

# Curriculum and Community – the 2Cs for Community-Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS): A case study from India

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**Abstract:** Education systems are a vital force for social action and change. It provides knowledge and aims at action based on a synchronous process of learning, involving both theoretical knowledge and experience from the real world. Pedagogy should bring together these elements for pragmatic learning as an effective tool for inclusive development and transformative education. Through the efforts of Higher Education Institutions in terms of the curriculum and action-oriented participation with the community we arrive at sustainable problem-oriented solutions towards increased social well-being. This will lead to a more equitable and just society in keeping with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This paper presents the case study of a Higher Education Institute in India, engaged in Community Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS) through an integrated curriculum approach, facilitating community engagement at two levels (macro-level and micro-level). The institutional macro-curriculum mandates a hundred percent student participation through internship and community outreach projects; while the discipline-specific courses at the micro-level encourage community-based research, through need analysis, suggested interventions, and active engagement with the community partner. A five-year longitudinal community partnership has witnessed the successful completion of two need-based initiatives, namely English as a Second Language and computer skills for children from the underprivileged community between the ages of 8-16. The replicable strategy proposed, presents the concept of '2 Cs', where 'Curriculum' and 'Community' form the focal indices within Higher Education Institutes across disciplines - professional or vocational. CBALwRAS offers partnerships with the local, civil, administrative, and corporate community to ensure sustainable, multiplier effect initiatives which will lead to civic-minded, socially aware and responsible, critically conscious global citizens.

**Keywords:** Community Based Academic Learning, Community Partnerships, Curriculum, Higher Education, Sustainable Development

## Introduction

Education provides knowledge, but it is also expected to contribute to social change through action. It offers students the opportunity to engage in experiential learning through interactions at the grassroots level to bring in developmental changes for a more just and inclusive society. Goal 17 of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) propagates problem-solving at the national and transnational level to build capacity and empower communities and individuals to achieve the well-being they aspire to through a shared vision, integrated and increased access to technology, knowledge, and finance. The role of the community including corporates, state and non-state or civil society actors at the local, national and international level is expected to bring together multiple competencies to build capacity and better living conditions in all human and environmental sectors.

While government policies and action are focused on solving global and national issues through macro planning, the paper suggests an additional support strategy to formally bring in existing Higher Education Institutions (HEI) to

participate in creating greater access to information on local problems and needs of the community. The interventions at the local level can be facilitated through partnerships developed by the HEI with civil society, government support, and student participation to achieve sustainable long-term workable solutions. Putting the above model to practice, the case study presents the course of action and results of the model being applied by an HEI in collaboration with the local community through a need-based intervention. Active community participation at every stage, from identifying the problem to execution of solutions enhances the outcome and success with a multiplier effect. The results testify to recent trends in development economics which suggest narrow questions and small interventions (Banerjee and Duflo, 2012) as the way forward for effective and sustainable development in terms of poverty alleviation.

The case study presents a comprehensive approach to Community Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS) at a Liberal Arts HEI through an integrated curriculum, facilitating community engagement at two levels. The institutional macro-curriculum mandates a hundred percent student participation through internships and community outreach; while discipline-specific courses at the micro-level encourage community research, need-analysis, suggested interventions, and active engagement with the beneficiary community partner. A five-year longitudinal partnership has witnessed the successful completion of two need-based interventions, namely English as a Second Language (ESL) and computer skills for children between the ages of 8-16.

The proposed strategy promotes CBALwRAS as a mandatory component of the curriculum at HEIs. The successful pilot of CBALwRAS as a pedagogy in two courses at the Liberal Arts HEI offered support to the local underprivileged and underserved locality within a five-kilometer radius of the institution. The ongoing project is an example of a strategy for development that incorporates classroom theory-based teaching and learning with field and applicable real-life education, leading to a capacity-building intervention in spoken English and computer skills for the beneficiary community. The focus of the proposed strategy is not just community service and charity work, but a well-structured course component with graded credits and learning on field through primary and secondary research via short-term and long-term longitudinal interaction with the local community. The purpose is to identify local needs through participatory action-based research with the community and provide support for long-term sustainable solutions through interdisciplinary or specific discipline-centric lenses and partnerships. This may translate into an institutional social responsibility project as per policy suggestions, which need not be financial in nature but galvanized through research, action, and resource support in terms of infrastructure, human resources, and other support mechanisms. It offers the possibility to employ education systems as a resource and tool for action at all levels for transformation, with a special focus on change at the local level.

The '2 Cs', where 'Curriculum' and 'Community' form the core indices within HEIs across disciplines - professional or vocational, along with partnerships with the local, civil, administrative, and corporate community ensures sustainable initiatives in creating civic-minded critically conscious global citizens and sustainable community development through student engagement.

In terms of international relevance, this model can be globally replicated as it provides a 2-pronged strategy both for the HEI and the students, as well as the community. For the student volunteers, learners and researchers, there is the acquisition of transferable holistic domain and experiential knowledge, that can be applied and translated into action. It empowers the community through the efforts of the HEIs in terms of the curriculum and action-oriented participation with the community, for sustainable problem-oriented solutions towards increased well-being. This 2-pronged strategy will lead to a more equitable and just society in keeping with the goals of the SDGs.

### **Development, Sustainable Development, Education and the role of education in development.**

Lexically, the term 'Development' has been defined in the Cambridge Dictionary as the process in which someone or something grows or changes and becomes more advanced. Development, according to Hugo Slim (1995) is also about continuity, for if change is to occur successfully, it must be in sync with the values and the capacity of the community in question. Development should therefore be culturally, socially, economically, technologically, and environmentally appropriate. It implies the upward movement of an entire social system, comprising both economic and non-economic factors, including "all sorts of consumption by various groups of people; consumption provided collectively; educational and health facilities and levels; the distribution of power in society; and more generally economic, social, and political stratification; broadly speaking, institutions and attitudes" (Myrdal, 1974). The role of the community thus becomes an integral part of a developing economy and it is not just limited to economic growth - production, distribution, and market forces. Today development is understood as a synthesis between economic growth and social change with inclusive growth. Economic growth expands onto the social project

connecting it to a society's well-being (Soares & Qunitella, 2008: 109). Development is associated with efficiency as an economic dimension, equity as a social, and liberty as a political dimension (Universidade Estadual de Campinas [UNICAMP], 2005 in Soares & Qunitella, 2008: 109).

