

## Mobilizing Community and Academic Knowledge for Transformative Change

### The Story of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

**'One of the most important and active UNESCO Chairs in the world'--Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, Director, UNESCO Office for South Asia, speaking at the launch of the K4C initiative in India on November 13<sup>th</sup>, 2017**

The UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education was created following the 2nd UNESCO International Conference on Higher Education held in Paris in July 2009. Dr. Rajesh Tandon and Dr. Budd Hall were designated as UNESCO Co-Chairs in June 2012. This paper traces the roots of the Chair, its contributions till date, and strategic lessons of such a Chair for UNESCO, policy makers, practitioners and academics.

#### **Roots**

Rajesh and Budd have been working together on issues of knowledge, democracy, social transformation and community-based participatory research for nearly 40 years.

In the 1970s, Budd Hall (who was working in Tanzania) and Rajesh Tandon (who was working in rural Rajasthan, India) had similar experiences as young researchers. Both had been trained in state-of-the-art social science research methods—Budd at UCLA in California and Rajesh at Case Western Reserve in Ohio, both in the USA. They did not know each other. Each was working in community settings with the hope that their research might contribute to community development in positive ways in those local settings. They were fresh from PhD training programs, skilled in the latest survey research methods, and committed to a social justice vision of their work.

Rajesh was working with tribal farmers in southern Rajasthan researching how they were being supported by government policies, services and structures. Born in a middle-class family in a city and educated in elite higher education institutions, Rajesh found that illiterate tribal women and men in the villages of southern Rajasthan had more knowledge about many aspects of rural life and farming practices than Rajesh had. The formal knowledge that Rajesh could bring to the situations they were facing had limited benefit. On the other hand, the knowledge that these rural families had which Rajesh needed to survive, let alone learn, was practical and transformative. Some thousands of kilometres away, Budd was working with the Institute of Adult Education in Dar-es-Salaam (Tanzania) to plan adult

education courses for communities of the nation that was being led by the then President, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere. Budd found that the sophisticated questionnaires and surveys, tabulated by the single University of Dar-es-Salaam computer, produced data that was totally out of line with what the villagers themselves were seeking.

Rajesh and Budd discovered through their engagement directly with communities in India and Tanzania that research methods which they had been trained in, with emphasis on the researcher identifying the research questions, the methods to be used, and the ways to present the results in an academic form, were not effective at the community level. What they learned is that most social science research methods were designed with an implicit understanding that knowledge was needed for authorities to make decisions on behalf of farmers, young mothers, out-of-work youth, the poor and the excluded. Research methods were seen to be objective, neutral, scientific, unbiased ways to create knowledge. And the natural audience for much research of the day was seen to be other researchers. From the Tanzanian experience, Budd wrote an article titled "Participatory Research: An Approach for Change". In that article, participatory research was articulated as an approach that combined social research with learning and action. Rajesh who was reflecting on his similar personal knowledge insights as he completed his PhD got in touch with Budd. That chance contact led to an intellectual and creative partnership that has lasted nearly 40 years.

The International Participatory Research Network was born with Rajesh as the Coordinator and Budd leading the implementation. Through this early network (from 1977-1992), the theory and practice of Participatory Research was spread globally through social movements and civil society networks. In the intervening years Budd played a role as Chair of the Department of Adult Education at the University of Toronto and later the Dean of Education at the University of Victoria (Canada). Rajesh founded and continued to build Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) as the preeminent global participatory research and training institute in India. They re-engaged as a team in 2008 when the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER) network was launched, which eventually led to the creation of the UNESCO Chair.

