Version: 11/05/2022

UNESCO Chairs / UNITWIN Networks Policy Brief Template

Under the UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC2022)
Section for Higher Education | Division for Education 2030

Type: Individual ☐ | Collective ☒

A Policy Brief on Knowledge Mobilization: The Power of Creativity and Action

Authors:

Tandon, Rajesh Dr. Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, New Delhi, India

Hall, Budd Dr. Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, Victoria, Canada

A Collective brief in cooperation with the Knowledge for Change Global Alliance on Community-Based Research, the Canadian Commission for UNESCO, University Grants Commission of India

Date 05/03/2022

Abstract

This brief fits within the Data and Knowledge Production theme, but also relates to the Futures of Higher Education and the Higher Education and the SDGs themes. If we are to meet the challenges of our times, the research produced within higher education institutions and their partners needs a dramatic shift from the academic mode of knowledge production to a societal mode of knowledge production and sharing. it will require that attention be given to the creation of locally contextualised knowledge with priorities for action that affect the everyday lives of people where they live and work. The Active participation of local stake-holders---community, local governments, local business, women & youth—in co-producing and sharing the knowledge of such local solutions can be facilitated through their involvement in the research process. Knowledge mobilization (KmB) is therefore called for. Our brief provides a context for understanding the need for KmB as well as providing examples of how creative or arts-based approaches to KmB have been proven to be effective.

Version: 11/05/2022

Content

Introduction

We are a few years away from realising the ambitious United Nations Agenda 2030, an agenda that covers the entire world. The climate crisis is affecting lives around the world. And dramatically adding to our challenges is the arrival of Covid -19 as a pandemic affecting health and well-being of millions everywhere. Generating, mobilising and utilising appropriate knowledge to address these challenges has never been more urgent. Knowledge mobilization in support of achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) requires concerted and innovative effort in many places (Hall et al, 2019). The focus of our UNESCO Chair is on building research capacity in the global South and the excluded North in the combined fields of community-based participatory research and social responsibility in higher education. To this end we carry out international research, create policy documents, engage with dozens of national and international networks in the field. We work within a framework of knowledge democracy, a research framework, that works with four knowledge principles: 1)recognition of multiplicities of epistemologies; 2) representation and mobilization of knowledge by making use of a vast array of creative methods as well as more conventional academic approaches; 3)Understanding that locally generated knowledge is an essential component for action in communities and movements for change; and that 4) Establishing an appropriate balance between recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples and others to own and control their own knowledge and the responsibility of researchers to share their work freely, openly and without cost to the potential users (Hall and Tandon, 2017). What we in Canada understand as knowledge mobilization or KMb therefore is integrated into all the work that we support and promote. From our perspective, the purpose of research is to work with questions and themes that originate with the intended beneficiaries and through engagement with these people to build capacity for changes towards a better life for all.

A place-based approach to research and KMb

If we are to meet the challenges of our times, the research produced within higher education institutions and their partners needs a dramatic shift from the academic mode of knowledge production to a societal mode of knowledge production and sharing. It will require that attention be given to the creation of locally contextualised knowledge with priorities for action that affect the everyday lives of people where they live and work. The active participation of local stake-holders---community, local governments, local business, women & youth—in co-producing and sharing the knowledge of such local solutions can be facilitated through their involvement in the research process.

Community-based Participatory Research (CBPR) methodology facilitates co-construction of knowledge through mutually respectful partnerships between formally trained researchers and local stakeholders. “CBPR is a collaborative enterprise between academics and community members. CBPR seeks to democratize knowledge creation by validating multiple sources of knowledge and promoting the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination*”.* (Tandon et , 2016 a). Effective use of CBPR in generating local knowledge solutions for achieving SDGs can contribute to local learning and actions in this regard. Stages of the research cycle in CBPR methodology are undertaken jointly in such partnerships; thus knowledge production and mobilisation is an integrated and collaborative undertaken in a partnership approach. CBPR therefore encapsulates the theories of knowledge democracy that we have mentioned earlier.

1.1 Approaches to Knowledge Mobilisation

Attention to Knowledge Mobilisation (KMb) as a responsibility of researchers has gained ascendancy in the past decade. While some form of KMb has always been associated with academic research, it has historically been largely limited to sharing results amongst academics within disciplinary fields and their professional peers through publications in specialist journals and books and conferences. The language of such knowledge sharing has been situated within the academic discourse, in formats mostly utilised by academic peers familiar with the same (Hall and Tandon, 2017).

