based universities and urban-based universities, as well as research-intensive universities and teaching universities (HESA, 2009). Historically, there were notions of outreach, community service or extension in most (if not all) of these types of universities in South Africa. These activities focused mostly on philanthropic, volunteer and service activities and were mostly unrelated or poorly related to the academic core functions.

The emergence of the post-apartheid developmental state in general, but specifically the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation of 1997*, changed all that. This document laid the basis for the Higher Education Act of 1997, which in turn made provision for the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the body that was charged with

institutional audits of universities. The White Paper included goals at a systems level, as well as institutional level goals that particularly foregrounded the social responsibility of students and universities. The HEQC, in its audit criteria, included a number of criteria that focused on community engagement. The effect of these specific audit criteria was that it steered the efforts of the universities that were audited towards social responsibility and national development.

However, care had to be taken that the role that is desired of universities in national development be a role that is aligned to the identity and self-understanding of the university and 'the identity structures of academics' in the words of Cooper (2011). It could not be enforced from outside and above, and it had to bear in mind the differentiated South African higher education system.

In terms of the development of community–university engagement in South Africa the following (updated from HEQC/CHE, 2006) can be regarded as seminal moments:

- *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation of 1997*. This document is an example of government steering of higher education and served as an impetus for the institutionalization of community engagement. The White Paper can be downloaded from [www.dhet.gov.za/Documents/Legislation/WhitePapers/tabid/191/Default.aspx](http://www.dhet.gov.za/Documents/Legislation/WhitePapers/tabid/191/Default.aspx).
- *The Community Engagement in Higher Education conference, Bantry Bay, Cape Town, 3–5 September 2006*. This was the first major conference on community–university partnerships in South Africa. It featured representatives from universities, different levels of government, non-profit organizations and local community partners of universities.
- *The HEQC audit of higher education institutions*. The audit process of higher education institutions can also be seen as an example of government steering of the sector. Go to [www.che.ac.za/media\\_and\\_publications/frameworks-criteria/criteria-institutional-audits](http://www.che.ac.za/media_and_publications/frameworks-criteria/criteria-institutional-audits) to view the audit criteria.
- *The launch of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF), Mangosuthu University of Tech-*

*nology, 1–3 November 2009*. The forum plays an important advocacy, networking and capacity-building role in terms of community–university engagement on a national level. Visit the SAHECEF website at [www.sahecef.ac.za](http://www.sahecef.ac.za).

- *Community Engagement in South African Higher Education, Kagisano No. 6, January 2010*. This booklet is the culmination of a national conversation on community–university engagement facilitated by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The booklet can be downloaded from [www.che.ac.za/media\\_and\\_publications/kagisano-series/kagisano-issue-number-6-community-engagement-south-african](http://www.che.ac.za/media_and_publications/kagisano-series/kagisano-issue-number-6-community-engagement-south-african).
- *The National Research Foundation (NRF) Community Engagement Programme, 2010–2012*. In 2010, the Knowledge Fields Development Directorate of the NRF issued the first Community Engagement Call, which elicited a number of prime proposals from universities focusing on 'research that contributes both to knowledge production within the ambit of community engagement ...; as well as research on the processes and dynamics of engagement from the perspective of the higher education sector', in the words used in the description of the Call. See details of the NRF Community Engagement Programme at [www.nrf.ac.za/projects.php?pid=49](http://www.nrf.ac.za/projects.php?pid=49).
- *The Community Engagement: The Changing Role of South African Universities in Development conference, East London, November 2011*. This was the second major national community–university engagement conference, the first having been held in Bantry Bay in 2006. The products of this conference include a book of abstracts, as well as a special issue of the *South African Review of Sociology* (Volume 43, Issue 2) entitled 'In search of a developmental university: community engagement in theory and practice', which is available online at <http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/issr20/43/2>.
- *The Trilateral Conference on Community Engagement, SA–USA–China, Durban, 11–13 December 2012*. This small conference featured representatives of the NRF (South Africa), the National Science Found-

dation (USA) and prominent community–university engagement practitioners, from both the USA and South Africa (unforeseen circumstances unfortunately preventing the Chinese delegation from attending the conference). The findings that will come out of this kind of conversation will critically shape the future development of community–university engagement and its role in the redefinition of the university and scholarship globally.

