" Civic Engagement and Social Development"

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Introduction

The social development approach to civic services provides a useful and appropriate conceptual framework to study civic service in the African context, in that it allows for an analysis of service programmes at different levels of intervention, namely, individual, family, household, community, and organisational and policy levels." (Patel 2007:7) (my emphasis)

Social development is a pro-poor approach that promotes people-centred development, human capabilities, social capital, participation, and active citizenship and civic engagement in achieving human development (Patel, 2005; Midgley, 1995). Social development is a rights-based and pluralist approach that focuses on strong government action and partnership between individuals, groups, communities, civil society, donors, development agencies, and the private and public sectors

Social Development Approach

"The social development approach to social policy was first introduced by the United Nations to address the human development needs in the world's poorest countries following independence from colonialism in the 1960s. In the late twentieth century, the approach has re-emerged as a response to unequal and distorted development, and was endorsed by the United Nations World Summit for Social Development in 1995 (United Nations, 1996).

In Africa, there is a resurgence of interest in the social development approach to address the intractable human development problems continentally and regionally (African Union, 2006; NEPAD, 2001; SARDC, 2001; SADC, 2003;UNDP, 2000; Republic of South Africa, 1997). The SADC countries have adopted the Millennium Development Goals, however the SADC region is faced with many challenges in achieving these goals (Tembo, Teputepu & Mwape, undated). Currently, the African Union is in the process of drafting a social policy for Africa informed by the social development approach. Essentially, social development is concerned with harmonising economic and social policies and programmes

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Policy

National policy:

Education White Paper 3: "Community service is intended to "promote and develop social responsibility and awareness among students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes" (Department of Education, 1997). According to Perold et al "the policy idea is that community service and civic engagement have a major role to play in transforming the teaching and learning pedagogy and research in universities, so as to produce outcomes that are responsive to the social, political, economic and cultural needs of the country. Characteristics central to responsiveness include reciprocity, mutual enrichment and the integration of the perspectives of poor communities in scholarly activities". (2007:60)

Compulsory community service in the health sector was introduced when the Medical, Dental and Supplementary Health Professions Amendment Act (Republic of South Africa, 1997) made a year's community service a requirement for the registration of health professionals as practitioners. Community service for health professionals is a policy initiative of the Department of Health that responds to unmet needs in under-served communities, particularly in rural areas. It provides graduating health professionals with the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of practising in conditions of poverty and underdevelopment. By 2005, a total of 12 334 health professionals of various types had undertaken community service across all nine provinces (Mohamed, 2006)

Institutional policy: Wits in 2003, Free State ,UCT Senate and Council adopted a social responsiveness policy in 2008; and most other universities also have some form of institutional policy on social responsibility and civic engagement.

Accreditation and quality assurance*: The *Founding Document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education* identified knowledge-based community service (service-learning) as one of the three areas for the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. The HEQC has developed criteria for the auditing of higher education programmes that include service-learning (Community Higher Education Service Partnership, 2003), which has served to further institutionalise community service in higher education. Opportunities have been created for universities to shape and guide teaching and research activities in response to the policy framework created by the *White Paper on the Transformation for Higher Education* (Department of Education, 1997). The promotion of community service in higher education has also been vigorously pursued through the work of the Community Higher Education Service Partnerships (CHESP) programme, a non-governmental initiative. Launched in 1999, the programme today operates in eight South African universities. By 2006, the principles and practice of service learning had been incorporated into some 200 credit-bearing courses across 39 different academic disciplines, involving almost 7 000 students ranging from first year to Master's level.

According to Perold et al, "the approach of integrating civic service into a range of policies and policy frameworks provides a measure of flexibility that promotes sectoral and local responsiveness. The social development approach is evident through the alignment of the service policy, programme goals and national development goals, as well as through the use of partnerships between government and civil society organisations to implement service programmes (2007:65).

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Practice

    Individual institutions: Civic engagement occurs through research, engagement with policy development, public commentary on development issues and strategies, disseminating knowledge and ideas derived from research, promoting active citizenship among the student population, empowering external constituencies, improving the relevance of the curriculum, and providing opportunities for lifelong learning

    Service-learning: Extensive and diverse examples exist across the South African higher education sector of accredited and curriculum-based opportunities for students to engage with poor or marginalised communities across the universities. **Challenge:** to what extent is this sustained in developmental terms (Wits Rural Facility is a good example of one programme that has been sustained) and is community participation reciprocal in its impact on scholarship and student learning?

    Regional/provincial cooperation between universities and government: In the Western Cape a memorandum of understanding was drawn up between a consortium of the four universities in that province and the Western Cape provincial government to develop a "learning region" that "that encourages the sharing of expertise and perspectives, and unlocks the reservoirs of creativity in developing and implementing home-grown solutions to regional challenges and problems." The initiative focused on scarce skills, education support by the university to schools, positioning the province in terms of the use of biotechnology, transport and anti-poverty strategies.