Contemporary KMb increasingly entails sharing results of research with other publics such as policymakers, civil society, business, community actors and social movements . Canadian Social Science Research Council (SSHRC) guidelines define "Knowledge mobilization is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange, and co-creation or co-production by researchers and knowledge users." (SSHRC, 2017).

Learning from European approaches we find the concept of Responsible Research & Innovations (RRI) which has been extensively promoted in European Union's Horizon 2020 research funding program. "RRI implies that societal actors (researchers, citizens, policy makers, business, third sector organisations, etc.) work together during the whole research and innovation process in order to better align both the process and its outcomes with the values, needs and expectations of society." (European Commission, 2020). The European Commission has created the Science with & for Society (SWAFS) research funding mechanisms which have supported Science Shops, among other strategies as vehicles for partnership research between academic and community partners (European Commission, 2016).

Common elements with most KMb approaches include: 1)sharing knowledge and results of research with both academic and non-academic communities 2)raising awareness of issues on which research was conducted, 3)Bringing stakeholders together, 4)strengthening the confidence and organizing abilities of marginalized groups to take action, 5) supporting new practices and action in families, communities and workplaces, and, 6) influencing policy and design of programmes

In the past it was a common understanding that KMb, *outreach* to others, including to academic communities of students and researchers, was a step taken after research has been completed and results have been obtained. In conventional meaning, it is a set of actions that researchers undertake to disseminate their research findings, after the research process is over. Academics have been challenged to think about sharing knowledge beyond formal journal/book articles/publications or academic conference presentations. The primary purpose of KMb in such circumstances is to share research results with various stakeholders so that research findings and results can be used by them to improve research, policy and practice. (Hall, 2015)

From a knowledge democracy perspective, a community-based participatory research (CBPR) methodology treats KMb as an integral part of research cycle, not something that is designed as an after- thought or separately from the very act of undertaking research. With a CBPR approach, the rationale for undertaking research is articulated clearly in terms of changes it proposes to facilitate or contribute to. CBPR understands that, "Social transformation as a goal of research that occurs as a collective learning phenomenon is a common theme across different conceptualisations of the term" (Israel et al,1998). CBPR is defined, "as research that will benefit the participants either through direct intervention or by using the results to inform action for

change" (Tandon et al, 2016 a.) Local actors—community, civil society, local governments, businesses—and policymakers and program implementers need to change in different ways if SDGs are to have a significant chance to improve people's lives (Tandon et al, 2016b). Hence, their active participation in research processes at all steps and stages of research helps to bring about such changes in their ways of understanding, planning and acting towards that SDG.

Creativity in KMb

In this section, we provide several illustrations of how creative approaches to KMb have been utilised in some of the research undertaken we have been engaged with as a UNESCO Chair and by others within the Global Consortium of Knowledge-for-Change (K4C) based in 14 countries. The K4C Global Consortium is an initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education to build the capacities for engaged research excellence around the world. With the critical challenges of present times and the goal of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), this programme with its established local training hubs, aims at catalysing solutions through co-construction of knowledge in partnership with the local communities (www.unescochair-cbrsr.org).

Our work has been influenced significantly by the Canadian feminist scholar Darlene Clover and her work on arts-based research and feminist pedagogies (Clover, 2011) According to Clover, arts-based research allows and demands deeper reflection and multiple constructions of meaning through a labour-intensive process. However wide ranging the information conventional methods like interviews or focus groups capture, there are only a part of how we can represent complexities and ambiguities involved in experience and ways of knowing. Symbol, metaphor, irony and imagery play an important role in reasoning, explaining, and understanding the world, enabling new connections between things concrete, such the gender wage gap, and things abstract, such as the theory of patriarchy. "Equal time should be allotted to the creation of the artwork and reflection, sharing and questioning," Clover claims (Clover, 2011). Therefore, dissemination of research, and arts-based research in particular, has to have strategic value because communication with the public around complex social issues must address and involve more than just transferring information. The arts provide means for study participants, researchers and students, especially in feminist adult education, to voice what often cannot be articulated through mere words.

