

MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR UNIVERSITY–COMMUNITY IMPACT IN DRIVING TRANSFORMATION AGENDA

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ABSTRACT

As part of the national transformation agenda, university-community impact is critical to HEIs for efficient delivery of community engagement (CE). Although CE is given due consideration in HEIs, there have been almost no attempts to develop evaluation tools that are useful for understanding the dynamics of engaging with communities at a micro and detailed level. HEIs tend to turn a blind eye on the micro dynamics of evaluating community engagement. Moreover, the tools for monitoring and evaluating CE are not standardized across all HEIs. This article reviews literature on monitoring and evaluation to draw conclusions and make recommendations. Findings of the literature review indicate that monitoring and evaluation remain a challenge in HEIs. As a recommendation, HEIs should be open to criticism regarding the quality of monitoring and evaluating CE and allow communities to evaluate them for improvements.

Keywords: impact, transformation, monitoring and evaluation, micro-dynamics, standards

INTRODUCTION

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a continuous management function to assess progress in achieving set objectives for community engagement. For community engagement (CE), M&E is used as a yardstick to measure the HEI's extent of responsiveness to present and future social, environmental and economic challenges of the developmental agenda. It is used to assess performance, relevance, effectiveness, and efficiency in the light of specified objectives for community engagement. It is also used to assess the HEI's impact on communities engaged (i.e., internally within HEIs and externally in communities). Definite standards must be met through specific indicators for CE to be effective. Indicators are used to monitor and evaluate CE activities, outputs and outcomes, and to assess whether they meet the set standards and goals for CE. According to Parsons, Gokey, and Thornton (2013, 6) an indicator is a quantitative and qualitative element that is used to measure whether the goals have been achieved, indicating changes brought in by the intervention or assisting in the assessment of the performance actor.

Monitoring and evaluation attempts to respond to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) (DHET 2013, 4), which outlines compulsions of post-school education and training system that responds to the needs of citizens, and broader societal and developmental goals. The White Paper encourages research that responds to societal challenges and needs by working closely with civil society. It also encourages formal learning programmes that include service to communities. This suggests that students and graduates have an obligation to responsible citizenship. As a result, CE becomes a mechanism that universities use to serve the public.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The review undertakes extensive literature on challenges of monitoring and evaluation of CE in higher education both locally and internationally. It explores theoretical frameworks used by other researchers to monitor and evaluate community engagement projects. Developing a theory of change (ToC) is one approach recommended to evaluate community engagement. The ToC approach is part of a larger family of theory-driven evaluation approaches. It guides evaluation design with the use of an unambiguous model of how an intervention leads to outcomes. It outlines the intended outcomes of the intervention and process between activities of the intervention and outcomes, together with underlying assumptions about how intervention activities are expected to work. According to Hamdy (2019, 9) ToC functions as a bridging step derived from analyzing and mapping people’s perceptions and theories and to make a clearer link and iterative process underlining events sequences between outputs and development impacts. ToCs are often depicted visually, through a diagram showing process flow of activities until the impact is realised. Gooding et al. (2018, 3) asserts that while some ToCs depict a string of activities until outcomes are achieved, more advanced approaches explore the mechanisms and circumstances that generate different outcomes.

Several researchers attempted to develop several models for monitoring and evaluation in the past centuries, including evaluation elements in projects’ attempts to bring change. Examples of models are the Logic Model (Eder et al. 2013, 5), Logic Model Plus (Trotter 2015, 12) and Reciprocity, Externalities, Access, Partnership (REAP) model by Pearce, Pearson, and Cameron (2008, 83). These models are widely used although they have their strengths and shortcomings. The Logic Model is a popular model that has been in existence for a long time. However, it tends to focus on output in terms of report requirements, which can be quite limiting in terms of expected outcomes. The ToC on the other hand is strongly considered to have a more certain degree of advantage and it attempts to answer the shortcomings of the Logic Model.

