



National Council of Rural Institutes

Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India



Connect

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Travelling TOGETHER

Steps towards Transacting Student Engagement with Communities for Promoting Rural Resilience.

“Universities need to derive an institutional set up for continuing student engagement in rural communities. Each university must have a cell for this specific purpose of engaging students and faculty.” This one sentence sums up the essence of the whole gamut of deliberations in the two-day workshop, organised by the National Council of Rural Institutes, Department of Higher Education Ministry of Human Resource Development Government of India, in collaboration with the Telangana State Council for Higher Education.

The Workshop, on 'Transacting Student Engagement for Promoting Rural Resilience', has been organised on January 18-19 at MCR-HRDI, Hyderabad.

It was guided by the vision of mainstreaming Rural Engagement in the formal

education curriculum. To achieve complete education from communities through a participatory learning and knowledge exchange approach.

Vice-Chancellors from the Universities in the state of Telangana participated in the workshop. They deliberated on the need for Rural Engagement for students and faculty. They also made commitments for their respective universities. Osmania University Vice-Chancellor Prof S Ramchandram, Telugu University Vice-Chancellor Prof SV Satyanarayana, Mahatma Gandhi University Vice-Chancellor Prof Altaf Hussain, Dr BR Ambedkar Open University Vice-Chancellor Prof K Sita Rama Rao, Telangana University Vice-Chancellor Prof P Sambaiah and Prof S Satyanarayana RGUKT Vice-Chancellor addressed the participating faculty members and flagged

the issues while the introductory remarks were made by NCRI Chairman Dr. WG Prasanna Kumar.

Speaking on the occasion, Chief Guest and TSCHE Chairman Prof. Papi Reddy



Universities need to derive an institutional set up. Each University must have a cell for promoting rural community Engagement of faculty and students

pointed out that the students in universities need to study and educate others to improve standards of living in rural areas. “Universities need to derive an institutional set up”. Each university must have a cell for promoting rural community engagement of faculty and students,” he

said. “The route to villages is through thousands of colleges which run under the universities imparting undergraduate and post graduate education. The TSCHE is keen on implementing the strategy which is derived from inputs from this workshop.

This workshop consisted key note speeches on Best Practices in Rural Engagement in different academic domains by senior teachers from the streams of Social Work, Education, Communications, Rural Studies and NSS. Group

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Discussions and brainstorming sessions were conducted post-noon in five different groups.

Speaking in the inaugural segment,

Prof. S. Ramachandram,



Experience of Community Engagement as a credited programme by Osmania University has been an eye opener

Vice-Chancellor, Osmania University, said the experience of introducing the concept of Community Engagement as a credited programme by Osmania University has been an eye opener and a first step in marching in that direction.

Prof. P. Sambaiiah,



A modified curriculum will provide best experimental learning opportunity to students in the contemporary field aspects of rural society

Vice-Chancellor, Telangana University underlined the need for building a Curriculum for Rural Engagement and preparing a teaching module along with practicum methodology. Promotion of 'Digital Basara' with 100% digital literacy was accomplished by the RGUKT through the students who visited every

household on Saturdays and trained them.

Prof. S. Satyanarayana,



Low cost Technology for meeting felt needs of the community should be developed and customized through this Engagement

Vice Chancellor, RGUKT, shared this experience and explained how teachers were trained. "Every stream of education needs to take up this task of rural engagement seriously," he said.

Prof. Khaja Altaf Hussain



In the time table itself some hours should be given and field work also to be incorporated to make this course meaningful

Vice-Chancellor, Mahatma Gandhi University recognized the importance of the workshop and emphasised that "we need to identify issues, prepare and involve students to analyse for themselves and get involved in research work. In the timetable itself some hours should be provided for and field work also to be undertaken."

