

Title of the Practice

Society University Interface: Transformation through Community Engagement and Participation

Objectives of the Practice

- Sensitising University students through outreach programmes, providing a platform to interact with the community with a vision to reciprocal learning.
- To understand the concept of rural sustainability and reinforcing the traditional character and strength of rural India.
- To develop add-on innovative community oriented courses to educate students and other participants regarding rich Indian cultural ethos.
- To conceptualize and develop small nature-friendly, society-friendly, cost effective technologies in the field for clean air, clean drinking water, clean streets, green energy, etc.
- To promote community participation through community development and capacity building programmes
- To work on livelihood opportunities and financial empowerment of the rural women through self-employment and Self Help Groups.
- To conceptualize and launch capacity building programmes for various sections of the society to inculcate skills and promote entrepreneurship.

The Context

While the contemporary academic framework of Indian University education has understandably, and usefully, focused on the given disciplines of social sciences and humanities that came to us with the western model, it has progressively, on that account, isolated the Universities from both their social environment and the inherited knowledge, diluted their bonding with the society around it and its felt needs and turned them into some kind of islands in the sense that those who get this education get distanced from their environment, both human and natural, and their heritage of Knowledge.

Bhagat Phool Singh Mahila Vishwavidyalaya (BPSMV), by drawing inspiration from its visionary founder, has the vision of remedying this and widening its horizons to include the rural women outside the University also in its ambit. There is a realization that the social obligation of the university definitely extends to the larger community beyond those girls who are admitted in its programmes and therefore, our University must set up programmes, activities and centres that have direct relevance for the rural women as a whole.

The Practice

The University has the vision of reinforcing its strong nexus with the wider society by setting up activities, programmes and centres that liberate the rural and

backward women from the physical drudgery and empower them by enabling them to use their inherent strength and inherited skills for their own and the rural community's welfare; and for self employment through training in all aspects of entrepreneurship.

To attain the above-mentioned objectives, BPSMV entered into an MoU with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under which an Apparel Skill Development Academy (ASDA) was established. The Matrix Clothing, Gurugram was the industrial partner in this project to provide the industrial expertise in collaboration with Ministry of Textiles, Government of India. Around 400 girls and women residing in nearby areas were trained and assessed by certified assessors. After the completion of training, certificates were provided to trainees. Further, Placement and entrepreneurial assistance was provided to all participants.

In its incessant efforts towards all-inclusive, sustainable development of the rural community, the University has adopted five villages and has engaged with the community in meaningful ways beyond sensitization workshops on health and hygiene, employment opportunities, legal information about their rights and services, awareness generation programmes, gender issues, etc.

The students of various Departments/Centres/Institutes of the University e.g. CSUIR, BPSITTR, Department of Social Work, DPER and MSM institute of Ayurveda also visit the villages not only to organize awareness camps but also to learn from the community the life-affirming values. To enhance the impact of the practice and catering to the demand of the local community, the University added a further dimension to the practice w.e.f. 2020 by allowing girls/women from outside the university to enroll for the certificate/ diploma programmes of the Centre, thereby expanding the range of the interface and moving closer towards realizing the objectives of the practice.

What makes our societal connect unique is that the students and other participants do not approach the rural community with the 'elitist' mindset to teach them something but to learn from them. As a result, they have increasingly come to recognize the rural folk, particularly women, as an unparalleled knowledge and energy resource. This new perspective helps the young girl students perceive rural women as the custodians of Indian culture, thereby understanding life more closely and having a balanced view towards life.

Evidence of Success

Through these threshold, innovative initiatives, the university has not brought about a visible change in the society around it but itself has evolved into a better institution with a strong societal connect. The evidence of the success of the interventions of BPSMV can be seen with the impact of these programmes in the villages. The

community people, Gram Panchayats, UNDP and other governing bodies have recognized and appreciated the initiatives of the University. Photographs, Videos, stakeholders' feedback and snippets from media coverage clearly reflect the success of the practice.

The expansion of the practice in allowing outside girls/women to enroll for the certificate and diploma programmes of the CSUIR, has not only increased the enrolment but also strengthened the inclusivity and outreach of the university. It has further brought diversity and vibrance to the level of discussion.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required

The path to success is never smooth and every journey poses several challenges. While implementing the practice, the university too encountered various obstacles viz. traditional mindset, fear-to-failure factor, peer-group pressure, inadequate financial, infrastructural support, poor industrial-institute connect, locational disadvantage, etc.

Financial institutions and PSUs such as banks must increase their sensitization programmes in rural, backward areas to finance the entrepreneurial, SHG activities. Sufficient funding for conducting field visits to and from the university along with transport facilities further may boost our activities and bring about better, desired social impact. Community Resource Centres run by the University in collaboration with the respective Gram Panchayats may be upgraded with ICT enabled infrastructure to provide regular training to the community and hone their skills at their door step.