Art exhibitions for example are an effective means to disseminate research findings in non-traditional ways to a much broader public. While working with a group of homeless/street-involved women over two years, Clover and her team developed artworks ranging from quilts to collage and masks around the issue of poverty. It is a critical and polarising issue for the community. At the end of the project, three exhibitions in three small art galleries were organised with the aim to expose the community to the issues in a "non-threatening" environment. The events registered a footfall of over 300, including politicians, artists, university students, professors, teachers, business owners, homeless men and women, social and community development workers, and media personnel. Clover notes the unlikeliness of achieving this reach if the same knowledge (on women and poverty) was disseminated through an academic presentation - or for people from some diverse walks of life to mingle and communicate about the issue so openly without the arts driving that discussion. "...the arts touch people, produce astonishing effects in people, in ways other forms do not" (Clover, 2011) Attendees at the gala responded to questions put forward by Clover and team, such as, if, when they thought about homeless men, they thought of artists. The aim was to unsettle assumptions and presumptions, and allow people to reflect on how they stereotype and categorise.

2.1 Story 1: Women domestic workers in India create a saree to share their findings on sexual harassment at workplace

"The guard said 'you love me and I will give you better job opportunities.'"

– Woman domestic worker in Gurugram, India

As the #MeTooIndia campaign gained momentum on social media in India, there were many more untold and unknown stories of sexual harassment faced by women working in the informal sector. Among them are women domestic workers in urban India, who work behind the closed doors of private households. The invisible and privatised nature of domestic work makes these women very vulnerable to sexual harassment at their workplace. There is a need for policy makers to pay attention to securing safe workplaces for women workers in the informal sector.

In a participatory research conducted with 1518 women domestic workers as part of a project in Gurugram, India, the women shared their stories of sexual harassment and how it affects them, both as women and as domestic workers. The project team used arts-based participatory research methods to help these women tell their stories. The idea was to make a patch work saree where the women could share their perceptions and stories through images which were sewn together to make a full saree length of cloth. The workers could thereby communicate their stories of sexual harassment without having to physically speak them aloud. Fourteen women contributed to this artwork. Their stories revealed that sexual harassment, sexual abuse and child abuse were synonymous in the minds of some of the women who contributed. Some took the opportunity to write out what they feel about sexual harassment, while others painted. One worker cross-stitched her experience, depicting the outfit she was wearing when the grandfather of the home she worked in told her she should wear short clothes and that she looks nice in them. There were two paintings of a girl crying into her hands with a man standing nearby. The majority of pieces had some form of writing on them.[1]

Figure 1

A few months later, these stories were shared as part of the campaign #DignityOfMyLabour, at a panel discussion in a bookstore which saw an audience comprising middle class youth, civil society practitioners, labour rights activists and labour union members. The saree was unveiled at the event by a domestic worker gender champion, trained by the project. The saree continues to be used to raise awareness on the issue of sexual harassment among domestic workers.

2.2 Story 2: Participatory videos for storytelling and action in Brazil

Our second story describes use of participatory video that a joint team of researchers from University of Victoria Canada and local partners in Sao Paolo Brazil undertook on waste collection and recycling in informal settlements (Hall, 2015).

In the Participatory Sustainable Waste Management project, the University of Victoria and the University of Sao Paulo collaborated with recycling cooperatives, municipal governments, and NGOs in Brazil, to support the organization of the informal recyclers by strengthening cooperative enterprises, micro-credit, collective commercialization, inclusive public policy, and the practice of a solidarity economy.

The specific aim of the participatory video research was to make their livelihoods and capacity visible to their local governments, through improved access to and participation in public policy discussions. The process reveals critical aspects of visual arts-based research such as representation, power, and vulnerability, and strategies for creating an appropriate environment through a participatory approach**.** It also reflects on its possibilities and challenges for political collective action and social change.

In São Paulo, there are approximately 13,000 pickers and recyclers of which about 8,000 are organized in cooperatives providing employment, improved working conditions, and increased environmental education. The predominant issues faced by this sector are poverty, stigmatization, health risks, accidents, exploitation by middlemen and a general lack of self-esteem. Their work is often associated with risk, unhygienic environments, criminal activities, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, and backwardness.

Figure 2

Pre-production

A series of three workshops were implemented in 2008 with the goal of building the capacity of recyclers from cooperatives to employ multimedia technology as a strategy to improve community-networking opportunities, stimulate awareness and education of recycling programs, and in the process contribute to their personal and collective growth. Collective reflection and dialogue was facilitated in focus groups using art-based techniques such as drawing and mapping to brainstorm around the major themes that were most important to the participants; emergent themes broadly covered occupational health, validation and recognition of service, environmental sustainability and education, gender equality, cooperative and enterprise development etc. Following the theme development workshop, the groups prepared the sequence of their stories using storyboards, outlining each scene and role. Each video script was unique; however, three main themes were consistent throughout: (1) recognizing the capacity of catadore/as to provide door to door collective service, (2) the need for government support, and (3) remuneration for the work the catadore/as provide.