Prof. S.V. Satyanarayana,



The role of Universities in Telangana is crucial in taking education to the Rural community through cultural media

Vice-Chancellor, Potti Sreeramulu Telugu University, threw light on a unique angle in higher education, saying that a country's progress or civilization is measured by language, literature, culture, people and their arts not just technology advancements. The role of universities and colleges in the newly formed Telangana state is crucial in community development. This is possible when education is taken to the rural masses,

Prof. K. Sitarama Rao,



The term "Student Power" would become more relevant when villages can be transformed with their involvement

Vice-Chancellor, Dr. B.R. Ambedkar Open University also spoke at the workshop and called for use of student power for social reconstruction. "Participatory research with practical learning, partnership, student

services and learning experiences is essential," he said.

Earlier, introducing the subject matter of the workshop to the participants, Dr WG Prasanna Kumar,



Learning is perennial and multi directional where everyone learns from everyone as all places and always

Chairman NCRI, shared the vision of the workshop which is aligned to the mission of Unnat Bharath Abhiyan of the Ministry of Human Resource Development in Government of India and Community Engagement Programme of the University Grants Commission. "The attempt is to build a structured programme wherein Universities leverage their knowledge by learning from Rural Communities and working along with them in identifying the enveloping challenges, advancing an appropriate as well as sustainable strategy resulting in edification of a resilient Rural India," he explained. Prof V Sudhakar from EFLU, Prof Vinod Pavarala from HCU, Prof Abdul Shaban from TISS, Prof Varun Vidyarthi from IIT Kharagpur and Prof Satyanarayana Reddy who is Telangana State NSS Liaison Officer shared their

own experiences of working with communities as part of the curriculum transaction.

The term “Student Power” would become more relevant when villages can be transformed. It is time to change the Top Down Approach of Rural Development. The Bottom Up Approach is the need of the hour, he reminded the gathering. In the second part of the inaugural session, expert resource persons shared domain experiences highlighting how the many facets of student engagement in rural areas can help achieve integration.

Dr. M. Satyanarayana, TS



NSS Liaison Officer explained that MHRD has accepted NSS proposal with

syllabus for Community Engagement. But it needs to be made into one course for a semester.

Sharing best practices in Student engagement with community through the Teacher Education, Prof V Sudhakar EFLU,



spoke of challenges such as lack of theoretical foundation to practice, critical classroom training and education being made political and the failure in understanding the Community needs with respect to Teacher Education. “The lack of concrete systematic curriculum practice is also an issue,” he said.

Prof Abdul Shaban, TISS Tuljapur, presented a bird's eye view of their work with

the community in the Osmanabad area of Maharashtra. “Initiatives in



education with respect to innovation can bring creative engagement with society to promote change,” he said. Communication is the key to engagement with rural communities and

Prof Vinod Pavarala of



University of Hyderabad outlined how we need to address the issue of Voice Poverty, the absence of conveyance of messages to

and fro between universities and communities. “It is time to revisit the curriculum of Communication and Journalism because of the changing times, technology and it is time to look for a change in paradigm.”

Prof Varun Vidyadhi of Manavodaya explained as



to how to gain insights into our work with universities and rural communities. He emphasized on the need for inward introspection. “The concept of “Antharmukhi” needs to be contemplated. The major question arising is how we make our education system and communities look within? This would be the first step to move towards finding a solution,” he said.

Core principles for Community Engagement



Dr Rajesh Tandon,
Founder-President and
Chief Functionary, Participatory
Research in Asia (PRIA)

In order to operationalize community - university engagement, it is important that an institutional mechanism is developed to adopt a holistic and functional approach to community engagement based on the following core principles (Tandon, 2014):

- i) Mutually agreed interests and needs of both communities and institutions be articulated and respected;
- ii) Engagement must encompass all the three functions of institutions of higher education—teaching, research and outreach/practice;
- iii) Institutional engagement cutting across disciplines and faculties should be mandated, including natural sciences, and not restricted to social and human sciences alone;
- iv) Participation in community engagement projects by students should earn them credits and partially meet graduation requirements and it should be integrated into their evaluation systems;
- v) Performance assessments of teachers, researchers and administrators in such institutions should include this dimension of community engagement.



