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United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

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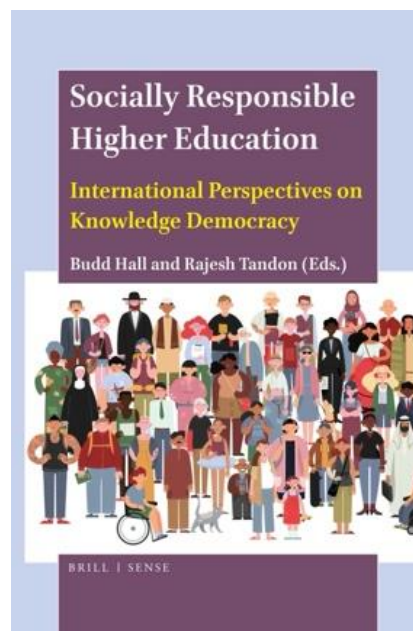UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education

# KNOWLEDGE DEMOCRACY AND DIVERSE EPISTEMOLOGIES

**Inspired by the book "Socially Responsible Higher Education: International Perspectives on Knowledge Democracy"**



## Organised By

**UNESCO Chair In Community Based Research And Social Responsibility In Higher Education**
**&**
**Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA)**

**Monday, July 19, 2021**
**12:00pm-1:30pm (IST); 2:30pm-4pm (MYT)**

# SPEAKERS



**CO-EDITOR OF BOOK *SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE HIGHER EDUCATION***

**DR. RAJESH TANDON, FOUNDER-PRESIDENT, PRIA; UNESCO CHAIR IN CBR AND SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

**OPENING REMARKS BY CONVENOR**

**PROF. EMERITUS DZULKIFLI BIN ABDUL RAZAK, RECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

**SPEAKER**

**MS. KANYA PADAYACHEE DURBAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SOUTH AFRICA**

**SPEAKER**

**DR. MUZAIMI MUSTAPHA UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA (USM)**

**SPEAKER**

**DR. SARITA ANAND VISVA- BHARATI SANTINIKETAN**

**DISCUSSANT**

**DR. ANA PERSIC DIVISION OF SCIENCE POLICY AND CAPACITY BUILDING, UNESCO PARIS**

# KEY MESSAGES

- If the university succeeds without the community, then the university has failed.

- If knowledge is not accessible to everyone, we will not see the impact we are aiming for, since knowledge is a leveller for society.

- Emotion and action are modes of knowing that are sometimes even more powerful than the conventional mode known as cognition.

- An Ubuntu- oriented framework with a clear methodology for the integration into a national system of education and training could be the engine for transformation.

- "Sejahtera" must encompasses the campus society, the people, the academic and non-academic members, the surrounding community and the natural environment.
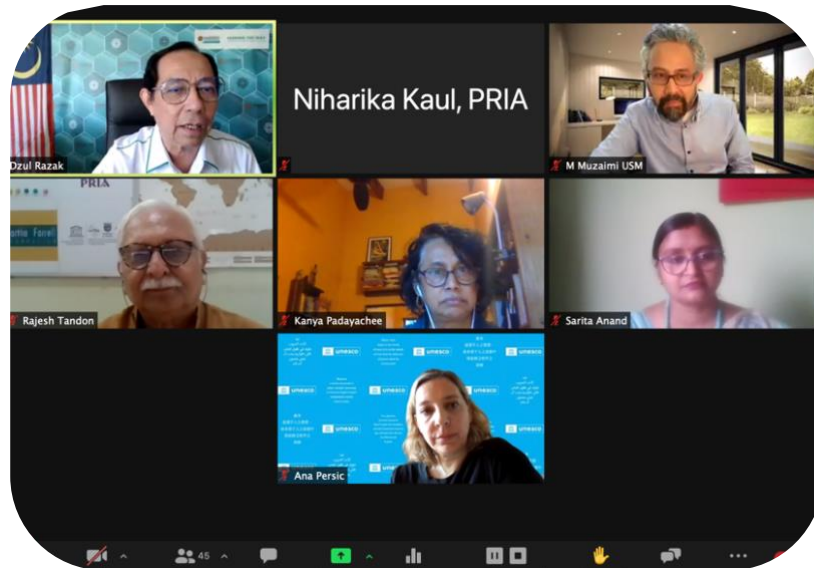
Ms. Niharika Kaul from PRIA initiated the discussion by welcoming the participants and speakers. She began with the co-editor's words from the book *Socially Responsible Higher Education: International Perspectives on Knowledge Democracy:*

> "Knowledge democracy is about intentionally linking values of democracy and action to the process of using knowledge"

Drawing from examples from diverse countries, with a greater representation of cases from the global South, this book furthers our understanding of the link between the role of higher education institutions (HEIs), knowledge, society and sustainability of life as we know it. Global crises including the pandemic, gender based violence, the climate crisis and human rights violations by dictatorial governments around the world have urged us all to rethink solutions in a collaborative manner from the lens of those most vulnerable to these crises to ensure we leave no one behind.