- *Academic Interaction with Social Partners: Investigating the Contribution of Universities to Economic and Social Development.* This book, authored by Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) researchers Kruss, Visser, Aphane and Haupt, and published towards the end of 2012, contains the results of a research study of university interaction with external social partners. It represents the first formal research study of community engagement that offers the ability to establish broad trends across the whole South African higher education system.

Because of the differentiation in the South African higher education system, different forms of community–university engagement emerged in South Africa. This is in line with the ‘system of progressive self-differentiation based on varying institutional visions and missions accompanied by policies and processes that enable institutions to make meaningful progress in their distinctive developmental trajectories’ that is propagated by Higher Education South Africa (HESA, 2009, p. 9).

The 2012 HSRC study employed the typology of relationships between universities and external partners that is outlined in Table IV.2.1.1. This typology corresponds to a great extent with a typology of community–university engagement that is emerging in South Africa based on the concurrent sessions of the 2006 Bantry Bay Conference, as well as the SAHECEF working groups.

Discussions in the SAHECEF Management and Governance group established that most of the institutions are involved in community engagement through teaching; in fact, the Joint Education Trust/Community–Higher Education Service Partnerships process deliberately used the tool of service-learning as an entry point

TABLE IV.2.1.1 HSRC’s types of university relationships with external partners	
<b>Alternative teaching</b>	e.g. continuing education, customized training, collaborative curriculum design and alternative modes of delivery
<b>Engaged teaching and outreach</b>	e.g. service-learning, student voluntary outreach, community-based research, clinical services and work-integrated learning
<b>Engaged research</b>	e.g. collaborative R&D, consultancy, contracts, participatory research and policy research
<b>Technology transfer</b>	e.g. design of new technologies, technology transfer, design of new interventions and joint commercialization
Source: Adapted from Kruss et al. (2012, p. 40).	

to develop community–university engagement in South Africa. Most institutions also have programmes that aim to broaden access to and widen participation in higher education, with special attention being given to interactions with disadvantaged schools. Most institutions also have active student volunteer programmes, and most are to some extent involved in regional development. A smaller number of institutions, because of their research strengths, branch out into community engagement through research. At least one South African university (North West University) has conceptualized its whole community–university endeavour as community interaction through knowledge transfer and the implementation of expertise.

### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL VIEW: INSIDE THE INDIVIDUAL SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

A list of good community–university engagement practices in South African universities can be accessed on the SAHECEF website [www.sahecef.ac.za](http://www.sahecef.ac.za). The importance of these examples of good community–university engagement practice is that they confirm the fact of different institutional community engagement foci and the fact that excellence is spread all over the South African higher education system. These are exemplars that can be emulated by others who find themselves in similar contexts or have similar visions. The examples of good practice can serve to give direction and inform and inspire others in the field of community–university engagement, bearing in mind that this field of higher education is one that is relatively new, and standards need to be set in it.

Regarding good practice in individual institutions, one could ask: what are the institu-

tional arrangements within individual South African universities that support engagement? Emerging practice in South Africa (as evidenced by discussions of the SAHECEF Management and Governance Work Group during 2011–2012) seems to confirm the international literature to a large extent (see, for example, Hollander et al., 2002, in this regard). The elements that are important in South African universities to support engagement appear to be the following:

- *Management support.* Community engagement in a university stands and falls by university management support. South African universities that excel in terms of community engagement all enjoy active support from top management, starting with the vice-chancellor.
- *Resources.* Adequate provision must be made in terms of financial and human resources in the main institutional budget for community engagement activities. This remains the best indicator of the importance that the institution attaches to community engagement.
- *A community engagement policy.* A community–university engagement policy that is the result of institution-wide consultation (preferably also with inputs from the major external partners) provides the formal framework to guide the implementation of community–university engagement. Such a policy is normally a mixture of conceptual commitments and practical procedures, and could be updated as institutional and external conditions change.
- *An institutional register of community–university engagement initiatives.* There has to be some form of registration mecha-

nism for community–university engagement initiatives within the institution. This can take the form of an electronic database or even printed profiles. Such a register must be regularly updated; this is a challenging task within the highly dynamic context of universities. Reports from such a register could be a valuable source of management information.

- *A senate committee.* To advance community–university engagement, it is necessary to establish a high-level committee at institutional level to oversee this function. The members of such a committee should be sufficiently senior to act as champions and to ensure that community engagement is entrenched in the institutional agenda.
- *Faculty committees and community engagement chairpersons.* To advance community–university engagement at faculty level, many South African universities have established dedicated committees for community engagement in faculties, with chairpersons, as in the case of research and teaching.
- *A central community engagement support service or unit.* The South African universities that have made significant strides in terms of community engagement have established a central support service or unit with the functions of coordination, support, monitoring and evaluation, quality assurance, training and development. At a number of universities, the head of such a unit is a senior appointment reporting to top management.
- *Recognition of community engagement.* The experience of a number of South African universities is that a formalized recognition and incentive system for faculty and students can significantly advance community engagement. Community engagement should also feature prominently in appointment, performance management and promotion procedures.

### GOING BEYOND

At the heart of how universities organize themselves in terms of community engagement is their *understanding of scholarship*. In this regard, universities in South Africa seem to exhibit different kinds of approach.

For the purposes of this paper, the following three approaches can be discerned: *detached scholarship*, *science for society* and *engaged scholarship*:

- *Detached scholarship.* According to this view, the academic works with ideas, and the world of ideas forms a dichotomy with that of reality or practice. Objectivity, understood as neutrality, is prized above all. Knowledge is pursued for the sake of knowledge. The academic has no concern about application, that is, the business of others. This is what some have criticized as the ‘ivory tower’ mentality, but it could also be related to positivism, a theory of knowledge that still has a lot of currency in the academic world, in South Africa as well as elsewhere. While this kind of approach has a place in certain instances of basic science, some academics may wish to extend its applicability to all science. The human and social sciences especially suffer from continuous attempts to impose the logical form of positivism on it. Where detached scholarship reigns, there is a disdain for community engagement as being something foreign to the academy.
- *Science for society.* The common understanding in this view is that science and knowledge are owned by the university and that they are offered to and consumed by society. The university, in this view, acts as a kind of knowledge service provider. Unlike the detached scholarship view, there is an awareness of ‘real-world’ problems and the role that academic knowledge can play in addressing these problems. Community engagement according to the science for society view is service to society by making available university expert knowledge to solve ‘real-world’ problems.
- *Engaged scholarship.* This view acknowledges the existence of a knowledge ecology, of which the university and its academic knowledge is part. It takes seriously issues of cognitive justice, co-production of knowledge, transdisciplinarity, complexity and the potential of engagement for the university and its sustainability. There is a deep realization that interactions with other social partners can impact critically on the university itself and that serious

community engagement work can produce ‘relational, localised and contextual knowledge’ in a process of ‘co-production of knowledge’ (Hartley et al., 2010). In such a process, there is a multidirectional flow of knowledge as opposed to a unidirectional flow of knowledge, shared authority for knowledge creation instead of the primacy of academic knowledge, and the university seen as part of an ecosystem of knowledge production addressing public problem-solving instead of as the centre of public problem-solving (Hartley et al., 2010). Knowledge with global applicability can be generated in a local setting. (This is colloquially referred to as ‘world-class science in our backyard’ among colleagues at Stellenbosch University.) In such an approach, one thinks differently about scholarship and its relationship to human development. It is nothing short of a different model of scholarship from the expert model. Because it values more than academic knowledge and peer-reviewed publications, it will also need a revised incentive system. This kind of understanding of scholarship goes beyond what currently is.