The 1970s viewed development as a transformation process reconciling and reinforcing present and future potential to cater to current needs and future aspirations through the concept of sustainable development (Becker, 1993 p. 49 in Soares & Quintella, 2008:110). What is also important to ensure, is that this positive youth development is sustainable in nature, and not a one-time initiative. The idea of sustainable development stems from the realization that traditionally defined 'development', on pre-existing patterns would eventually collide with the Earth's finite resources, and negatively impact future generations. Sustainable Development has evolved into an idea that takes into account the welfare of all generations in terms of equal opportunities for the present and future generations (Chichilnisky, 1997) with a holistic, applied, and practical approach. The World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002 framed it as an intellectual pursuit, which tries to make sense of the interactions of three complex systems: the world economy, the global society, and the Earth's physical environment viewing them as interdependent and mutually reinforcing pillars. For these to be feasible, the SDGs 2030, added the requirement of 'partnerships' through goal 17, which opens up the scope for collaboration between multi-stakeholders, be it HEIs, government bodies, NGOs and CSOs, or the corporate community. This will enable problem-solving at the national and transnational level through a shared vision, multiple competencies with knowledge, and technology and mobilization of resources both financial and human - which will lead to capacity building and empower communities and individuals to achieve the well-being they aspire to.

Development being inclusive and for all, is further elucidated under the term inclusive development. However, it must be noted that there is no congruous understanding of the term inclusive development. It is usually understood to refer to "growth coupled with equal opportunities," (Rauniyar and Kanbur, 2009:3) and has economic, social, and institutional dimensions. The literature of the Asian Development Bank iterates that to achieve inclusive growth and inclusive development, a combination of mutually reinforcing measures needs to be ensured, which range from "promoting efficient and sustainable economic growth, ensuring a level political playing field, strengthening capacities, and providing for social safety nets" (Rauniyar and Kanbur, 2009:13).

Community-based partnerships propagated by the HEIs within a localized framework for building and strengthening the capacity of the community is a strategy for development and to ensure the transformation of the population burden to a population dividend in a country like India (Sinha-Deshpande et.al, 2017). India today has the largest youth population that will continue to be productive in the coming decades (Verma et al., 2017) along with one of the largest systemic frameworks for education in the world, what is required is to bring the two resources together to gain human capital for growth at all levels. This paper proposes a strategy for building these partnerships for development through CBALwRAS. The demographic dividend and the true capacity of the youth have been undermined by focusing on their deficits rather than their developmental potential (Damon, 2004), the proposed strategy counters this narrative by proposing partnerships with the community through curriculum and community based service learning pedagogy in the higher education sector to work with the youth for inclusive development.

We live in times when local issues are global concerns, and hence we cannot speak of socio-economic development as long as inequality persists. One of sustainable development's key goals is achieving justice and social inclusion, thus providing equal opportunities to all communities. The wicked problems of poverty, lack of education and unemployment are complex and inter-related; each issue cannot be singled out and tackled. Emas (2015) states, "in practice, sustainable development requires the integration of economic, environmental, and social objectives across sectors, territories, and generations". Thus, the SDGs cannot be achieved in isolation, but through sustained multi-stakeholder partnerships, close collaborations and resource sharing. The UN mandates that development strategies be made through partnership with the community, "through partnerships universities can map the needs of their communities with their capacities and key offerings" (Akpezi Ogbuigwe, 2018).

The role of the HEIs becomes even more apparent when reviewed against the role of education extended by philosophers and educationists of the past, across the globe. Education for social action and change has been the key to most thinkers from Spencer, who believed that "the great aim of education is not knowledge but action", which is also echoed by W. E. B. Du Bois, "education must not simply teach work – it must teach Life." The idea seems to be drawn from John Dewey, the father of experiential education for whom the principle of continuity was central to learning which is a lifelong process of understanding (Eyler and Giles, 1999). This is deeply rooted in his ideas of humanism and pragmatism (Sikandar, 2016: 183). Tagore's experiment with education in India also brings forth his

vision of service and education as closely linked to nature and human society (Salamatullah, 1960). According to Vivekananda, education prepares a man for social service, develops (s) his character, and is a tool for liberation from darkness and ignorance (Barman, 2016). For Nelson Mandela “education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”. Recent trends in development studies also suggest that education is a powerful tool for poverty alleviation (DFID, 2008).

### **Service Learning to Community-Based Service Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS)**

Socioeconomic development depends on finding simple solutions to complex problems. One of the important actors in resolving social and environmental issues across regional, national and transnational boundaries are education systems as they not only impart knowledge but also generate new knowledge by interacting with and understanding the social space. Further, HEIs work with the future citizens of the globe, and engaging them with social issues is an imperative to be undertaken by the HEI. Service Learning and Academic Service Learning (henceforth used interchangeably) thus bring in the collaborative aspect of service and learning to higher education. The focus of service learning is on experience, reflection, and civic engagement.