In co- creating solutions, how can higher education institutions harmonise multiple ways of knowing? How can knowledge democracy and epistemic justice bring about deeper transformations in these times? What does a value based, engaged and contextual understanding of knowledge mean for different communities and can it truly have a transformative impact in the way people and communities work towards addressing societal needs? These are some of the issues that must be explored within the context of knowledge democracy within higher education.

**Prof. Emeritus Tan Sri Dato Dzulkifli Bin Abdul Razak, Rector of the International Islamic University Malaysia**

Professor Razak began by suggesting that usually universities in the global south look up to universities in the global north; often we are told that universities are about publications, about research, about commercialisation and about an industrial base while most of these are foreign to the global south educational systems. Therefore the idea of going back to the community and learning from them to cater to their needs becomes a core part of social responsibility of higher education institutions especially in the global south.

Universities in the global south are always seen as part of the community. If the university succeeds without the community, then the university has failed. The university and the community must move together because it is the responsibility of the university that the community benefits from the spill over of the work done by the university. The reverse process is actually the way forward, where the university learns from the community rather than the community learning from the university. For instance, most often the community surrounding the university has a more sustainable form of living than the university preaches or even knows of. The idea of co-creation and co-learning are critical in this discussion.

The book *Socially Responsible Higher Education: International Perspectives on Knowledge Democracy* gives us a whole range of experiences of universities and communities working around building social responsibility in higher education. Nalanda university, a renowned Buddhist university in ancient India was actually run as a social entity where anyone could come and go, at a time when knowledge was not owned by anyone, it was not a commodity. We need to take this opportunity to transform education. Knowledge democracy is pertinent today more than ever, as we see vaccine politics and vaccine inequities between the richer and poorer nations. So similarly if knowledge is not accessible, not transmitted to everyone, we will not see the impact we are aiming for, since knowledge is a leveller for society. Culture is part of the knowledge base and diversity of culture generates knowledge. It drives the potential to learn from one another.

**Dr. Rajesh Tandon, Founder-President of PRIA, UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education**

Dr. Tandon thanked the contributors of the book, whose analysis and experiences made this book possible. Since the last 30 years the global idea about "serving" the community became a one way road over time, where university professors, students and researchers would go and help the community, as if they had nothing to learn from the community. But in the last ten years, this situation has been changing. The discussion about socially responsible higher education is recognising a mutuality of relationships between the university and community. The pressure in the pandemic has thrown light on the success of local knowledge and local

solutions produced by communities. Therefore the purpose of higher education post pandemic has to be that of inclusive and fairer recovery.

For such an inclusive recovery, we need to prepare our doctors, lawyers and other young professionals who get educated in universities but do not know much about their own society. They all study a global body of knowledge which has emanated from three- four hundred years ago, but that learning and training material does not contain local stories about the local communities. Climate solutions are not going to be solved by green washing technology, but by analysing and understanding local climate based challenges, local economy and local techniques used by communities.

Historically, education and learning was in an open sphere in educational institutions. Society and learners interacted, but then we began to create walls which kept the society out. The knowledge that existed in society was ignored and now gradually, we are coming back to that. Knowledge emerges in local culture, based in local languages. The UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education developed the Knowledge for Change Global Consortium which is a partnership between an academic institution and a community organisation with the purpose to produce knowledge locally to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Looking beyond the Western Cannon, emotion and action are modes of knowing and sometimes more powerful than the conventional mode known as cognition, but are often ignored. There are certain phenomena which one can only understand when they act on them. So looking at culturally embedded epistemology, valuing cognition, emotion and action is imperative, and that every person is capable of these modes of knowing. Secondly, there is an assumption that theory is built without reality. This assumption is incorrect, since those theories that hold water are based on accumulative experience, be it natural health practices, or even organic agriculture. It is only now that they are being scientifically acknowledged.

Finally looking at indigenous epistemologies, indigenous communities have been keepers of our lands, forests, seas, and they have a way of knowing which entails a spiritual relationship between humans and nature. We have also had subaltern social movements in many societies, that raised questions that were not produced in universities, taking examples of women's movements, movements around peace or movements of workers.