Between the 1970s and up until the very late 1990s, it was rare to find a mention of participatory research (PR) within universities, despite strong theoretical contributions from Latin American intellectuals such as Paulo Freire and Orlando Fals Borda. While social movements and grass-roots practitioners had taken up PR with enthusiasm and the international development community had adapted similar participatory principles throughout their professional networks, universities were slow to recognize the intrinsic values of PR. PR was a critical challenge to the research orthodoxies of the day, but offered many advantages for researchers who wanted to see the production of knowledge linked to policy changes, political action or community development. This resistance from academia to incorporating PR in its curriculum/teaching and practice of research was largely because of the heavy hand of an academic knowledge culture that is both discipline-bound and self-referential; it thus resisted the understanding that knowledge is created every day by people living in their multiple realities as farmers, mothers, youthful informal sector workers, those struggling for shelter and clean water.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century saw the creation of funding opportunities in Canada from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) for what they called ‘Community University Research Alliances (CURA)’. In Europe, the Science Shop movement of the 1970s was recognized by the European Council as an important approach to developing ‘science with and for society’. In USA, building on the very early experiences of the Land Grant Institutions, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and the Carnegie Foundation released reports that were to open up attention to ‘engaged’ research, participatory action research and to the principles of co-construction of knowledge for enhancing the public good. These breakthroughs were amplified by demands from Indigenous peoples for a new approach to research, from people living with HIV and AIDS to lead research on their own lives and to community health workers who saw links between PR and principles of social determinants of health.

### **UNESCO Co-Chair is Born**

Budd and Rajesh were invited to contribute papers on and participated in the conference on “Role of Higher Education in Human & Social Development”, convened and published by Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi) in 2008. GUNi was created after the first UNESCO Conference on Higher Education in 1997, and has its secretariat in Barcelona. This partnership with GUNi led to participation in the second UNESCO Conference in Higher Education in Paris in 2009. The conference communique made significant references to importance of indigenous knowledge and partnerships with communities:

*‘Higher Education Institutions, through their core functions (teaching, research and service to the community) carried out in the context of institutional autonomy and academic freedom should increase their interdisciplinary focus and promote critical thinking and active citizenship. This would contribute to sustainable development, peace, wellbeing and the realization of human rights .... [Higher Education] must not only give solid skills for the present and future world but must also contribute to the education of ethical citizens committed to the construction of peace, the defense of human rights and the values of democracy (UNESCO, 2009)’.*

During this period (2008-11), Budd and Rajesh had engaged very actively with their national, regional and international networks which focused on community engagement in higher education. These networks were invited to become co-founders of UNESCO Chair when suggestion to this effect came from GUNi and UNESCO Paris.

There are more than 700 UNESCO Chairs so far in the world; UNITWIN/Chair programme of UNESCO has just completed 25 years. There are less than a dozen Chairs on higher education, and GUNi was designated as the facilitator for these. All UNESCO Chairs are allotted to a single academic based in a single university.

Given the core value of linking practitioner knowledge with academic knowledge, and sustaining the collaboration between Budd and Rajesh, we proposed a Co-Chair arrangement to UNESCO—Budd based in a northern university in western Canada (University of Victoria) and Rajesh based in a southern

practitioner organisation (PRIA) in Delhi India. Such a unique proposal for Co-Chair was actively supported by Canadian Commission for UNESCO (CCU). UNESCO office in Paris agreed to make the necessary changes in protocol, and UNESCO Chair on Community-based Research & Social Responsibility in Higher Education became a reality in July 2012.

To our surprise, we discovered that a UNESCO Chair is 'coronation without throne or kingdom'. We were allowed to use the UNITWIN/UNESCO logo, and that is it. We had envisioned an ambitious four year programme of research, policy advocacy and capacity enhancement.

Our work has been influenced by the pedagogical thinking of the Indian Nobel Prize winning Poet, Rabindranath Tagore, and by the work of the Brazilian educational visionary, Paulo Freire. The primary goal of our UNESCO Chair is to build research capacity in the fields of Community-Based Research (CBR) and Social Responsibility in Higher Education in the Global South and the excluded North. But our concern is not only with the content of this work, but the process of the work. Like the structure of our Chair itself which draws attention to the values and principles of CBR, our goal is to work in ways that promote and respect community university co-construction of knowledge. We promote these values in several important ways:

- 1) Commitment to open access, free downloadable publishing;*
- 2) Supporting CBR as a place based and culturally centred approach;*
- 3) Working with and supporting already existing regional and international networks;*
- 4) Encouraging the creation of autonomous research hubs that are partnerships between community sector organisations and universities;*
- 5) Deepening our understanding of Indigenous and other subaltern knowledge systems; and*
- 6) Underscoring the critical importance of learning in the improvement of our effectiveness. Our work is organic, place-based, and links global and local with the academy and the community.*

### **Support & Engagements**

We have been fortunate to receive overwhelming support from several directions. First and foremost, our host institutions—UVic and PRIA—generously offered human, physical and modest financial support to carry forward our activities. We had to find our own chairs!

CCU has been a constant source of support, by encouraging regular communication of our activities, and meetings of Canadian Chairs, including sharing information with fellow Canadian Commissions.

Nationally, Rajesh has been able to secure wide recognition and support from Higher Education fraternity in India. University Grants Commission (UGC) invited him to support formulation of a new Scheme for Establishing Centres for Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement (CFSRCE) in Indian Universities in 2014 (UGC, 2014). The Association of Indian Universities (AIU) co-hosted several events and shared our work through their journals. Further, in the 2016, the Higher Education

Committee of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI)<sup>1</sup> invited Rajesh to conduct a Master Class on *'Living in Harmony: Universities & Communities; Strategies for Successful Community University Engagement (CUE)'* (UNESCO Chair, 2016a). This Master Class was a part of the pre-conference deliberations for the FICCI Higher Education Summit 2016.

In 2017, the FICCI Higher Education Committee constituted a Taskforce on 'Social Outreach in Higher Education', which was chaired by Rajesh. The taskforce produced a knowledge paper on *'Social Outreach in Higher Education'* (FICCI, 2017), which was formally released in the inaugural session of the FICCI Higher Education Summit 2017 on November 9, 2017 at New Delhi.

We have regularly received encouragement and appreciation from UNESCO Director for South Asia and his team in Delhi.

Canadian support for the UNESCO Chair has been very important. Budd has served on the Executive Committee of Community Based Research Canada which has promoted the very successful biannual national meeting called Community Campus Expositions, the largest gathering of CBR research partners in Canada.

GUNi has been very supportive of our Chair in several ways. We were appointed as Guest Editors of GUNi's 5<sup>th</sup> World Report on Higher Education in 2012. Budd hosted a seminar in March 2013 in Victoria to prepare the intellectual base for the Report, and we also participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Higher Education (themed, *'Let's build transformative knowledge to drive social change'*) hosted by GUNi in Barcelona in May 2013. This Report was published in March 2014, entitled, *'Knowledge, Engagement & Higher Education: Contributing to Social Change'* (GUNi, 2014).

We were again invited to serve on the Editorial Team of GUNi's 6th World Report on Higher Education in 2015. It was published in March 2017 entitled, *'Towards a Socially Responsible University: Balancing the Global with the Local'* (GUNi, 2017).

### **Programmes of the UNESCO Chair**

We have developed our programme of work in three broad categories: knowledge production and mobilisation, policy development and advocacy, and individual and institutional capacity enhancement.

#### ***Knowledge production***

Knowledge production and mobilization on various aspects of community-based research as a contribution to knowledge democracy has been a prime research agenda to enhance the global understanding of social responsibility in higher education (UNESCO Chair, 2016b).

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<sup>1</sup> FICCI is the largest and oldest apex business organisation in India, and plays a leading role in higher education policy advocacy and debates in India; among other sectors it engages in.