The vast literature on Service Learning (SL) and Academic Service Learning (ASL) explains it as a structured, course-based, credit-bearing, educational experience, which engages faculty and students with community partners in an organized activity to meet academic learning objectives while addressing acknowledged community needs. With its roots in the theories of engaged learning that emphasizes connecting knowledge to experience through engagement beyond the classroom developed by John Dewey (cited in Giles & Eyler, 1994), it draws from Paolo Freire (1970) and David Kolb (1984) and others (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995; Jacoby, 1996; Eyler and Giles, 1999; Howard, 1998 & 2001; Butin, 2010; Flecky, 2009). The aim is to understand and respond to identified community needs in a way to gain a deeper experiential understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. One of the key aspects is overcoming the challenges of applying abstract concepts and theories to real-world problems for solutions and problem-solving. As a teaching and learning strategy, it integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection (Kiltz and Ball, 2010; Schon, 1987) resulting in a radically effective transformative method of teaching students and enhancing communities. The 4Rs - respect, reciprocity, relevance, and reflection are the key aspects of SL (Butin, 2010).

Howard (1998) puts forth four key elements to define Academic Service Learning.

1. First and foremost, it is put forth as a pedagogical model - a teaching methodology, not focused on building leadership, value systems, or social responsibility, though these are some of the important learning outcomes of ASL.
2. Secondly it intentionally integrates community-based academic learning into the core curriculum of the course. There is a give and take of information between academic learning and community service, where academic learning informs and contributes towards community service and the learnings thereof.
3. Academic and experiential learning integrate to strengthen and reinforce each other.
4. Finally, and most importantly the community service experiences must be relevant to the academic course of study (Howard, 1998)

Distinct from volunteerism, co-curricular and extracurricular service (that do not engage in formal evaluation and documentation of academic learning), with a focus on strengthening the academic learning objectives of a course (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995) service-learning focuses on three main outcomes- building and strengthening disciplinary knowledge and skills; support student developmental stages; and institutionalize and promote service-learning (Phillips, Bolduc and Gallo, 2013) and community development. As a pedagogy, it involves a methodology for the delivery of the content knowledge while as a philosophy it entails a worldview that diffuses through curriculum, instruction, and assessment of a course (Kendal, 1990) to contribute towards community service, preparing students for active citizenship. It is not merely an addition of a community service option or completion of service hours within an academic course but a ‘synergistic model’ integrating service with learning for academic and experiential learning to qualitatively change the norms and relationship in the teaching-learning process (Howard 1998: 21) resolving the conflicts between traditional pedagogy and norms of education in ASL. Therefore, the key elements of Service Learning based on literature outlines a framework, which reflects SL through the following aspects. It:

- is a philosophy of service
- addresses human and community needs

- promotes experiential learning as a critical learning complement to the academic goals of the course. “Academic service learning is not about the addition of service to learning, but rather the integration of service with learning” (Howard, 1998: 21).
- achieves academic learning objectives and development for students
- is a civic engagement or a collaborative relationship involving community partners
- is a structured partnership program for students, faculty, and community partners
- “expanding educational institutions’ participation in community, especially in terms of fostering coalitions and creating responsive resources for and with that community . . .” (Brown, 2001:5)
- reflection for students, faculty, and community partners on interactions and activities in light of both educational and community objectives.
- balance between the service and learning
- distinct from collaborative, cooperative, and problem-based education
- distinct from volunteer activities due to the aligned course / academic objectives
- distinct from internships due to civic engagement and reflection about service as essential elements

Service Learning (SL) activities and units adopted by courses and educational institutions can be voluntary, service-centric, or research-based. These include Direct Service, which is more personal and face-to-face; Indirect Service where students work on broader issues such as environmental problem that is locally placed, advocacy that focuses on educating others about the concerns and issues of the community and; research-based community engagements (Wolpert - Gawron, 2016). Research-based service learning focuses on research work conducted by a group of students and faculty of an educational institution to improve the conditions of a community (Wolpert - Gawron, H, 2016). It arose as an off-shoot of SL and is the amalgamation of academic research work with the community. These include projects undertaken in partnership with students, faculty and community partners (either directly or through NGOs, etc) with the purpose of solving local community needs or aiming at social change. Research initiatives also include the assessment of existing programmes, creating of research tools, etc. Research-Based Service Learning benefits all participants, students, faculty, academic and educational institutions, and their communities by gaining academic knowledge and skills, interpersonal skills, and –self-confidence. Academic and educational institutions engage in social action and change creating an identity for themselves while the community gains through research projects and programmes instituted by the academic institutions to solve problems and address local needs in the community. According to Enos and Troppe (1996), research-based service learning is an integral part of service learning either as a component of participatory action research or as service-related research. Research aligns the student outlook towards service from propagating dependency to fostering capacity in the community (Enos and Troppe, 1996). It is also remarkable to note that research-based service-learning partnerships among the community and HEI are longer-lasting collaborations with research being ‘for’ and ‘with’ the community as opposed to being a research study ‘on’ them (Enos and Troppe, 1996).

Butin (2005) emphasizes the postmodern turn of service learning that moves beyond the technical, normative, pedagogical, political, cultural, and a universal understanding of Service Learning, to intersubjective deliberations with local perspectives, local goals, and self-reflexivity. ‘It is a pedagogy immersed in the complexities and ambiguities of how we come to make sense of ourselves and the world around us...how different contexts prompt different responses’ (Butin, 2005: 98-99) moving beyond the universals of service learning to make one's own meanings based on the experiences of the engagement which becomes part of life.

While the literature on service learning offers abundant details on program development, its impact on students (Delve, Mintz, and Stewart , 1990; Morton,1995; Enos and Troppe, 1996; Albert, 1996), types of courses and guidelines for execution (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Giles and Eyler, 1994; McEwen, 1996), there is lack of information on the strategy to incorporate academic service learning at the disciplinary level to augment learning for the students and developmental aspects for the community (Phillip et.al, 2013). Zlotkowski (2000) put forth the importance of service learning within the curriculum, not just as a value-add aspect of the programme. He emphasizes the role of the department, type of curriculum, discipline, level of the course (introductory, capstone, internship), participation and understanding by faculty of SL in the curriculum to contribute to the success of service learning and student outcomes.