Thus Spake The Teachers

Teachers sitting down to share notes; Trainers understanding the field realities from the teachers. brainstorming, discussion, debate, presentation and analysis. These were the things that marked the second day of the workshop on transacting student engagement. Groups of faculty members from various streams sat down with their resource persons and identified gaps in the existing curriculum in terms of student-community engagement and also suggested possible curriculum interventions in their respective disciplines. There was also a module suggested for an inter-disciplinary course that spans across various streams. After intensive discussions, each of the groups made presentations.

The Group on Teacher Education



identified absence of a full-time, credited course on community engagement, absence of a theory course and identified activities as the main

gaps. The Group suggested inclusion of content with topics such as Community engagement for literacy, RTE and vocational skill development. They emphasised on introducing aspects from the Indian Constitution for realisation of democratic ideals. Expert interaction, group discussions, field visit based reporting are identified for transacting community engagement of student teachers.

The NSS officers identified the core



principles of meaningful content, voice and choice, personal and public purpose. They proposed a credited course for one semester, covering resource and social mapping, participatory learning and practical experiments such as adoption of a community, a village or a group.

The faculty members from Communication and Journalism insisted on inclusion of socio-political and economic realities of rural India, a balance of theory and practice and contextual specialisations. They also identified the need to revisit



Development Journalism curriculum for a more integrated, inclusive and applied approach. The modern tools, including social media need to be explored.

The faculty members from Social Work wanted to utilise the ample opportunities for practical engagement. The suggested course content included study of community organisation, role of community organiser and a study of the Indian village system, the three-tier



Panchayat Raj system, understanding policies pertaining to agriculture, welfare, land reforms and rural employment.



Strategising Rural Solutions

The Ministry of Human Resource Development (HRD) directed Higher Education Institutions to adopt villages, carry out field studies and devise responses to the challenges before the rural India. The Central government further plans to undertake the responses devised by these institutions in their policies for rural reconstruction. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in this regard was signed between Ministries of HRD, Rural Development and Panchayat Raj under the 'Unnat Bharat Abhiyan', which aims to connect knowledge institutions with rural development processes by adopting village clusters.

While some of the private and government education

institutions have been adopting villages and working for their betterment, an MoU like this would facilitate them to work in tandem with the central government for inputs in policy issues. The programme is being implemented in 92 districts in Phase I.

According to officials in the Ministry of HRD, after field study, engagement with the local community and assessment of requirements for quality living, the inputs of educational institutions could be incorporated into the Gram Panchayat Development Plans. The study can be considered for implementation by the concerned district authorities.

As per the MoU, HRD Ministry will ensure that all higher education institutions would be encouraged to adopt a cluster of five panchayats in consultation with the district collectors to carry out detailed field study. IIT-Delhi will design and make available a suitable work flow driven internet enabled platform that can be used by all institutions to prepare plans and track progress for the next 10 years.

The Ministry of Panchayat Raj would facilitate the involvement of knowledge institutions in the Gram Panchayat Development Plan (GPDP) preparation process and ensure operational tie-up between the educational institutions and the local bodies.

The Ministry of Rural Development will make available the services of National Institute of Rural Development and Panchayat Raj, Hyderabad for capacity building of personnel from educational institutions to undertake field visits and impart familiarity with the tools of field study and report preparation.

ISRO Chief asks NIT to adopt villages

"You can innovate on technologies and bring in solutions to problems affecting the country," said Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) Chairman A S Kiran Kumar. He cited India's success in entering the Mars orbit in its maiden attempt and becoming the fourth country to send a spacecraft to the red planet. Dr Kiran Kumar addressed the 14th Convocation of National Institute of Technology-Rourkela (NIT-R) as chief guest. Kumar advised the NIT-R to adopt 100 villages to ensure that the benefits of technology reach rural population. Using ISRO's water surface map, ways should be explored to provide alternative source of livelihood to the tribal people in inland fisheries which have tremendous opportunities, he said. "We have a huge number of communication and navigation satellites whose signals can be used for bringing in new amount of applications. All these areas have tremendous opportunities for the institution," he added.