- (i) Strengthening Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions<sup>2</sup> (UNESCO Chair, 2015a)
- (ii) Strengthening Community University Research Partnerships<sup>3</sup> (Hall, et. al., 2015; UNESCO Chair, 2015b)
- (iii) Building the Next-Generation of Community Based Researchers<sup>4</sup> (Tandon et. al., 2016a; 2016b)

In addition, we have written several papers based on our joint work:

- (i) Higher Education and Community-based Research: Creating a Global Vision (Munck, et. al., 2014)
- (ii) Beyond Epistemicide: Knowledge Democracy & Higher Education (Hall, 2015)
- (iii) Knowledge Democracy & Excellence in Engagement (Tandon, et. al., 2016c)
- (iv) The Next Gen Project: A Global Study on Training, Teaching and Learning Community-Based Research (Lepore, Tandon & Hall, 2016).
- (v) Decolonization of Knowledge, Epistemicide, Participatory Research and Higher Education (Hall & Tandon, 2017a)
- (vi) Impact Assessment: Community-Engaged Research (CER) at the University of Victoria, 2009-2015 (Tremblay, 2017)
- (vii) Gauging the Impact of Community University Engagement Initiatives in India (Singh, 2017)
- (viii) Participatory Research: Where Have We Been, Where Are We Going? – A dialogue (Hall & Tandon, 2017b)
- (ix) Making the Commitment: Contribution of Higher Education to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Tandon, 2017)

### ***Knowledge Mobilisation***

The traditional mode of academic knowledge production in many areas of social, economic, health and sustainability matters has been severely limited in terms of impact by the fact that the dominant mode of dissemination has been through specialized journals with limited readerships, presentations at conferences composed entirely of other academics and writing in a style which is inaccessible to most policy makers and community leaders. Our Chair, working within our knowledge democracy framework, believes that much more work needs to be done on making sure that co-construction of knowledge between community stake-holders and academics is supported and that all knowledge undertaken within higher education circles is made available free of charge to the public. We have committed ourselves to:

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<sup>2</sup>Read more about the project here: <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/2015/05/11/community-engagement-in-higher-education-institutions/>

<sup>3</sup>Read more about the project here: <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/2014/04/30/project-strengthening-community-university-research-partnerships/>

<sup>4</sup>Read more about the project here: <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/2014/07/18/building-the-next-generation-of-community-based-researchers-the-nextgen-project/>

- Open access publishing of all our UNESCO Chair books and guidelines. Partners: University of Victoria Press and PRIA.
- Open Access Repository for all UNESCO Chair documents guaranteeing free and open access to anyone in the world with internet access (<http://dspace.library.uvic.ca/handle/1828/5949>). Partner: UVic Library and PRIA Digital Library.
- Enhanced portal, app development and social media presence. We will continue our creation and dissemination of UNESCO Chair blogs. We will enhance the interactivity of our web portal and develop a CBR smart phone application that could give users access to curricula sources, places for CBR training, regional research centres, names of scholars working in the field and so forth. We will expand our Facebook and Twitter support and study expanding into Instagram, Snapchat, LinkedIn and other related social media platforms. Partners: PRIA and University of Victoria.
- Global Webinar Series. We have pilot tested delivering webinars from a single centre and from regional locations during our previous four years. We intend to launch a global webinar series on “Knowledge Democracy and Social Responsibility in Higher Education” with four webinars being offered per year in Spanish, English, Hindi and French.

### ***Policy advocacy***

Policy advocacy is central to the UNESCO Chair’s work. Through policy dialogues in India, Canada and internationally, the Chair has helped to advance innovative policies and systems that incentivize and enable community engagement, community-based research and social responsibility in higher education in different contexts (UNESCO Chair, 2016b). Our policy advocacy activities broadly include: policy dialogues; Big Tent global communiqués on Community University Engagement; technical support to policy makers; and support to regional higher education networks. The themes of the Big Tent communiqués are as below.

GCI: September 23rd, 2010, Global Video Dialogue on Enhancing North-South Cooperation in Community-University Engagement, Centre for Higher Education Studies (CHES) at the Institute of Education, London, England.

GCI: November 1st, 2011, Community University Engagement in 2030: A Scenario.

GCI: May 12th, 2012, Sustainability, Knowledge and Democracy, presented at the 5th International Conference of the Living Knowledge Network, Bonn, Germany.

GCI: May 15th, 2013, The Grand Challenges and the Great Transformation to Sustainable Societies, presented at the 6th International conference in Higher Education, Barcelona, Spain.