In spite of the breadth and depth of data, Phillip et, al. (2013) speak of the lack of information on an evidence-based framework to support faculty and departments to incorporate ASL into their programmes. This holds true for the Indian context as well where while social action is the underlying ethos of education at the higher and school level there is a lack of a result-oriented framework that can be adopted and adapted to suit the local requirements by

faculty and organizations to move forward. The current work aims at outlining this framework for bringing together curriculum, students, and pedagogy with academic service learning as a complete 360-degree experience for the student and the community through partnership. The conflict, dilemma, and challenges outlined by Howard (1998) Butin (2005), and others can be addressed by following a set of strategized norms for transforming classrooms and courses from a traditional learning space to a Community Based Academic Learning (CBAL) environment that integrates and incorporates Research, Action, and Service (RAS) in learning space.

### **Community-Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS)**

The changing global economy and the need of inclusive development reinforce the need to skill students to be able to perform in real-life scenarios and apply theoretical knowledge; Service Learning or Academic Service Learning becomes an important element for the Indian education scenario. Bringing in Community Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service (CBALwRAS) integrates the Community and the Curriculum, or the 2Cs in a learning environment. The community and academics need to be interconnected through a pedagogy that incorporates Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) within the curriculum through field-based activities spread over a period that allows enhanced learning of social issues. Community engagement includes interacting with the community to understand the needs and concerns to create a plan of action and service as required and expected by the community partner.

The working strategy of CBALwRAS has resulted from the practice engaged by a Higher Education institution in Western India over a period of five years through its macro and micro curriculum that mandates student engagement in and with the community. The practice transformed classrooms and community space by bringing together the philosophy of service, and research with community-based participatory research and action at the HEI at both the macro and micro levels. At the macro institutional level, the programme mandates community outreach through direct or indirect service for students in partnership with NGOs and CSOs. The curriculum structure allows freedom at the course level to integrate learning pedagogy that does not encourage traditional didactic pedagogy but lays emphasis on the need for real-life engagement and experiences to develop skills in critical thinking and problem-solving.

The CBALwRAS classrooms enable bridging the dichotomy between the deductive-inductive methods of learning, passive-active participation of students in the learning process, high degree of structure and direction vis-a-vis low degree of structure and direction in organizing the classroom, individualistic and communal ways of learning, the role of student experience and learning with the community in building the classroom learning space and a shift from the objective understanding of knowledge to integrate subjective and pragmatic ways of knowing (Howard, 1998). It also promotes significant development and progress for the community – achieving goals put forth by the community itself.

The institutional responsibility in taking these classroom learnings and requirements of the community is extremely important – the needs of the community identified by the course through Community-Based Participatory learning gets incorporated by the institute as one of its functions to provide for the skills and learning expected by the community.

### **CBALwRAS: A case study from the Higher Education sector in India for sustainable community development**

Niti Aayog, the National Institution for Transforming India, based on the idea of cooperative federalism, views localization of SDGs as the way forward for the country's SDG implementation strategy.<sup>1</sup> This strategy involves the decentralization of governmental institutions at the Central, State, and District levels for the implementation of SDGs for localized understanding and implementation which is advocated through raising awareness at all levels and bringing on board Ministries, State governments, and the Union Territories. Apart from these, data-driven decision making, periodic reviews, a whole government approach, and training form the cornerstone of the initiative. It is in this local context that the HEIs can collaborate with the government and administrative bodies to enable sustainable development and capacity building. This will be specifically in the field of research and need analysis which can support the data-driven decision-making as well as the training aspect. The HEIs can be the link between the local government agency, the community and CSOs, NGOs and NPOs to take the initiative forward (Sinha-Deshpande et.al, 2017).

The Indian education sector under the forces of globalization, both economic and social along with the increasing demand for higher education in terms of the number of students due to the increasing population, has been transformed from teaching, research and extension to an employability generating industry. Its contribution to social change and action is more often than not questionable. Tandon (2007:1) emphasizes the need for higher education to

explore and engage with alternative sources and modes of learning and knowledge production through increased engagement with civil society to contribute to social and human development especially in the global south, with lessons learnt from the global north especially from the American education systems. The New Education Policy of India, drafted in 2020 took into account the need to meet the dynamics of the population with regard to quality education, innovation, and research, to make India a knowledge superpower by equipping its students with the necessary skills and knowledge and to eliminate the shortage of manpower in science, technology, academics, and industry.<sup>2</sup> Its role in social development through engagement with the community and hence social change and inclusive growths equally important to be defined. “From being a private good, higher education needs to evolve as a public social good which would then have a lot to contribute to the needs of sustainable development” (Tandon and Mukherjee, 2011).

The efforts undertaken by the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India by initiating the mandate of Institutional Social Responsibility and the redefined parameters of assessment by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) indicate the vision of the government and policy towards changing the role of education in bringing about social change. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has set up a Subject Expert Group (SEG) on Curricular Reforms and Educational Institutions Social Responsibility. The SEG establishes a framework that would help with the prospect of curriculum reforms in various disciplines including institutional social responsibility. Community engagement, according to UGC, extends to creating and participating in a dialogue to understand the community and their lives.<sup>3</sup> Community engagement through educational institutions has been part of India’s learning mechanism through extra-curricular and value-added activities such as the National Service Scheme (NSS), and Socially Useful Productive Work (SUPW). While they have been a part of the national development agenda across political lines, they are more in the nature of community service rather than Community Based Academic Learning with Research, Action, and Service. They are a mandatory graded component of the secondary and higher secondary examinations across the country, but are not given as much weightage in the curriculum as other mandatory subjects such as the languages, social sciences and the natural sciences. This might insinuate to the students that reaching out to the community is not as important as performing well in academics. Therefore, a qualitative improvement in terms of a pedagogical shift is required by the HEIs.