LEVELS OF MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and evaluation of CE is undertaken at micro level, meso level and macro level. At micro level, monitoring and evaluation occur at the student and the academic level. The student is central, and is the primary customer whereby the university pulls its resources (human, financial and physical) towards shaping a student to be a graduate with the required attributes that can address societal challenges. Community engagement assists in developing projects that allow the student to experience learning, inquire and reflect. Through CE projects, students engage with the community through inquiry-based learning, where academics give them a significant amount of autonomy and independence. This approach encourages co-learning, co-researching and co-inquiring as indicated by Healey, Flint and Harrington (2014, 13). Graduate attributes aligned with the transformation agenda are indicators of successful learning through CE. During learning, there is no significant difference between the academic and the student as both learn in the process. In this case, academic learning is bound to contribute to the enhancement and enrichment of the curriculum.

At meso level, monitoring and evaluation occur at institutional level, where the required graduate attributes are the focus. HEIs have structures and systems in place to monitor and evaluate the quality of community engagement. The HEQC, through CHE, is responsible for ensuring proper design and implementation of the institutional quality management system in the integration of CE into Teaching and Learning and Research within the context of the institution's mission. A quality assurance system includes governance matters of CE, policies and procedures, plans, instructional materials, impact assessment, and management of data as they affect the delivery of the HEI's core functions (CHE 2021, 23). CHE provides guidance and plays an oversight role, and through an audit exercise, conducts an audit on a ten-year interval to allow HEIs to improve on the delivery of their core functions, including CE. M&E provides opportunities for HEIs to transform teaching and learning by influencing the curriculum, pedagogy, and staff promotion criteria.

At the macro level, monitoring and evaluation occur at the level of the community engaged, cascading to society. At this level of M&E, the community is actively involved in the entire life cycle of the CE project through a collaborative effort with student/lecturer learning, and is empowered with knowledge and skills while the CE project contributes to its development. The community becomes a recognisable partner with the university, and this could be done through a formal contractual agreement. There is mutual benefit between the community and the HEI. Partnerships and collaboration assist in ensuring the sustainability of the project. According to Bowen (2006, 18), evaluation is achieved when participants' needs are met, and a collaborative team is developed. Trust, respect, shared vision, goals, and mission,

good relationship, effective communication, clearly defined roles of partners, and effective conflict resolution were identified as critical factors in Drahota's systematic review on the facilitation of partnerships (Drahota 2016, 194). Eder et al. (2013, 7) echoed trust as the core of the productive relationship, while Gradinger et al. (2015, 669–670) counted equality/partnership, respect, trust, openness/honesty, independence, clarity of purpose, process, and communication as essential variables for evaluating the effectiveness of CE. On the other hand, Harper et al. (2004, 204) indicated commitment and building relationships based on existing strengths. Other indicators such as reciprocity, transformation, social responsiveness, responsible citizenship, collaboration, empowerment etc., are used to ensure that CE brings a change to the community. All these indicators require monitoring and evaluation to measure impact.

JUSTIFICATIONS FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION

There are various significant reasons for monitoring and evaluating community engagement in HEIs, mainly compliance. The White Paper and National Plan for Higher Education of 1997 encouraged community service in HEIs even though it was outside the curriculum. The DoE has delegated the Council of Higher Education (CHE) to evaluate HEIs on community engagement, teaching and learning, and research, with HEQC as a subcommittee of CHE for quality assurance. The HEQC advises that quality assurance for community engagement in institutions be formalised within quality management systems of the institutions. *Kagisano* no. 6, (2010, 34) indicates that such arrangements should be linked to teaching, learning, and research, and implemented through adequate resources and recognition. In 2012 the HEQC advised on CE by releasing revised Criteria for Programme Accreditation, which included minimum requirements for CE in the form of Service-Learning (Criterion 1). Requirements are that HEIs must demonstrate social responsiveness, reciprocity, equality, scholarly engagement, collaboration, ethical engagement and sustainability. Other pertinent necessities are feedback, best practices, funding, and opportunities for improvement.

Social responsiveness

HEIs battle to be socially responsive, although some are making an effort. This challenge can be linked to their history of detachment from communities. This can also be based on how they have been conceptualised as an exclusive community without interaction with external communities. And as such, they have been perceived as “a no-go area”. Because of that they carried themselves according to society's expectations, which has deeply affected the marginalisation of external communities by HEIs.