Next, to decolonise curricula, we need to develop place-based contextual curricula. The wall between the classroom and the community must be porous. Community based participatory research is one of the ways in which one can co-construct knowledge. Linguistic and cultural diversity both in theory and practice are also key factors for building a community- engaged, contextual curricula.

**Ms. Kanya Padayachee, Durban University of Technology, South Africa**

Ms. Padayachee began her address by speaking about how the pandemic has completely consumed us and compelled us to focus on the needs of the collective human society. The violence of the past week in South Africa led to frenzied outburst that rendered homes burnt to the ground, places of work recked and food supply threatened. The human project is at a critical juncture to move beyond the corrosive human system that operates within a framework of segregation of the other, material accumulation for its own sake and the relentless pursuit of individualism.

South Africa's transition to democracy in 1994 was preceded by a terrible history of dispossession, oppression and segregation characterised by 300 years of colonial rule. Painfully 27 years into democracy the country remains riddles with the degradations of poverty, inequality and underdevelopment, all of which were brought into sharper focus during the pandemic.

Ms. Padayachee stated that in the book chapter, they argue that the current dualistic education system which trains primarily for entry into the market is inadequate for strengthening the democratic ethos, a sense of common citizenship and commitment to a common good. Gandhi's concept of social welfare, based on a mutual relationship between the individual and society has synergies with the African indigenous value system of Ubuntu. This wholistic paradigm could be instructive to education transformation in South Africa.

The concept of Ubuntu aims to provide a unifying vision of community built upon compassionate, respectful, interdependent relationships; a community in which responsibility is collective and in which others are treated as extended family. The basis of the ubuntu ethic is a deep moral obligation to become fully human. The education system in South Africa needs to play a more actively role in the political, social and economic reordering of State and society. An ubuntu oriented framework with a clear methodology for the integration of its principles into a national system of education and training could be the engine for transformation. The rise of colonialism in Africa had a profoundly negative impact on indigenous knowledge systems through the imposition of Euro- Western cultures and the concomitant suppression of other forms of knowledge.

Drawing from the analogy of pervasive decimation of indigenous knowledge in Sub-Saharan Africa, the authors note its deliberate exclusion from education which is one of the primary means of continuity. In this context the authors of this chapter extended the discourse on epistemic diversity and reimagining institutions of higher learning away from the hegemonic university that seeks to undermine the lives of indigenous communities and those in opposition to capitalism. The authors endorsed the idea of the intercultural university as an alternative. Intercultural learning and the pursuit of knowledge are used as elements that

contribute to the construction of a world where many worlds can fit into. Such places of learning which are legitimised by communities build a different kind of community orientated knowledge of politics and economics, ultimately causing the political restructuring from below.

Finally the authors propose that in the African context of decolonisation the reimagining of higher education institutions would require a transformation of the attitude of academia towards envisioning reality that encompasses a philosophical attitude of Ubuntu, which will include as its main features human engagement, non-domination, the inter-connectedness of human beings and the optimal development of human relationships. This education approach may be a firm grounding for young people who have a mammoth responsibility of shaping the quality of South Africa's democracy to bring about a new order of social justice.

### Dr. Muzaimi Mustapha, Associate Professor in Medical Neuroscience at the Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)

Initiating his address by discussing the natural beauty of the USM campus, Dr. Muzaimi stated that the university must balance the emotion and action within its ethos, resonating with the words of Dr. Tandon. Speaking of the concept of Sejahtera, one principle linked to it is health and wellness. Sejahtera also represents tranquillity. With the balance of nature, environment and humans comes this idea of harmony. Sejahtera must encompass the whole campus society and involve the people, the academic and non- academic members as well as the surrounding community. Sejahtera also involves the natural environment in which we work. These multiple aspects feed into the balance within the university campus among the physical, spiritual, intellectual and emotional state of mind.

Sejahtera is operationalised at USM using five principles of volunteerism, teamwork, insourcing, research and documentation. Sejahtera requires change of mindsets; creates physical, social, learning, working and spiritual spaces; adopts practices which are people and environment friendly among others, provides quality health care and implements its practices through volunteerism, R&D, campaigns among others.

### Dr. Sarita Anand, Assistant Professor in Visva-Bharati, Santiniketan

Dr. Anand started by speaking about Rabindranath Tagore's work with regard to vocational skill development and rural reconstruction. He believed that real education is that which is with nature, not within concrete walls of classrooms. This idea of oneness with nature can help learners develop sympathy and understand their connection with the outside world which leads to building a knowledge democracy.

