Non-Governmental Organisations as Stakeholders in the Implementation of Community-Based Research by Universities

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Abstract

Numerous research studies are conducted in communities surrounding universities. This paper illustrates the value of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in South Africa as stakeholders in an intermediary platform that can contribute to community development, based on research done by university researchers in these communities. The Quintuple Helix Model was used as a theoretical premise, viewing the importance of collaborative partnerships to contribute to sustainable development. The orientation enhanced in this paper is that research findings obtained from communities, in combination with the shared speciality areas and expertise of stakeholders such as NGOs, would serve as dynamic catalysts to bring stakeholders and researchers together in an innovative intermediary platform context that can facilitate development. A triangulation mixed-method design was used where a focus group discussion was held with 19 participants from NGOs, augmented by an open-ended questionnaire. The results indicated that NGOs can be viewed as strategic partners in community development and indicated how they could contribute in facilitating the implementation of research recommendations done by university researchers. NGOs are responsive to the needs and welfare of the people of South Africa supporting participatory democracy.

Keywords: non-governmental organisations; stakeholders; social innovation; social development

Introduction

Community-based research defined by the authors can be referred to as research conducted by all faculties, researchers and students with and within communities surrounding the university. In an effort to ensure ethically sound practices, universities

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should "give back" their research findings to the very communities who took part in their research initiatives to contribute to development within these communities.

Universities in their efforts to contribute to community development get involved in community engagement (CE) activities to respond to societal needs, and these activities should also ideally be integrated with teaching and learning activities, adequately resourced and monitored (CHE 2007, 24–25). There is ample evidence that CE at South African universities is regarded as one of the core aspects of universities' missions which contributes towards the facilitation of community development initiatives. In the context of this study the emphasis is on the use of research findings to effect development (CHE 2016; Department of Education 1997; DHET 2010; National Planning Commission 2012; Thakrar 2016). A core aim of CE, apart from its scholarly value, is to contribute towards the social and economic transformation of societies within which universities are located (De Lange 2012; Olowu 2012). This context includes their geographically, socially and economically interlinked relations with communities. Goddard and Vallance (2013) state that higher education institutions through their community engaged positioning can play a major role towards innovative local and regional development.

The remote location of many of the South African rurally based institutions can be viewed as an inherent strength as this creates the opportunity to incorporate surrounding communities and other stakeholders in developmental initiatives. In this regard NGOs, owing to their community-based positions and in partnership with rurally based universities, stand to contribute in innovative and entrepreneurial ways towards community development initiatives. The emphasis in this study is on social innovations that provide the impetus for community development (CHE 2016). Social innovation is about social change rather than profit maximisation. It results in improved welfare, quality of life and/or social relations (not mutually exclusive) and it is also about system-changing, altering perceptions, behaviour and structures, and resulting in profound societal change (McKelvey and Zaring 2017).

This study involved a rurally based university and its attempts to reposition itself in terms of its CE mission. One strategic goal is to partner with stakeholders to contribute towards community development through research. This university can be viewed, in fact, as deeply rurally based in terms of the South African context and is, as such, classified in terms of the DHET's (2010) criteria as a comprehensive university. Its location affords stakeholders opportunities through the generation of research findings to participate in social innovative initiatives (Verharen 2015). The developmental premise is advanced by research findings that connect stakeholders through knowledge-based social innovation-driven developments in order to deal with problems and other challenges in communities. This is, as Verharen (2015) states, even more crucial in African-based university contexts owing to the magnitude of developmental challenges, such as economic and infrastructural challenges.

The focus of this paper is on how NGOs as multiple stakeholders within an inclusive intermediary platform can contribute to community development using social innovations derived from research findings. An inclusive intermediary platform can be described as a system where research project planning is done and where eventually the findings of such research projects are synthesised through the analysis of data obtained from communities (Grobbelaar, Schiller, and De Wet 2017). This process is done in combination with the shared speciality areas and expertise of multiple identified stakeholders, such as NGOs, businesses, universities, government and the community. The inclusive intermediary platform serves as a dynamic catalyst to bring multiple stakeholders and researchers together in an innovative and creative way to facilitate development inspired and informed by research.

The Community

Debates often focus on what and who this amorphous "community" is (Kruss and Gastrow 2015). As stated, this paper focuses on community-based research conducted by university researchers in communities that participated in the provision of the research data. It is about the use and implementation of such research findings for developmental purposes within the community with the involvement of multiple stakeholders such as NGOs that could also be seen as CE activities. The emphasis is specifically on those communities that have provided the data and information to the university researchers during the research process.

The core function of a university is to produce knowledge and such knowledge needs to be used, in this instance, for developmental purposes (CHE 2016, 246). For a university to contribute to sustainable development in communities, it needs to establish partnerships. Universities are not viewed as community developers in the first instance (Kruss and Gastrow 2015). The university is compelled to forge partnerships with stakeholders who are also community-based, such as NGOs. It is also important to state that CE is seen as a scholarship-enriching process that relies for its implementation on the ability to forge multiple partnerships as developmental stakeholders (Boyer 1997; Grobbelaar, Schiller, and De Wet 2017). Hence the aim of this paper is to analyse how NGOs perceive their role as multiple stakeholders in the implementation of community-based research conducted by universities as members of an inclusive intermediary facilitating platform.