As a national imperative, social responsiveness is addressed and emphasized in the White Paper (DoE 1997) and the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education 2001) in (*Kagisano* no. 6, 2010, 63). It has been viewed as a way HEIs develop and implement research and teaching programs in response to the larger community to address the broader social and economic contexts in which distressed communities are located (Nongxa in *Kagisano* no. 6, 2010, 63). The positive spinoffs of social responsiveness for the HEIs are the improvement in the relevance of the curriculum and the provision of opportunities for life-long learning.

Reciprocity and equality and scholarly engagement

HEIs have an obligation to leverage knowledge and skills to benefit communities while teaching and learning through research. The exchange of knowledge and expertise produces mutual benefits between universities and their community partners. Knowledge is generated and shared in collaboration with communities as stakeholders for equal use. Engagement with communities is crucial to co-create knowledge in enhancing the relevance of curricula. Through collaboration, consultation, involvement and empowerment, ethical engagement and continued feedback, communities are engaged in a way that facilitates participation in essential programme decisions.

CHALLENGES WITH MONITORING AND EVALUATING COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HEIS

Universities are aware of their mandate to contribute towards making a difference to communities internally (within the university community) and externally. Thus, monitoring and evaluation are essential, and HEIs are increasingly adopting CE through engagement with their communities to comply with national imperatives. However, monitoring the CE processes and programmes and measuring their effectiveness through evaluation remains challenging. Since the birth of the new South Africa in 1994, when CE was made an integral component to drive the transformation agenda, HEIs have been grappling with its monitoring and evaluation (M&E). Even though HEIs have policies and procedures in place for community engagement to a certain extent, adherence measures of quality assurance through M&E are underplayed. According to Hart (2011, 39), attempts have been made to develop evaluation tools that are useful to understand the micro dynamics of public engagement among researchers, students, community groups, and community members. According to Daniels and Adonis's (2020, 44–45) quality review report on CE in South African HEIs, most universities that underwent institutional quality audit experienced quality assurance challenges. Indicators for quality assurance were inadequate in some universities while in other universities, quality assurance

was non-existent. Undoubtedly, community engagement in HEIs has been implemented with remarkable success stories. Yet, some challenges have been identified across universities with monitoring and evaluation. Challenges can be narrated as follows:

University–community impact

Community engagement has been perceived to have an ability to give context to the transformation agenda in higher education institutions. Community Engagement is transformation strategy within education for a sustainable future (Raja 2019, 2). HEIs carry out their community engagement mandate mainly to be responsive to societal challenges through partnerships with various communities. The HEQC (2006, 4) indicates that the founding document of the HEQC (2006) identified knowledge-based community service as one of the three areas for quality assurance of higher education along with teaching and research. focal points of higher education.

Although CE has been perceived to give context to the transformation agenda there has been, to a certain extent, non-compliance by HEIs. Measuring university community impact has been a daunting task. The focus of HEIs has been primarily on quantitative reporting. This could be reason for passionate individual academics within HEIs opt to carry out the exercise of monitoring and evaluation without waiting for it to be institutionalised. According to Daniels and Adonis (2020, 49), although there is progress in research that brought conceptual models for CE, there is no significant impact on the quality assurance of community engagement. Evidence is in the 2012 HEQC quality assurance audit report on community engagement in HEIs, which revealed that most HEIs experienced challenges with monitoring and evaluation. The audit findings reported that QA for CE was neglected at all South African HEIs. Quality assurance reports fell short of community engagement’s impacts on communities. Cases such as lack of coordination in community engagement activities, intellectual property rights, funding proposal inputs and eventual benefits, were noted as disputes that negatively influenced quality in CE (Netshandama 2010, in Daniels and Adonis 2020, 47). This implies that monitoring and evaluation in HEIs have been either lacking or inadequate.