The proposed strategy of CBALwRAS is the pedagogical shift that is being proposed in this paper based on the surmise that “Service-learning provides a potent tool for service and learning” (Flecky, 2009: 12). At the HEI where the CBALwRAS is undertaken as an initiative, service learning through a community outreach project, is a mandatory component of the programme. In addition to this, discipline-specific integration of the proposed strategy has been undertaken in specializations like Environmental Studies, Business Studies, Media Studies, and Anthropology. The curriculum and pedagogy to incorporate CBALwRAS are worked to design activities for Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR) to achieve learning outcomes through assignments. Action based on need analysis was the outcome of the research conducted; while Service involved students working with the primary beneficiary community to provide spoken English and computer skills. The anthropology department in particular conducted projects for the past five years in accordance with the above. The Y-Nagar *basti*, a slum-dwelling underserved community was the key partner for this initiative, in collaboration with the HEI.

The longitudinal project was initiated with a mini ethnographic study and survey research spread over a period of 16 weeks which resulted in the identification of the concerns faced by the residents of the *basti* related to sanitation, food systems linked to health and nutrition as well as education. The research conducted led to insights that reflected that education was the primary support that the community wanted, specifically in terms of English as a Second Language (ESL) and Computer Skilling. This became evident through the qualitative and quantitative research conducted by the students as part of the course activities and assignments. The analysis was presented by students through term papers, academic essays, and presentations before the faculty and students of the class. Maintaining regular field notes and journals on their experience was a key element of the study being undertaken, encouraging observation and reflection. Subsequent batches used this data for analytics through software such as IBM's SPSS, which established the base for future action and research projects such as interactive audio-visual presentations that displayed life stories of the members of the community, titled *Y-nagar chi Goshthi* or the ‘Voices of Y-nagar’ to a broader audience. The project also incorporated an international partnership with an HEI in the USA for training and knowledge sharing on CBAL as this pedagogy is well integrated into their curriculum. The international partnership enhanced student and faculty learning which helped contribute to the outcomes of the project.

The community expressed the need for support in ESL and Computer skills for their children, hence, the project extended its partnership to the Media Capstone course of the HEI which created a marketing buzz in the institution

by identifying it as *Apna Basta* or 'My Schoolbag'. The idea focused on generating interest within the HEI management, faculty, and among the students to engage in a service-learning programme where HEI students would be trained by a non-profit organization (NPO) in being able to teach spoken English and computer skills to the children from Y-nagar to cater to the needs expressed by the community as demonstrated in the research conducted by the Anthropology students. One of the key requirements for the media students was to engage with the partner community before they designed and worked on the marketing plan for the project. The idea was to immerse the students within the community for an experiential understanding of the life and needs of the community they were working with and translate that into a live project. The initiative was successful, leading to a proposal for the HEI to engage in a social responsibility project, where the institution promoted the engagement for further action to the Community Outreach Cell at the HEI to take the *Apna Basta* to its logical conclusion as the Institutional Social Responsibility (ISR) for sustainable community development based on partnerships at multiple levels. These partnerships were multi-tiered engaging the primary beneficiary community to the HEI at multiple levels - the students, faculty, administration, and management, through the curriculum and programme design of the HEI. The HEI was engaged with the NPO and the civil society to cater to the needs of the community partner as part of its social initiative. The HEI was also in close partnership with the students and the faculty in their initiative to undertake the project to collaborate with the community to identify the needs and deliver the objective for sustainable community development. Thus, while the service-learning experience is critiqued for falling into the trap of 'doing for' rather than 'doing with' the community, as elaborated in other studies (Brown, 2001; Egger, 2007 and Flecky, 2009) this collaborative partnership with the residents of Y-Nagar, sought to break rather than reinforce stereotypes.

Having identified the primary beneficiary community partner, the HEI contacted a non-profit organization (NPO), engaged in enabling primary and secondary educational equity for partnership. The HEI worked with the NPO partner on the basis of its commitment to addressing the 'education crisis' and 'transforming India' by 'building a movement of leaders who will eliminate educational inequity in India'.<sup>4</sup> Two faculty members from the HEI together with the NPO partner, worked towards the project that aimed at instituting social change within and outside the HEI by offering English and Computer classes to underprivileged children in Y-Nagar. Students at the HEI interested in working with the initiative underwent a process of selection based on their commitment, aptitude and inclination toward civic engagement and service. Twelve student volunteers were selected for the purpose.

The student, faculty, and NPO volunteers interacted and engaged with the beneficiary partners to work towards the shared vision and solutions through action. To be able to cater to the varied learning requirements, an English skill test was conducted for the beneficiary students at the Y-nagar locale itself. It was found that the majority of children could only finish the first or second level which included one word answers or 3-4 letter words. They found it difficult to even write letters or pronounce them and had to be assisted by the student volunteers. A few students were able to complete the skill test on their own and were able to attempt higher-level skill tests. For the children struggling with basic English skills, teaching Computer skills would not be possible, and so the focus for them was shifted to learning the basics of the English Language, starting with alphabet and phonetics. Beneficiary students from another NGO partner with basic English skills were identified to receive computer skilling. Four student-volunteers of the HEI were trained by the Computer Studies faculty member to impart basic computer skills to the thirty-eight beneficiary students of this other NGO. The HEI offered its infrastructure and technical resources including transportation to and from the beneficiary student residences to the HEI for these initiatives.

Student volunteers were provided with intensive teacher training sessions in teaching methods by the NPO for the English language sessions. The student volunteers were trained to cater to students from different levels, based on the needs of the beneficiary students. The student volunteers also learned how to engage the children in a conversation through an 'Introduction Round' and 'Energizers'.

The success of the initiative created an environment for the extension of the project to its second phase. The second phase also witnessed sustained enthusiasm and participation from the community. There was increased involvement of adults and parents as they observed an improvement in their children's academic performance in school as well as an increase in their emotional well-being and social confidence. The second phase also witnessed increased enrollment of both student volunteers and beneficiary students with dropout students rejoining the programme. It was also extended to include meals sponsored by individual members of the civil society, first-aid care by the health department of the HEI, and co-curricular activities.