GCI: November 20, 2013, Learning to Build Inclusive Cities, Hong Kong

GCVI: October 11th, 2015, Local Identities and Global Citizenship: A Message from Catania and Challenges for Universities, presented at Pascal International Observatory Annual Conference, Catania, Sicily.

GCVII: February 6, 2017, Global crisis engages universities and community partners Big Tent Consortium issues call to action to partners worldwide

The Confluence at the Source of the Nile<sup>5</sup>:

Confluence witnessed a gathering of Indigenous and Mother Tongue Scholars from Africa, the Afrikan diaspora and from the lands of Indigenous Peoples in other parts of the world. The Partner at this event was MpamboAfrikan Multiversity.

The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Cartagena Conference on Participatory (Action) Research.<sup>6</sup>

The late Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda held the most important global meeting on the subject of action research and democracy in Cartagena, Colombia in June of 1997. This meeting marked a turning point in the world of engaged scholarship, a turn away from a Marxist emphasis on leadership of a vanguard of intellectuals to recognition of the wisdom and knowledge making capacities of ordinary people engaged in struggles for their rights. This conference was hosted by the Action Research Network of the Americas (ARNA).

***Capacity Enhancement: The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium on Training in Community-Based Participatory Research***

Training and Capacity Enhancement is the third pillar of efforts in this regard, utilizing knowledge created through the research as well as linked to policy development work described above. This has focused on both human and institutional capacity for engagement, community-based research and social responsibility.

Going forward and building on the research and partnership development of our first four years, our focus is on the establishment of the K4C Global Consortium on Training in Community Based Participatory Research. The K4C is a UNESCO Chair initiative supported through a cooperation agreement between the University of Victoria in Canada and PRIA International Academy in India. The K4C Global Consortium is a three-stage process of identifying training hubs (partnerships between universities and practitioner organisations), preparation of Mentors through a 21 week on-line and face 2 face Mentor Training Programme and finally the creation of local CBPR training programs in the various hub locations. There are plans for four MTP cohorts during 2018 and 2019. The first group of

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<sup>5</sup> More on this event is available here: <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/2017/05/22/confluence-2017-jinja-uganda-may-18-21-2017/>

<sup>6</sup> More on this event is available here: <http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/index.php/2017/06/20/arna-conference-cartagena-colombia-june-12-16-2017/>

K4C hubs are being established in India, South Africa, Cuba, Colombia, Indonesia and Italy. Hubs are under development in Ghana, Uganda, Benin, Brazil, Canada, England, Scotland, Spain (Catalonia).

## Looking Ahead

UNESCO renewed our Chair for another term of four years in 2016, based on its assessment of excellent work carried out in the first four year term 2012-16. [At the India launch of the K4C initiative in New Delhi](#), the Director of UNESCO Office for South Asia, Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, remarked: “*This UNESCO Chair is one of the most active and important UNESCO Chairs in the world*”.

Our experience as UNESCO Chair has been very positive in carrying forward the movement of community-based participatory research. Within a short initial period, it became clear to us that higher education can fulfill its social responsibility while performing its core missions of teaching, research and service in a societally engaged manner. A university’s social responsibility is not to be separated from its core everyday functions; they need to learn to do it differently, in an engaged manner.

Therefore, we would like to suggest that UNESCO, its Head Quarters and regional offices and its national commissions pay greater attention to UNESCO Chairs. Their support can make a huge difference towards mainstreaming this important intellectual work into the worlds of practitioners, policy-makers and academics. Additionally, we have found that having an international network of allies and supporters who are doing similar work is a great value addition to our collective impacts. In some cases, national commissions and regional/national UNESCO offices can facilitate such linkages.

In the field of higher education, UNESCO Chairs can benefit greatly by the contributions and networks of GUNi. However, in recent years, GUNi’s global outreach has weakened. As one of its parents, United Nations University (UNU) can play a stimulating role, along with UNESCO Paris, to enhance the capacities and outreach of GUNi to advance of the forthcoming 3rd UNESCO conference on higher education in 2020.

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