There has been limited literature on impact and outcome measures for CE. Literature shows that in the United States of America (USA) monitoring and evaluation of CE projects is a glaring shortfall. Reports on measures often lacked information pertaining to validity with internal consistency, while reliability has been the most reported statistic (Granner and Sharpe 2004, 517). An analogous situation applies to the UK universities whereby, according to Hart (2011, 36), reviewing methods are often procedural rather than substantive, rigorous and comprehensive of community perspectives. Standardised instruments and tools are also absent

from measuring impact (Hart 2011, 36). Tools for monitoring and evaluation that HEIs use lack an understanding of micro dynamics in CE, as though their designers do not adequately understand what is happening on the ground. The limited literature on impact and outcome measures is evidence of the problem with monitoring and evaluation.

Eder et al. (2013, 6) indicated that the challenges of monitoring and evaluating community engagement in higher education to address transformation, is the difficulty to build community structures to support the implementation of community engagement research findings that can sustain the intervention brought in by the university. The challenge is also in the identification and deployment of metrics to study how relationships between the university and community produced through CE communicate science Eder et al. (2013, 7).

Marginalised Community Engagement

CE is a scholarship with equal status to research, teaching, and learning. It has taken a significant role to drive the transformation agenda for impact in universities. It is also globally recognized for its role and contribution to societal transformation. The main challenge, however, that has contributed to the challenge of monitoring and evaluation is that it has not been prioritised in HEIs.

The underplaying of the role of higher education as significant driver of development in most national policies could be a contributing factor to the marginalisation of CE. Focus has been to research on issues that do not necessarily address social and economic development to contribute to the national developmental agenda. Although the university has development related structures and special programmes linking it to development initiatives, the challenge is that in a number of cases individuals drive these initiatives rather than being institutionalized (Cloete 2011, 105). For that reason, less emphasis has been made on monitoring and evaluation of their community engagement activities.

Another contributing factor to the marginalisation of CE is that academics have also enjoyed the freedom of using own perceptions to express their creativity and advance intellectual inquiry. Academic freedom is a fundamental right protected by the Constitution (White Paper for PSET) (DHET 2013, 12). Academic freedom has, somehow, negatively affected the university's understanding and prioritisation of CE. It has been subjected to interpretations that align with the universities' understanding of CE. This has a significant bearing on how universities monitor and evaluate CE. Academic freedom and institutional autonomy enjoyed by HEIs have resulted in CE that is regulated and administered in a manner that best suits the university. For these reasons, CE does not receive the monitoring and evaluation recognition it deserves. Pienaar-Steyn (2012, 45) indicated

that CE would only be recognised as a core value and incorporated into the critical activities once it can be measured. This implies that monitoring and evaluation should be used as barometer to measure the effectiveness of CE in HEIs. Pearce et al. (2008, 85) used a REAP model to monitor and evaluate community engagement. Reciprocity proved to be a challenge among academics as they were not willing to learn from the communities, so that their knowledge base is informed by new information acquired from the communities.

The conceptual clarity of CE

CE has been ambiguous and subjected to various interpretations such as outreach, community service, regional engagement, public service, community engagement, civic engagement, public engagement, knowledge exchange, third mission, triple helix and social innovation. Due to its ambiguity, CE has been of lesser status for a very long time. From the 1980s to date, the concept of CE has evolved from outreach and service to mutual beneficiation, making CE integral to the university's core functions (Bender 2008, 90). According to Bhagwan (2017, 171) HEQC refers to CE as initiatives and processes through which the institution's expertise in the areas of teaching and research is applied to address relevant community issues. The study by Bhagwan across six universities on the concept of CE revealed that CE was interpreted differently along the following themes: Community context, University context, Connecting with communities, Engaging for change, Partnerships and reciprocity, Co-designing solutions, Co-creation of knowledge and Indigenous knowledge. The study discovered that academics define and conceptualize community engagement in a variety of ways across different higher education institutions (Bhagwan 2017, 180). The study also revealed that not all participants recognized the significance of knowledge production and a deeper form of engaged scholarship (Bhagwan 2017, 181). Another study by Botha (2015, 8) revealed that no matter how CE is defined, the mutuality and reciprocity between the academy and the community is essential. Amid various definitions, scholarship of engagement gained prominence to date. The scholarship of engagement is a phrase that captures scholarship in the areas of professional service, teaching and learning, and research (De Lange 2012, 97). Although scholarship of engagement gained prominence in the conceptualisation of CE, the challenge has been in its monitoring and evaluation due to lack of standards and tools to monitor and evaluate as that depends on the conceptual clarity of CE.