Challenges faced by the student volunteers ranged from time and classroom management, and the improvisation of lesson plans to the need for individual attention and creating localized examples so that the children could relate to



them. The short attention span of the beneficiary students led to the student volunteers creating innovative activities to enhance learning over shorter periods with a special focus on encouraging learning by understanding as opposed to rote memory. Flashcards, worksheets, narrative videos, and songs were used as teaching aids to maximize the learning experience and engagement. With time the interaction between the student volunteers and the beneficiary students led to a co-constructed classroom with emotional bonds building between the two. The skills acquired by both groups, that is the student-volunteers and the beneficiary-students, included transferable skills, language competency and conversational skills, apart from a deep sense of achievement for both groups. The class experience also led to a sense of fellowship and camaraderie where advanced learners were supporting their classmates, and the confident and extrovert students encouraged the introverted classmates to speak up in front of their peers without fear. The project led to an experience that indicated that the “community is more than an intervention setting—it is where we live and relate with others in community” (Flecky, 2009: 12).

The sense of achievement among the beneficiary students is reflected in the following statements:

*“I know how to answer all these questions because of our classes last semester”.*

*A fellow student to a new student who joined in the following semester, “you will understand all of this as (the volunteer) will teach you. It’s fun and you can answer all the questions in your school as well.”*

*“The classes are very interesting. They make us learn, develop ourselves and even make us do physical activities.”*

The student volunteers expressed a sense of fulfillment, humility, life learning, and patience among the most important skills gained through the experience in the statements below:

*“Soon, I realized that it was a learning process not just for them, but for me too. I learned patience, the power of responsibility, and most importantly, the innocence that the children brought with them every Sunday morning.”*

*“I like to believe that the kids were better teachers than us... the kids I saw for the past few weekends have taught me and reminded me of things and values... maybe even more than what they learned from me”.*

*“I got to sharpen a lot of my skills during the course of this project such as patience, teamwork, adaptability, and time management...it was something that brought mutual joy to both the students and myself”.*

*“My students taught me about life while I taught them English”.*

The parents of the beneficiary students expressed their happiness at the eagerness with which their children practiced what was taught and were hoping that Project would continue long-term. Some expressed an interest in their younger children joining the programme as well. The enthusiasm that the students had for the classes was reflected in a student’s choice to forego attending a family wedding and another student insisting on coming to class despite an injured foot. They were so eager to get back to the class that the student volunteers would receive calls from them during the holidays regarding the classes. To further add to the achievement of the initiative, dropouts stopped completely after the first three sessions. The recall tests also proved the success of the initiative with two students who advanced from level 1 to level 3. Another child’s parents proudly informed the HEI that she had stood first in her class in school. The HEI will enter the third phase of this project in January 2020 with local funding from civil society to bring in more teaching aids and reading material. In collaboration with the HEI’s center for emotional well-being, the initiative will also extend to bringing in a counselor. The research expressed the fact that some beneficiary students were unable to attend classes, as they were caretakers and responsible for their younger sibling/s. Hence, a proposal for a creche is also under consideration to address this issue. In addition to this, the HEI’s NPO partner will devote more time and attention to strengthening the engagement in the classroom to allow for even better outcomes.

At a glance, the achievements and outcomes for the stakeholders involved capacity building, understanding, and engaging with a diverse population, leading to a multicultural understanding of the local space. A sense of fellowship and empathy also was evident for all involved and the requirements of all stakeholders was achieved. NGOs and CSOs with student participation and HEI partnerships stand to gain an increased workforce and support mechanism with HEIs as resource centers. The Corporate Community while extending support in the form of CSR

funding is associated with well-researched action-oriented projects at the local level in partnership with HEIs for proper utilization of funds. The HEIs have the opportunity for a pedagogical and systemic shift to ensure capacity building both for the volunteers as well as the beneficiary community, albeit at different levels. For the students, CBALwRAS offers an experiential and 360-degree education with 21<sup>st</sup>-century transferable skills: critical thinking, writing, and analysis, focus on results and action for change beyond theory ability to adapt to diverse situations. At the national and global level, the inculcation of CBALwRAS would ensure inclusive development through capacity building for a just and equitable society. It would enable the development of socially aware, responsible individuals who are critically conscious global citizens who contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through partnerships (Goal 17) between HEIs and the community.

### **The 2Cs: A replicable step-by-step framework**

The replicable methodology proposed as a strategy for a multiplier effect is based on the 2Cs - the Curriculum and the Community. The strategy can be implemented in all Higher Education systems, across disciplines – professional or vocational for inclusive development. The strategy CBALwRAS can be replicated, at two levels. At the macro-level, the aim is to institutionalize CBALwRAS through curriculum design and pedagogy to promote inclusive and sustainable community growth by engaging in direct and indirect community service through NPOs, NGOs, and CSO partners. The students are expected to gain experiential learning and understand local and global concerns through their work in the social space, instilling a sense of shared social responsibility among the youth. The key is the multi-stakeholder partnerships at the local level that the HEIs engage in as part of their social commitment to action and change. At the micro-level, these experiences and understandings for the student is more discipline centric, embedded in the courses of their specific areas of specialization. The theory-specific learnings through the micro level will lead education to be experiential, application oriented, and employable as students will learn to apply knowledge towards specific problem-oriented solutions. The strategy at both levels aim at capacity building through need-based interventions to equip and empower disadvantaged groups and the youth with a sense of achievement in identifying solutions. Therefore, while at the institutional level the community outreach project is a mandate, and is adopted at the macro-level of the programme structure itself; at the micro-level, it is course-specific and discipline centric, which is not mandatory, but encourages embedding CBALwRAS in the course curriculum.