Study first, Marry Later

A recent study co-related age of marriage and education and came up with a heartening finding. Based on the Indian Census data, the study found that the median age at marriage for women has increased from 19.4 years in 2001 to 21.2 years in 2011. The mean age at effective marriage for females – defined as the age at consummation of marriage – has increased from 19.3 years in 1990 to 21.2 years in 2011, according to Census data. In rural India, the figure was 20.7 years, while it was 22.7 years in urban areas. Further, the percentage of women at various levels of education who married below 18 also dropped, indicating that as more women were educated, the average age of marriage rose. Over the decade ending 2011, the percentage of illiterate rural women who married before 18 dropped 14 percentage points. In 2011, about 38% of illiterate women in rural area married before the age of 18—the legal age of marriage for women in India. This figure falls to 17% among women who completed matriculation, and further to 7% in women who completed their graduation or more. Education and higher income play a major role in increasing the mean age of marriage according to the 'United Nations Children's Fund.

Books on Wheels for Villages

The National Book Trust (NBT) has been running a mobile book exhibition with a team of people travelling from one countryside to the other for the last 26 years exhibiting and selling books at a nominal price to readers who have minimum resources and means to acquire them.

Every month the team goes out to a selected district and move from one village to another with a van full of freshly printed books. They spend a month in each district exhibiting, selling them and return to fill up the van and then move to another again. Mobile Book Exhibition is a part of NBT's initiative to inculcate reading habits among people, a tradition followed since 1957, its heydays. In 2017, this age old tradition will turn 60.

The mobile book exhibitions have been tremendously popular among the rural India because of the low price of the books as well as its high-quality publishing.

Every book is written by an expert in the concerned field and the price range starts from as nominal as Rs 12.

However, though the books are priced very nominally, the mobile outlets sell books worth millions every year, says Baldeo Bhai Sharma, Chairman of the trust. "Our mobile exhibitions have set a record of selling books worth more than Rs 12 lakhs in tribal villages of Odisha in just two months time. This has become possible because we see our work as a duty to the nation and to educate the new generation," he said. The trust has 11 such vans and more than 40 employees dedicated to organise such exhibitions.

A recent study said that despite India's speedy growth in terms of information and communication technology, the country remains an underperformer with only 18 percent of its population accessing internet in 2014 as per a World Bank study.

NCRI Celebrates Republic Day



The National Council for Rural Institutes celebrated the 68th Republic Day with much fanfare. The NCRI team reiterated its commitment to serve its mandate with diligence and commitment. It has been recalled on the occasion that the focus of the Council will shift from Institution building to curriculum building and strengthening rural education. When NCRI was set up in 1995, there were hardly any rural universities. However, after 1995, many Higher Education institutions such as Central and State Universities,

IITs, IIMs, NITs have come up in rural areas. The change in location of the Universities has not resulted in a change in the focus of teaching and the focus areas continued to be urban issues and aspects, with very little concern shown for rural issues. In this context, it is not the locus but the focus that has become important and curricular activity should become the area for intervention. This changed approach has been discussed once again on the occasion of Republic Day. Chairman Dr WG Prasanna Kumar has hoisted the national flag in the presence of NCRI team.

NCRI Internships

The National Council of Rural Institutes (NCRI) invites applications from students pursuing post graduate courses (any discipline) for summer internships in the field of higher education on rural concerns. Interns will be inducted for a maximum period of 8 weeks during May-August 2017. The selected intern will be provided with a monthly remuneration of Rs 10,000/- and a certificate on successful completion of internship. Interested candidates may apply through their respective heads of institutions/departments to Member Secretary NCRI. The applications must reach by March 31, 2017. For application format and other details of internship, please visit NCRI website.

NCRI team strengthened

NCRI included experienced project consultants/senior consultants in its team, to strengthen its team and augment its outreach work with higher education institutes across the country. With this, curriculum and resource material development in Higher Education is being diversified and work is extended into the new streams of Gandhian Studies, Social Work, Education, Communication and Rural Education.



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