Funding of community engagement

Community Engagement, for a long time, has been a non-funded DHET mandate, posing a challenge to the university's ability to monitor and evaluate CE projects. Locally, state subsidies

are directed towards teaching and learning, and research. This observation is supported by the study conducted by Johnson (2020, 91), which discovered that CE practitioners cited a lack of government funding as the most significant barrier to community engagement. The challenge of non-funded CE can also be linked to a study conducted by Holzer and Kass (2015, 120), who indicated that a Clinical and Translational Science Award (CTSA) program in 12 institutions received funding only in the original 2006 grant cycle with no subsequent aid.

DHET stated that it would financially support CE if it was linked directly to the academic program of universities and formed part of these institutions' teaching and research function (DHET 2013, section 4.8). This implies DHET does not fund CE activities that are outside the curriculum. In universities that are committed to CE, funding is allocated within institutional structures to support community engagement, and policies are in place to manage risk regarding the use of allocated funds.

Funders for CE set standards which makes it almost impossible to obtain the funding. The National Research Fund (NRF) funding is unambiguous with its standards for funding. It funds CE projects that can demonstrate impact and value. Programmes that have the potential to drive outcomes and are backed by factual data are the ones that receive priority in funding. The NRF also funds CE research that contributes both production of knowledge and analysis of processes and dynamics of engagement from the perspective of the higher education sector. It supports and provides enabling conditions for higher education institutions to understand the philosophical and conceptual challenges associated with the dynamics of community engagement. It further funds research which contributes to deeper theoretical, philosophical and conceptual orientations of CE from a higher education perspective. These requirements become a deterrent from receiving funding for CE.

Funders require HEIs with a good reputation in community engagement. This can be seen in studies conducted to generate new understandings about how community engagement practices and stakeholder perceptions of engagement might be understood in the context of state support for higher education. The findings of the study conducted by Weerts (2014, 138) indicate that State funding was directed to universities with robust and well-known outreach programs that were highly visible among legislators, and were promoted through a centralized outreach and engagement office. Universities with largely decentralized outreach CE activities and no clearinghouse to organize and promote such activities received lower-than-expected levels of state funding. This suggests that state funding is a function of societal demands and visible university contribution to community development. With the existing triple challenge of poverty, inequality and unemployment in our communities, visible community engagement outreach activities are bound to receive state funding if the university commits to address them.

THE CHALLENGE OF STANDARDS AND INDICATORS IN M&E

For maximum impact, monitoring and evaluation should be conducted through a set standards and indicators across all the stages of the community engagement project, i.e., conceptualisation, implementation and exit. Through each stage standards and indicators for each activity need to be specified and monitored. During the project conceptualisation stage examples of indicators that are used are identified community needs, inclusivity, cultural sensitivity and involvement of community members in the development/application of theories. During the implementation stage, examples of indicators are the involvement of communities in the co-creation and co-design of new knowledge. During the exit stage, examples of indicators include community involvement in module assessments, evidence of portfolios, and reflections (see Table 1). The benefit of using indicators for monitoring and evaluation is that performance is improved, and results are achieved.

Table 1: Example of activities and indicators

Project stages	Activities	M&E indicators
Project conceptualization	Identification of module; purpose statement; learning outcomes and activities, stakeholder identification and participation, risk identification, readiness of facility.	Community needs are prioritised. The engagement is inclusive of the community, cultural sensitivity; involvement of community members in the development and application of theories.
Implementation	Preparation of student readiness, indemnities, safety, reflection books, train and assess students.	Empowerment, co-creation, co-design.
Exit	Has the learning taken place for both students and the community engaged? student evaluations, community feedback, reflection, formative and summative assessment, portfolios.	Assessment, portfolio, reflections, and participation in all stages of learning.