Defining civic engagement and social responsibility

Engaging with external stakeholders to find solutions to the problems of climate change, poverty, unemployment and a myriad of other challenges, speaks to the core of UCT's mission, which is to play an "active developmental role in our cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment". (UCT SR report 2008:2)

Senate-approved definition of Social Responsiveness stipulates that it must have an intentional public purpose or benefit (which) demonstrates engagement with external (non-academic) constituencies. (UCT SR report 2008:9) Forms of social responsiveness: socially engaged teaching and research, socially engaged service and learning. (UCT SR report 2008:10)

"***Embedding social responsiveness in the core activities of the university also positions the university as a player in addressing the challenges of society. As our society and the world changes, universities especially are required to respond to different challenges that arise, to ease the plight of the poor, to develop innovative solutions to many and varied problems, to offer informed guidance to those that our democracy has given responsibilities for leadership and service delivery, and to ensure that we engage with partners for purposes of social advancement.***"

Management and accountability for social responsibility may be positioned in the office of the VC or delegated to a DVC. In the case of UCT activities are then run through the Institutional Planning Department, Centre for HE Development, the Research and Innovation and Postgraduate Funding offices, and the Department of Student Affairs. Alternatively civic engagement may be managed through a social responsiveness unit that draws together deans of schools or heads of departments. Other arrangements also exist in SA.

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Recognition and reward systems:

At UCT institutional awards take the following forms:

- A 'Distinguished Social Responsiveness Award' that strongly focuses on reciprocal benefit to the partner (non-academic external constituency) and the university
- Social responsiveness is integrated into the KPAs for academic activities taken into account for *ad hominem* promotions. "Performance criteria applied in 'Rate for Job' (RfJ) evaluations specify that Social Responsiveness should be embedded in the three performance areas of Research, Teaching and Leadership/Management/ Administration for which required outputs, responsibilities and activities have been established.
- Student recognition through the provision of certificates to students who meet the following requirements:
    - active membership of a student development agency or other student society engaged in community service
    - heading or actively participating in civic engagement initiatives.

Opportunities for future development

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- **Civic engagement scholarship is still underdeveloped**. While the field is growing and academic work is published in journals that focus on specific disciplines or fields, the field of civic engagement itself remains relatively small. In the voluntary service sector, for examples, journals such as *Voluntas* and the proceedings from *ISTAR* conferences are the key vehicles for serious scholarship in this field. No African journals or publications are devoted to this field, except for the publications produced by VOSESA

- **University civic engagement and social responsibility occupies a low profile in the public domain**. A key challenge is to 'popularise' the research findings or the outputs of academic social responsibility programmes so that the universities become associated in the public eye with civic engagement, development and social responsibility.

- Some good examples of socially responsible **academic innovation** (see for postgraduate programme in disability studies which involved extensive civil society input and has attracted students from countries throughout Africa), but such **large-scale mainstream initiatives tend to be fairly isolated**. **More common is the 'project' approach** through which university departments apply their work in local communities.

- There are likely to be **significant opportunities for cross-national and institutional cooperation** around civic engagement and social responsibility within the SADC region.

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Challenges

- Foregrounding the significance and profile of civic engagement at institutional level remains a challenge. Although UCT presents a good example of how that university has institutionalised social responsibility in its work, the profiles that it provides demonstrate that this field of activity is still not mainstreamed. The UCT 2008 social responsibility report identifies **the need for a wider debate around the role of public universities in promoting the public good and in helping to address development challenges facing our society.**
- **Civic engagement in itself does not attract funding,** but needs to be expressed through other fields and disciplines. This makes it more difficult to isolate, define and profile the importance of the work *as civic engagement* and raises particular communication and positionining challenges.
- **The absence of clearly defined and measurable statements about the outcomes** envisaged for each of the civic service policies hampers assessment of the impact of service on servers and recipients. According to Perold et al (2007:65): "If civic service is to become a social institution that advances social and human development and 'provides exceptional return on investment', then the quality assurance of service programmes requires attention. To date, higher education is the only sector in which criteria for quality assurance have been developed by an external body (the HEQC), but this work needs to be deepened through research."
- Perold et al also point out that "**evidence-based impact assessments are an indispensable measure of strong policy** (Sherraden ibid). Partnerships between universities, research institutions and service programmes could help to assess change at regular intervals (e.g. over three- to five-year periods) and to measure the costs and benefits of such impact. For these studies to impact on policy reviews, the findings need to be widely communicated to influence policy deliberations throughout government and civil society."
- There is a need to **define the roles and responsibilities of government and civil society in service programmes** (Hanson, 2006). Support is required for cost-recovery among local organisations that house and manage servers, capacity-building for programme development, and the provision of accredited training that strengthens the

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