Production

The groups then split up and shared the cameras when needed and filmed over 100 hours of footage in total. They filled in the timesheet with details of the footage shot (to help them co-edit a scene later). They were encouraged to shoot generous amounts of footage and leave the trimming, sequencing, and continuity to the editing stage which was an important element of participatory video in the training. The groups decided who would be directing, acting, filming, and interviewing and for the most part, each person had an opportunity to try each role. The production took place at various locations, primarily at each of the cooperatives, and surrounding communities. The clips included interviewing other cooperatives members, residences, business owners and in many of the cases included accompanying the *catadore/as* in their daily work collecting materials, processing, and working with business.

Post-production

Viewing the footage is an important aspect of the participatory video process where participants can review what they and others have filmed, and in that process develop a new sense of issues that is taken into further filming. This viewing of the material as the project progresses lies at the heart of the participatory video process. It opens up local communication channels, promotes dialogue and discussion, and sets in motion a dynamic exchange of ideas on ways to solve problems. In addition to viewing selected clips from each group's work, complete copies of all the raw footage were distributed to each group. The entire process for editing and publishing the final four videos took approximately 12 months to complete.

Knowledge mobilization and impact

Once the videos were produced and consensually approved, they were strategically presented to key stakeholders. Discussions on how to use the videos during the meetings, who would be present at the meetings, potential outcomes, and strategies to evaluate the effectiveness of the participatory videos for political change. A methodology was collectively developed and open-ended interview questions were prepared for the focus groups. Three focus groups in three metropolitan regions of Brazil were organised and attended by leaders of cooperatives, municipal officers, government officials from different departments including social welfare, economic development, environmental services, and in one case, even the Mayor.

In all three case studies, the government representatives suggested the use of the videos as tools for communicating with other government departments, the business sector, and for public educational programs. Overall, the government responses to the videos were positive and sympathetic, despite some of the challenges associated with political agendas and bureaucratic ties (e.g., budget constraints in providing support for cooperatives).

2.3 Story 3: Immigrant Women Using Spoken Word in Toronto

Immigrant women face challenges in City of Toronto to access basic services; previous research studies undertaken without their active participation did not identify key issues adequately. A local research team led by Centre of Learning and Development then undertook a participatory research project which used arts-based methods.

In 2019 the Immigrant Women Integration Program (IWIP) trainees presented findings about their needs based on a study that they had planned and carried out themselves. They presented their findings on needs and sustainability at Toronto City Hall. The instructor of the arts-based methodology: Mahlikah Awe:ri is an award winning, spoken word artist. She together with the Director of Programming for Neighbourhood Impact at the Centre Of Learning & Development in Regent Park, a Founding Member of Red Slam an Indigenous Art & Social Change Movement and a Prologue to the Performing Arts Touring Artist, the Immigrant Women Integration Program Trainees: eight women from Pakistan, Egypt, Syria, Bangladesh, Turkey, Eritrea and Brazil chose the best way to present their own findings. They took a long time working through their presentations individually and as a group.

The audience were community members, environmental non-profit organizations, and city council members. Over 70 people attended the event. Reports from audience members back to the IWIP indicated that they were impressed at the level of presentation skills the participants had. The audience was engaged with the content of the presentation because the presenters were community women themselves. The IWIP trainees had an opportunity to create a safe space for discussion with moderated conversations. They were able to create connections with

change makers in the city. The trainees connected with city officials who recommended community grants which they were eligible to apply for.

The project coordinators indicated that it was very beneficial that the presentation training was conducted by a spoken word artist who would help the trainees write out their presentation as a story and would be able to support them in incorporating visuals and other forms of art into their presentation.

2.4 Story 4: Town Halls and Community Engagement for Health in South Africa

In the Free State of South Africa, a partnership study between a local university and the health department was undertaken to understand how communities can take greater responsibility for health. A participatory action research project was undertaken with local health workers, community members and university academics working together. The challenge was how to share the information gathered through the research process with a much wider community of neighbours. Participation was organized through a rural collaborative learning platform in the community of Trompsburg and Srpingfontein, Xariep District,Free State, South Africa. The participatory research project involved Community Health Workers, students from the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of the Free State, health support organizations working with HIV and AIDS prevention.

The intended audience included other community members of Trompsburg and Srpingfontein, Regional and local government workers and officials, community health care workers from local clinics and other students and academics from the University.