Project conceptualisation stage

Specified standards and indicators of success that are not set at a CE project conceptualisation stage when goals and objectives are set, complicate monitoring and evaluation. During the project conceptualisation stage goals and specific objectives are set to specify the desired outcomes at a particular end date. They are meant to assist the CE project to bring a desired change in learning and in the community that the university engages with. According to Gooding et al. (2018, 3), developing a theory of change (TOC) is critical for evaluating CE because it allows for the explicit expression of intended outcomes and understanding of how engagement activities contribute to specific outcomes. It also assists in developing a framework of evaluating CE with a focus on outcomes rather than activities. Outcomes are operationalized (i.e., indicators for success). When the TOC is developed strategies that are required to reach

the long-term goal are defined and assumptions are articulated based on best practices.

The TOC can also be developed with the use of the Logic Framework Model (see Figure 1) which can be applied by thoroughly analysing the context in which the project will operate and ensuring that all stakeholders’ experiences and opinions are considered. When indicators of success for the conceptualisation of a CE project are not laid out and well-articulated during the project conceptualisation stage, it becomes a challenge to evaluate the success of conceptualisation.

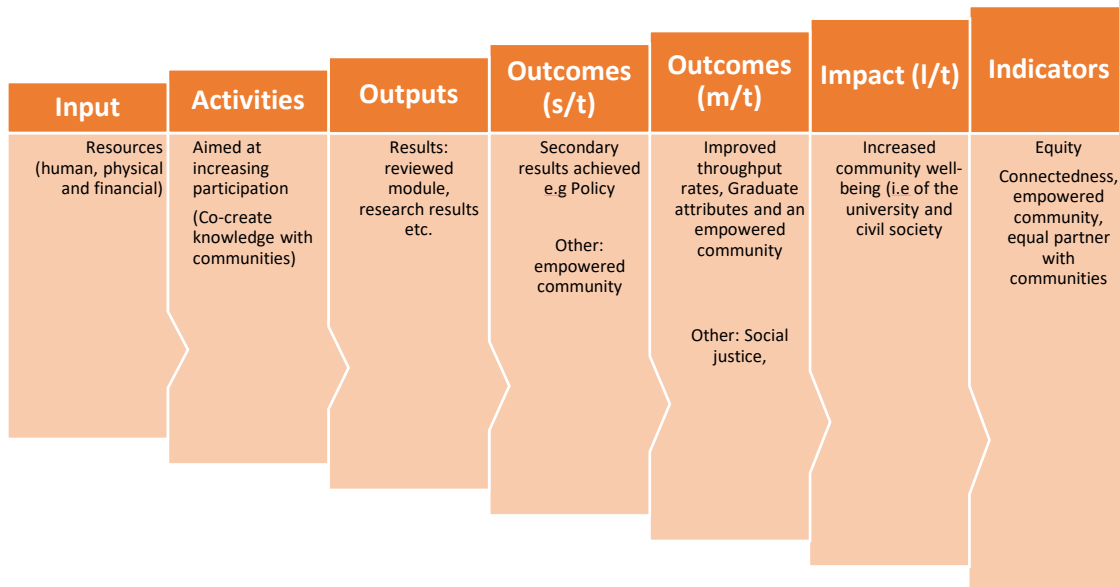


Figure 1: Example of a logical framework

Implementation stage

Monitoring and evaluation are complicated when specific standards and success indicators are not established for project implementation. Activities during the CE project’s implementation stage aim to increase participation by discovering and co-creating new knowledge with communities. For each input in the CE project, there are outputs. When results are long-term, they impact the intended beneficiaries, which is the essence of an effective CE project. In the Log Frame, there is a barometer that assists in the acquisition of the desired results such as improved community well-being (i.e., of the university and intended communities) with tangible indicators such as equity, connectedness, empowerment, and equal partnership with communities. During the project’s implementation stage, indicators of success include meeting the needs of the community and those of the university. Other indicators concern sensitivity to culture, politics, religion, and inclusivity issues in the development and/or application of theories. Furthermore, issues that are frequently overlooked, such as meeting locations for ease of access for all project participants, as well as the time of day or evening/night, a mechanism

for decision-making or reaching consensus, and how conflicts are managed, are critical indicators of success during the CE project’s implementation stage. When such indicators are missing, it becomes difficult to monitor and evaluate CE projects.