Throughout his life, Tagore worked for the community and heard their needs and learnt from them. He believed that real education is that which builds the ability among learners to think for themselves and for the well- being of others. His idea of knowledge was emancipation and transformation, service and sacrifice so that people could spread their love across barriers of class, caste and other forms of discrimination to embrace humanity in a spirit of oneness and rising above eco-centrism and ethno-centrism to a state of global consciousness. He aimed to improve conditions of those who were most vulnerable. He tried to give shape to those ideas about education at Visva Bharati, Santiniketan which completes its 100th year this year in 2021.

Through his work with local people at Santiniketan, he realised deep-seated societal challenges that troubled the local society. He initiated projects for community development near Santiniketan in 1922. This centre now is a vibrant centre fostering local arts and crafts. It also promotes local music, traditional agricultural practices and health and hygiene awareness of local communities. The Rural Extension Centre is one of the oldest departments of the university that works for serving the needs of the local community. The university has also started initiatives for restoring and recovering indigenous knowledge systems of the Santhal tribal community in West Bengal. The curriculum at the university has been revised to support the initiatives and a separate course for the Santhal tribal community is also running at the university. There is also a separate department at the university for restoring and preserving endangered languages.

**Dr. Ana Persic, Acting Chief of Science Policy and Partnerships Section at the Division of Science Policy and Capacity Building, UNESCO headquarters in Paris**

Dr. Persic  began by sharing that there is a global movement for opening science to scientists themselves through open access resources and open access to data amongst others. It also includes opening science to the broader society. What  is missing is an international framework for these new transformative open science systems which can help them operate in a just and equitable way so that the differences between the haves and have nots are not enhanced.

In November 2019, 193 UNESCO Member States tasked UNESCO with developing an international standard-setting instrument on Open Science which is the UNESCO Recommendation on Open Science. It has the potential to make national and international scientific processes more transparent. Open Science is recognised as a critical SDG accelerator and it can be a game changer for bridging science, technology and innovation gaps and fulfilling the human right to science.

Since 2019, UNESCO has had a broad consultative process on defining open science and its principles with several stakeholders including citizen science groups, indigenous communities and other groups. This process was guided by an international Open Science Advisory Committee supported by global comprehensive Open Science Partnership. Hopefully the final text will be adopted by the UNESCO General Conference this year.

Open Science is defined as an inclusive construct that combines various movements and practices aiming to make multilingual scientific knowledge openly available, accessible to people; to increase scientific collaboration and sharing of information for the benefit of society and science; and to open the processes of scientific knowledge creation, evaluation and communication to societal actors beyond the traditional scientific community.

The key pillars of open science are: open scientific knowledge, open science infrastructures, open engagement of societal actors and open dialogue with other knowledge systems. The core values of open science relate to the quality and integrity of research; collective benefit sine science is a public good belonging to humanity in common; equity and fairness between and within countries enabling reciprocal sharing of scientific inputs; and diversity and inclusiveness of knowledges, practices and languages. The guiding principles include transparency; equality of opportunities; responsibility, respect and accountability; collaboration and participation; flexibility and sustainability.

Seven areas of action include promotion of a common understanding of OS, developing an enabling policy environment for open science, investing in OS infrastructure, investing in capacity building for OS, fostering a culture for OS, promoting innovative approaches and international multi-stakeholder cooperation. One of the biggest challenges seen is shifting the scientific culture from competition to collaboration; from looking at science as a product to science as a process and finally shifting from the idea of science for a select few to science for all.

### Discussion

On the question of how UNESCO's framework for open science can help to transform the current practice for global university rankings, Dr. Persic suggested that there is already a global debate about university rankings; with the UNESCO Open Science Recommendation this conversation will broaden up. Universities are already employing different forms of evaluation and a mix of top down and bottoms up approaches will hopefully improve or change the present system of university rankings.

Ms. Sheela Patel from SPARC highlighted that its very important to decolonise research and knowledge. This requires a contestation at a global level with vigour that is urgent because northern researchers use complicated jargon which gets appropriated and which we cannot

navigate because there is no conversation about it. The second issue is about indigenous knowledge and climate, especially in light of the commercial business interests growing globally and greenwashing about local commitments. The third issue is about ethics; we have to take greater responsibility for our actions. At the moment you need individual sign offs from them to interview them if you want to be part of the global research projects. In reality however, it is a community issue so how do we bring that in the realm of public systems of resolving these challenges. Unless the city authorities, the local universities and the community networks have a decadal partnerships, we will not be able to solve any problems.

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