The approach to KMb that they chose was to create Health Fair in the local community centre. The results of the study were presented by those who had been involved in the study through a series of stalls, displays, posters and informal talks. Health issues that were covered included Diabetes, Tuberculosis, Hypertension, Eating disorders, and sanitation and clean water. The intention was to raise awareness about what community members themselves were able to do to improve their own health.

The strategy that arose from rural collaborative learning platform with their action learning processes, the participatory research involving a large number of stakeholders and the Health Fair as a KMb strategy had significant impact. It created increased awareness of the local health and well-being challenges and the lived experiences of all the partners in the community-university partnership. It enabled the co-creation of knowledge needed for the community to take ownership of aspects of health responsibility.

Conclusion

Our engagement with action oriented place and community-based researchers through our UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education offers a rich menu of research and KMb activities from a variety of settings to draw on. There are several lessons to be drawn from our work to date. First is that it is critical to understand that KMb is but one element in a larger knowledge democracy framework. There are dangers in trying to understand KMb as something that somehow stands on its own or can be planned apart from the other dimensions of creating and using knowledge for action/change. Second community-based participatory research offers a unique approach to the construction, curation or harvesting of locally contextualized knowledge which incorporates thinking about KMb from

the very beginning of work with people. Third is the obvious, but surprisingly rare prescriptive that CBPR and the KMb integrated into it must involve researchers, community members with their experiential knowledge of struggle and survival, as well as policy makers and others if real change is to occur. And finally, we are convinced through many years of transformative research and engagement of the power of the arts; arts to represent knowledge, arts to share knowledge, arts to link cognitive and affective knowledge, arts for the heart, arts for hope.

Policy Recommendations

KMb approaches need to be integrated in a systematic manner for dissemination of knowledge generated from research is directly and contextually actionable by communities, local governments and policy-makers. The following key recommendations emerge from the above approaches:

1. Research Councils and research funding agencies should encourage researchers to include in their research design and plans such multi-stakeholder KMb methods from the very beginning.
2. Research funding agencies can specifically earmark a substantial proportion of funding grants to be invested in KMb activities of the research cycles.
3. Professional disciplinary associations can include integration of such KMb approaches in their disciplinary standards and certifications.
4. Opportunities for learning such diverse methods, specially arts-based methods, should be made available by regional and national academies for young researchers so that they can include them in their research proposals and plans.
5. KMb approaches and arts-based methods should be taught in research methodology courses in academia so that sensitisation of relevance of such methods can happen at early stage of research training.

References

Clover, D. (2011) *"Successes and Challenges of Feminist Arts-based Participatory methodologies with homeless/street-involved women in Victoria", Action Research, 9(1), 12-26*

European Commission (2016) *Science with and for Society, Work Programme 2016-17,* (https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/wp/2016_2017/main/h2020-wp1617-swfs_en.pdf)

European Commission (2020) *Responsible Research and Innovation*, (https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/responsible-research-innovation#Article)

Hall B.L, Tandon R. & Tremblay C., 2015 *"Strengthening Community University Research Partnerships: Global Perspectives* Victoria and New Delhi: University of Victoria and PRIA

Hall, B.L. and Tandon, R. (2017) "Decolonization of knowledge, epistemicide, participatory research and higher education" in *Research for All, Vol 1 No 1 pp 6-19*

Hall, B. L & Tandon, R., 2019 *"Knowledge democracy: Opening our doors to all knowledge systems"*, Humanistic Futures of Learning, UNESCO

SSHRC, 2018 (https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/programs-programmes/definitions-eng.aspx#km-mc)

SSHRC, 2017 (https://www.sshrc-crsh.gc.ca/funding-financement/policies-politiques/knowledge_mobilisation-mobilisation_des_connaissances-eng.aspx#a1)

Tandon R., Hall B.L, Lepore W. & Singh W., 2016 a. "*Knowledge and Engagement: Building Capacity for the Next Generation of Community Based Researchers"*

Tandon R., Singh W., Clover D. and Hall B.L., 2016 b., *"Knowledge Democracy and Excellence in Engagement",* IDS Bulletin

Tandon R., 2018, *"Societal Engagement in Higher Education: Pathways to SDGs"*, Sustainable Development Goals: Actors & Implementation- A Report from the International Conference, GUNi (http://www.guninetwork.org/files/guni_sdgs_report.pdf)

UNESCO Chair CBR-SR (http://unescochair-cbrsr.org/pdf/K4C_flyerMay2018_new.pdf)