

Engaging Resource-Deprived Communities

Challenges and Opportunities for University – Community Engagement

Introduction

There have been recent joint activities both in terms of social development and academic by the Hanze University of Applied Sciences, Groningen, The Netherlands, and communities along the Kenyan coast in the Mombasa district. These activities aim at engaging the university with the community with a purpose of increasing knowledge. Examples of activities being undertaken in this engagement are: business knowledge; sources of livelihoods and how these sources can be made sustainable; employability, education and child care. Local communities in this part of Africa face many development challenges such as health, education, sanitation and employable skills. Engaging a university has been lauded as one of the best ways to face these challenges through sharing both knowledge and physical resources. While this sounds plausible, there are many questions associated with this engagement type. For example, is this model of working together sustainable; is it a whole new model or an old one being extended; what are opportunities and challenges? Why would a university from Europe go directly to work with local communities in rural Africa? What are the implications on ownership, local capacities for own development and the role of the state?

Engagement challenges and opportunities

This project is not an isolated case. There is an increased interest in the University's capacity to work together with, particularly resources-poor communities, for mutual development. This interest is partly encouraged by positive results elsewhere in the World and partly because of an increased access to information particularly with the use of available ICT opportunities today. A selection of the challenges for the Mombasa – Hanze university engagement are:

- Communication between the university and the community
- Funding issues and financial perceptions of the community and the university
- Management of these projects
- Political and economic situation, particularly pertaining to Kenya at the moment
- Sustainability of such an engagement (for example linking up with local training and financial institutions for a sustained local capacity building)

What are the benefits for the university to engage with such communities? Is there a way that communities and universities can engage and be of benefit to both? Questions arise from the fact that the university and the community often operate using two very different systems and are in very different economic, educational and developmental circumstances. While these challenges may seem daunting, there are many opportunities that this type of engagement can potentially use to make university – community engagement a productive undertaking for stakeholders involved. A few examples of these are;

- The opportunity for the community and the university to learn together
- Ownership of both the problem and the solution
- Giving a conversational space for the marginalised community members, and
- Allowing the community and the university to identify what matters most to them and find common grounds for working together to deal with these.

This paper will explore some fundamental questions on engagement using Mombasa and Hanze University's engagement case.

About the presenter

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In this full research article, I am using the study as part of my PhD research and it relates to my core research interests in education. I would like the paper to be considered for one of the parallel sessions.

This paper is for strand 3: Engaging Communities with Universities. The paper will concentrate on challenges and opportunities for a European institution engaging local communities in Africa.

Key words

University – community engagement; education for development; capacity building; engagement challenges and opportunities.