The steps identified, based on the initiatives at the HEI under consideration, are as follows:

#### **1. Curriculum commitment to CBALwRAS**

The first step requires a curriculum commitment on the part of the HEI to integrate its programme structure and course outline wherever possible with CBALwRAS. At the macro level, this will imply that Community Outreach Projects are embedded in the Programme Structure with credit-bearing and graded courses as part of graduate requirements, as with the HEI under consideration. At the micro-level, the programme structure offers the freedom for independent courses to choose whether or not to integrate CBALwRAS in the course curriculum, as per the requirement and scope of the course being taught. For both the macro and micro processes, the integration of CBALwRAS within the designing of the programme is an indication of the commitment the institutional management carries towards sustainable community development and grooming critically conscious citizens, trained in problem-solving. This is the first and most important step forward as student engagement in service learning requires a flexible learning space that allows course outcomes and activities specifically linked to community and civic engagement.

#### **2. Developing partnerships**

The second step in the replicable strategy is to identify and establish working partners. As socioeconomic problems at the global and local levels, cannot be solved by individuals or independent communities, what is required is an integration of resources, human, financial, technological, and intellectual which can be garnered through partnerships among institutions. Partnerships need to be built with the beneficiary community, NGOs, NPOs, and CSOs, or the local and civic administration and the corporate community. The idea is for the students to work together with multi-stakeholders, reach out to the beneficiary community, and ensure appropriate action and service, based on community-based participatory research and need analysis. At the macro-level, for the HEI where this initiative was undertaken, students work for more than 200 hours with NPOs, CSOs, and NGOs across the country, in areas of Child and Youth Social Work, Community Health, Education, Animal Welfare, Environmental Wellbeing and others. For projects and initiatives at the micro-level, they engaged and partnered with the beneficiary community within a close distance (5km radius) of HEI not just for accessibility and ease of engagement but also because

geographical proximity may support linguistic and cultural similarity for better understanding of the problems with the community partner. The Y-nagar community, together with the NPO, partnered with the HEI for English language Skilling, while another NGO teamed up with the HEI for computer skilling. For both the macro and the micro levels, partnerships helped train the participating students in community-based research and learning for intervention, action, and capacity building.

### 3. *Design an integrated curriculum for civic engagement*

The third step in this strategy involves designing a curriculum with activities and assessments for community engagement, to identify, comprehend and serve the needs of the partner community. There is a conscious effort to integrate the understanding and engagement of social issues within the curriculum at the macro and micro levels. At the macro-level, it provides the opportunity for the students to engage with experts from various fields engaged in working with the community, to understand the various sectors for community engagement including service. For example, at the HEI under discussion, guest lectures were conducted at the institute by experts and leaders from different fields of civic and social engagement, academics and practitioners from the field of service learning, etc. At the micro-level, this requires developing a subject / course curriculum with activities for engagement with the community through community participation and needs assessment. For example, research and fieldwork through surveys, and mini ethnography to chart community needs were integrated as a part of coursework and graded assessments in both anthropology, media, and business course curriculums.

### 4. *Participation with the community for the community*

The fourth step comprises innovative methods of conceptualizing interventions based on the community's need assessment conducted by the students as part of the course. The resources include support mechanisms and funds from partner corporate houses or civil society and non-profit organizations. At the macro-level, it involves stipulated time-bound service learning engagement with CSOs or NGOs for a minimum requirement of two hundred hours, with students as key members in community building and development. The student is evaluated on the ability to understand the organizational strategies and their role within the context of the social problem, in addition to evaluating the intervention and proactively taking steps to bridge the gaps in the activity. Students maintain a reflective and analytical daily log. At the micro-level, time-bound small-scale micro-interventions and engagement based on needs assessments form the key pedagogy. For example, the *Apna Basta*, or the spoken English language and computer skilling project was the outcome of applied anthropology and the media capstone project. The other activities undertaken by the anthropology students include a photo essay on the voices of the community titled *Y-nagar chi Goshthi* and training the students in creative skills of story-telling and poetry

### 5. *Review and extension*

One of the most important stages of a service learning or an action project is the process of review to assess its outcomes, and identify challenges and areas of improvement. Based on the results, the activity can be extended to other groups within the same locality or be offered to others for incremental and exponential change. In the case under review, there was sustained enthusiasm and participation from the community which led to the developing the second phase of the intervention. Phase 2 witnessed increased enrollment for volunteers and Y-nagar student beneficiaries with increased involvement of adults and parents. Dropout students rejoined the ESL programme in Phase 2, which was also extended to include meals, first-aid care, and co-curricular activities with support from civil society partners. The Y-nagar Project over a period of 5 years witnessed deep-rooted changes with small timely interventions- an increase in beneficiary participants from 8 to 50 and volunteering students from 6 to 14 showcasing a successful partnership.

The CBALwRAS is not just a pedagogy for specific outcomes, but a philosophy that aims to integrate action and change-oriented service learning within the life cycle of a student; and into the ideology of HEIs through the 2Cs or the curriculum and community for an overarching influence and sustained development of the local and eventually the global space. Since the focus of education is not just imparting knowledge but also life-long learning, encompassing CBALwRAS will help achieve what Benjamin Franklin said "Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I may remember. Involve me and I will learn." Not just for the academic fraternity, but this philosophy through the idea of partnership aims to influence other members of the community including the civil society and corporate bodies by integrating them into the development of the underserved community and the youth.