Exit stage

For exit stage of the CE project a strategy is developed with critical indicators to assess the state of readiness for the project to exit. At the exit stage CE projects are evaluated to assess their impact on the HEIs and the benefitting community, as well as their relevance to the HEIs’ strategy in the light of specified objectives. Evaluation assesses whether there is learning that has taken place to the institution and intended beneficiaries. It also assesses the kind of learning acquired. This phase provides criteria for evaluating planned output related to CE. Documented examples of co-creating and co-learning are essential at this stage. They are reflected in scholarly CE outputs, which come in various activities such as number of workshops, seminars, conference presentations, media publications, research papers in accredited journals, etc. Evaluation results assist in providing recommendations, lessons learned and future actions.

CONCLUSION

Literature suggests that despite progress in community engagement among South African universities, monitoring and evaluation remain a challenge. Not all HEIs show a level of commitment to community engagement, hence monitoring and evaluation is still questionable. While HEIs have an obligation towards CE, there is still room to strengthen their commitment to it. The transformation of society is possible through “Community” engagement, and so the “era” for engaged scholarship has finally arrived – it is past the debates of defining it etc. It is now the time for justifying/proof of impact (Hart personal communication 2021).

RECOMMENDATIONS

While HEIs have autonomy in terms of developing and implementing policies and priorities for community engagement in addition to teaching and research, they are accountable to the public. For that reason, they should be open to criticism regarding the quality of monitoring and evaluating community engagement. CHE emphasizes universities’ obligation towards community engagement. In a way, this implies that the university strategy must indicate the university’s intention and commitment to community engagement. The M&E goal must be to improve current and future CE management, whereas the CE goal must be to achieve the medium and long-term impacts that HEIs desire.

It is time that HEIs question whether they are serving the public good and embracing the

mandate of contributing to higher education's transformation agenda. It is also time for HEIs to allow communities to evaluate them, as this makes way for improvements in the way they engage with them. Allowing communities to evaluate HEIs provides platform for communities to have a say in how HEIs could conduct CE. Open dialogues and debates play a significant role in showing the commitment of the HEIs to the common good. According to Cherrington et al. (2019, 10), being truly an engaged university requires constant dialogues, reflection, and the intentionality and commitment of all parties towards collaboration that promotes mutual learning through socially just processes. Community voices are also critical in community engagement as they provide platform for communities to engage in meaningful conversations on how HEIs conduct CE.

There is a glaring need for HEIs to collaborate with communities to empower them towards development in ensuring the sustainability of CE projects. Community engagement exists to address complex social issues to enable social transformation (Cherrington et al. 2019, 1). Partnerships are crucial, and through them HEIs engage the communities throughout the project life cycle.

The inconsistency of the tools used by the HEIs complicates quality assurance across HEIs. Therefore, a consensus must be reached on the appropriate tools and best practices to measure the impact of community engagement. Standard methods for incorporating critical community perspectives should also be agreed upon.

Community engagement is a mandate by DHET, which is unfortunately non-funded. As a result, CE tends to be under-resourced. Some HEIs have CE offices that are understaffed or do not have competent staff, and that stifles the delivery of CE. Because of this, teaching and learning, and research take precedence over community engagement. It therefore becomes essential that CE receives the necessary financial support if HEIs are to contribute to the country's developmental agenda of our communities.

There is value attached to a university committed to engaging with its communities because it co-generates new knowledge with its communities. The university also transmits, applies and preserves the generated knowledge for the benefit of its communities. However, this must be consistent with the institution's strategy and congruence of university-community values.

The responsiveness to regional and national priorities needs further scrutiny by HEIs, i.e., are we (as HEIs) responsive to the regional and national priorities? The Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) must be evaluated in terms of its contribution to higher education's transformation agenda.

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