A very practical example of the kind of scholarship described above is the process of writing and using the book *Sustainable Stellenbosch: Opening Dialogues*, which was launched on 30 November 2012. Co-written by Stellenbosch University academics, Stellenbosch Municipality officials and community members, this book addresses the most pressing problems of the town and offers conceptual frameworks to start thinking about possible solutions. The book marks:

a particular moment in the evolution of a body of knowledge that is both about the material realities of the town in which the university is based and about the forging of a research practice that contributes to our global understanding of the connections between innovation, knowledge production and sustainability. (Swilling et al., 2012, p. 347)

The book will be used as the basis of several public discussions around clusters of themes that are important for the future of the town and will certainly inform public policy directions. This example shows that

a move away from the traditional 'expert model' of knowledge production is not to be feared but could bring added dividends of relevance and inclusivity.

More conceptual work needs to be done, and practical measures need to be put in place to further enhance community–university engagement in South Africa. On the conceptual side, the national conversation about community–university engagement in South African higher education needs to continue, and it must continue to be driven by influential national role-players such as the CHE, NRF, HESA, Department of Higher Education and Training and SAHECEF by way of conversations, workshops, conferences, publications, and so on. In addition, the academic model and understanding of scholarship needs to be urgently deliberated and reviewed to fit the South African developmental context and to allow institutions to follow differentiated development trajectories. On the practical side, there needs to be a revision of the academic reward system that will match a revised academic model. National awards and grants (like the NRF Community Engagement Call) must be continued and expanded. The building of networks and capacity-building (professional development) in terms of community–university engagement are other important priorities to be pursued.

The one big challenge to implementing these changes is the will to do so of univer-

sities and their management teams. The will and courageous leadership may be lacking because of a commitment to the current academic model and reward systems. If steering by government and other interested parties is backed up by respect for the identity and self-understanding of universities and academics, as well as by substantial monetary incentives and rewards, a different, most exciting time awaits community–university engagement in South Africa.

### CONCLUSION

The South African government is, through its policies and legislation, steering universities to be more socially responsive. There is the realization that institutions within the differentiated higher education system can make a variety of possible community engagement contributions depending on their contexts, visions and missions. However, the role that the university is expected to play must keep track of its identity as an institution, as well as the identity structures of academics. Therefore, community–university engagement work must be moved into the centre of academic endeavours. There needs to be a clear realization on the part of all social partners involved in community–university engagement that the university is not a development agency; but that it has a knowledge role to play in national development and reconciliation in South Africa. What are needed are practical

measures and a new academic model, with an academic incentive system that will support such a model.

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## Inside View IV.2.2

### Knowledge, engagement and higher education in Eastern Africa

Janice Desire Busingye

#### INTRODUCTION

Community engagement in Eastern Africa is informed by the historical context of education in the region. It is also informed by the need to contribute to solving social problems and to the emerging global paradigms of engagement in universities across the world. In these circumstances, institutions of higher learning have had to think globally and are still struggling to act locally. In this paper, I will descriptively landscape community engagement across nine universities drawn from the

Eastern African countries of Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi. I will draw on the Community Service Continuum developed by Nampota (2011, p. 110) to locate the character of community engagement in East African institutions of higher learning.

#### HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN EASTERN AFRICA

Community engagement in Eastern Africa is intertwined with the history of higher education in Africa. From the time Africa got a

formalized education system in 1923 until now, the goals of community engagement and higher education have been a reflection of the needs of the wider society. For instance, during the colonial period, university and college education was purposed to serve the administrative needs of the colonial masters (Preece et al., 2012). During independence, Preece et al. (2012) have argued that university education was purposed to meet the national development needs of the countries where the universities were located. In East Africa, the De la