### **'Outcomes' and 'Reflections' for future action**

Jeffrey Sachs and Ban Ki Moon (2015) elaborate on the role of a university in the development of a nation, emphasizing that these institutions enable society to consider the fact that all local concerns require localized solutions; poverty, disease, climate change, etc. They suggest that this be undertaken in a self-sustaining fashion that is easily replicable. They further state that “universities provide resources in all forms to assess and address these issues - and serve as crucial partners in the process of problem solving at the national level”. As demonstrated in this paper, through the case presented, HEIs can mobilize their resources to translate the developmental goals into action and influence social change in a manner that is self-sustaining and replicable. Being placed in this position of access to resources, they have the power to engage in social action for sustained community development. HEIs become responsible for the local community and can co-construct productive learning engagements through partnerships with the community that includes the underserved and underprivileged community, non-governmental organizations, civil society, and local governing bodies. The focus is equity and capacity building. HEIs thus can adopt a needs-based approach and engage long-term with local communities, practicing sustainable development in action, paving the way for self-sustaining long-term solutions. This approach offers HEIs the opportunity to find solutions to real-world problems and engage academically with sustainable development (Sinha-Deshpande et. al, 2017).

The term beneficiary community is a misnomer as all the stakeholders in this partnership contribute to and gain in the process of engagement for a sustainable community that is equitable and just to all its members. For lack of a more appropriate term, to indicate the multiple stakeholders and a discomfort with the term under-privileged or underserved community, the idea of a Primary Beneficiary Community (PBC) around which the activities of the multiple stakeholder partnerships are focused is also proposed above.

There is a need to shift pedagogy or the method and practice of teaching to go beyond theoretical learning, to include experiential and practical training with knowledge and understanding of the social space around which the HEIs and students interact. Since society, social phenomena, and social issues cannot be bound by narrow disciplinary boundaries, pedagogy will need to move towards a trans-inter-and-multi disciplinary approach to fulfill the ultimate goals of education – fostering critical thinking, pragmatic idealism, and social initiative within the youth of a nation. India today, faces a dichotomy of concerns – the population problem or the population dividend, or the human capital – the difference lies in transforming the youth into agents of change for self and the community through the education they receive. While education in India is the key to employability, statistics indicate that only about 45% of our educated youth are employable. This indicates a dissonance between skill and education, which can be addressed through a paradigm shift in pedagogy towards the incorporation of activities that promote critical thinking, civic-mindedness, research, working with primary data, overall communication, and interlinkages of ideas and problems in real-life contexts. These experiences provide transferable skills which will create students who contribute to both the social and economic growth of their nation. The need for this transformation has been understood on a policy level as well, with government bodies such as the UGC and NAAC including guidelines that mandate the institutionalization of service learning and research-based community partnerships. Relooking at education as a mode of social reform and enhancement of skills both for personal development and social change requires the academic sector to extend its role beyond an ideational and advisory support system.

Niti Aayog, the National Institution for Transforming India, based on the idea of cooperative federalism, views localization of SDGs as the way forward for the country’s SDG implementation strategy.<sup>5</sup> This strategy involves the decentralization of governmental institutions at the Central, State, and District levels for the implementation of SDGs for localized understanding and implementation which is advocated through raising awareness at all levels and bringing on board Ministries, State governments, and the Union Territories. Apart from these, data-driven decision making, periodic reviews, a whole government approach, and training formed the cornerstones of the initiative. It is in the local contexts that the HEIs can collaborate with the government and administrative bodies to enable sustainable development and capacity building.

Initiatives undertaken by academic institutions through actively integrating curriculum with service learning (with or without research) contribute towards developing communities leading to a sustainable process of community engagement programs and continued results. It integrates the universities in socially responsible action and the role of the HEI moves beyond the education delivery mechanism to that of a space for social action that is academically informed through research and theory. This brings the HEI centre stage in national development within localized regions while working with the community from the grassroots level enforcing action and social change through education.

At the macro level, the aim is to relate curriculum and pedagogy to social change by institutionalizing and integrating CBAL as a mandatory component in the programme and curriculum design. It brings together the

community and the curriculum of the Higher Education Institutions (HEI) through the establishment of multi-stakeholder partnerships for inclusive and sustainable development in all sectors at the local, national and global levels in domains ranging from community health to environmental and social change. At the micro-level, CBALwRAS transforms education for the student, faculty, and the partner community members. The student volunteers experience an education that is experiential, application-oriented and employable. If we are to achieve the SDGs, governments, civil society, and international partners must scale up their investments in young people, engaging youth globally – “it is essential for the well-being of the entire world” (Lebada, 2019), ensuring they are “educated, empowered and employed”. This partnership integrates a sense of shared social responsibility which nurtures students into active members of society who contribute to its growth.

Further, these partnerships equip, empower and ensure capacity building within local neighborhoods via need-based interventions from the HEIs for disadvantaged communities with the local NGOs, corporate houses, and the civil society. Participatory action research and understanding of local concerns and a shared vision with stakeholders and local partners will be the key to finding innovative frameworks for solutions to real-world problems which impact people’s lives. The solutions designed need to create equal opportunities for sustained growth. Sustainable Development thus is a long-term, optimistic model of social development that places people at the center of their needs, abilities, and actions. Social change can be brought about when institutions and students form partnerships with the local community as a priority, forging a mutually beneficial and enriching relationship.

Thus, partnerships create a sense of shared social investment among all stakeholders and broaden the scope for sponsorship and funding leading to greater scope and outreach of the initiative. Through the documentation of student experience, this paper demonstrates that field experience and community engagement provide students with a deep sense of fulfillment, that will inspire and motivate them to actively engage in similar work in the future. Projects like these also enable faculty to engage with new research, focused on identifying and solving social problems leading to solutions for social issues. Faculty and students can then work towards the publication of their findings, celebrating both the social outcomes and projects and most importantly an intellectual gain.

These initiatives at the macro-level and micro-level can be adapted to other urban contexts in India and other parts of the world. It is recommended that other HEIs explore these possibilities and engage in dialogue with each other to jointly explore and collaborate toward building inclusive societies. Thus, as HEIs work towards social justice, their students evolve into civic-minded leaders and global citizens. When engaged youth are at the frontline working towards justice and equality through research and action the goal of social well-being can be collectively achieved.

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