The University: Community Engagement Context

The university involved in this research has embarked on the strategically repositioning of its CE mission as a response to several dynamics that are facing universities today (CHE 2016, 266–267). The decolonising debate is one such dynamic interplay, together with the continuous call on universities to respond to societal needs (CHE 2007).

Against this background this university accepted the scholarly premise of CE as espoused by Boyer (1990, 1997) who positions CE as scholarship of engagement and poses that academics should transcend the teaching versus research debate by discovering a more creative way of being scholarly oriented. CE thus embeds the core missions of teaching and learning and research in the mission of the university (CHE 2016; Ramaley 2002, 1). In support of Boyer (1997), it positions engagement as,

> … an educational and research initiative conducted through some form of partnership and characterised by shared goals, a shared agenda, agreed upon definitions of success that are meaningful to both the university and the community participants, and some pooling or leveraging of university resources and public and private funds provided by other participants. The resulting collaboration or partnership is mutually beneficial and is likely to build the capacity or competence of all parties.

In this partnership an engaged premise requires research, teaching and learning actions to produce knowledge outcomes that could contribute to quality-of-life enhancing experiences for partners in the community. This necessitates that universities must position themselves to shift strategically from a passive producer of knowledge to an active participant (CHE 2016, 243). This collaborative arrangement leads to innovative discovery activities that involve multiple stakeholders (Glass, Doberneck, and Schweitzer 2011, 12). It is then purported that such activities should have diverse and immediate benefits to a variety of stakeholders inclusive of the communities who have been researched. These were some of the aspects that were explored in the focus group discussion with NGO participants.

In this research, it is accepted that engaged research includes more than one discipline and engaged research activities are often transdisciplinary (De Lange 2012, 94). This kind of a strategy relies very heavily on institutional capacity to make meaningful impacts in the contexts in which universities find themselves. Seeking and establishing partnerships to affect the implementation of research findings reinforces the engaged strategy and philosophy. Owing to the very nature of research it provides the opportunity for social innovations and entrepreneurial processes to be embedded in the developmental activities linked to CE. It is proposed, thus, that this should be facilitated by an inclusive intermediary platform (Grobbelaar, Schiller, and De Wet 2017).

The partnerships with NGOs were thus explored to determine whether research findings could be implemented in innovative and creative ways involving NGOs who are involved in community development work in the immediate location of the university. NGOs, according to Lisetchi and Brancu (2014, 91), are instrumental in "… performing in new and innovative ways the tasks of planning, organising, leading, motivating and controlling resources and people in order to achieve effectively and efficiently their purposes and objectives fundamentally connected to social needs".

Theoretical Premise

The theoretical premise of this paper is influenced by particular ontological qualities embedded in both the agentic and structural approaches to development and in this context community-based development. The combination of these two approaches, where it is recognised that both individual and structural qualities complement one another as powerful developmental drivers, leads to the acceptance of a position where inclusive social innovations cannot be solely viewed as an instrumentalist or technical activity in solving problems.

Cajaiba-Santana (2014, 44) states in this respect that social innovations are manifested in the change of attitudes, behaviour or perceptions, resulting in new social practices inclusive of the communities in which they occur. This results in change at the structural and individualist levels where the interplay leads to new social systems to improve the quality of life of communities (Lettice and Parekh 2010, 142). It is thus about social change that needs to be brought about. Inclusive social innovation happens when a new idea establishes a different way of thinking and acting that changes existing ways of doing and thinking within communities (McKelvey and Zaring 2017, 8–9). This is supported by Neumeier (2012, 55) claiming that new social practices are created from collective, intentional and goal-oriented actions aimed at prompting social change through the reconfiguration of how social goals are accomplished.

To facilitate these development initiatives, systems, structures and processes and partnerships need to be established based on inclusivity of all stakeholders. It is important to understand from this perspective, as Bryden et al (2017, 9) pose, that there is a causal relationship between structures for participation and innovative inclusiveness. In this context, it must be recognised that there are critical conditions to adhere to: the forms and types of knowledge that are needed for a more inclusive innovation process; structures that need to be established to facilitate development; and the membership or people and their expertise involved in the composition of such structures. The Triple, Quadruple and Quintuple helices, and N-tuples (Kolehmainen et al. 2015; Park 2014) are examples of such facilitating structures to deal with inclusive sustainable development.

The interplay of such actions and systems would be a key aspect embedded in the Quintuple Helix framework as an inclusive intermediary platform, hence the study proposes the Quintuple Helix approach (Carayannis and Campbell 2012) as the theoretical framework which incorporates the values, principles and practices of an engaged university (DHET 2010; Thakrar 2016). This approach supports the concept of a platform that seeks to operate and function in an environment that is situated in natural and social cultural contexts. It is further embedded in the community and engages with institutions such as the business sector, the NGO sector, government and the university, as a knowledge producing entity. The platform is being defined through the nature and quality of reciprocal and mutually beneficial relationships as well as a common goal, namely to improve the quality of life of the community through the use and

implementation of research findings generated by researchers, in this case from the university, which obtained the data and information from the relevant community (Park 2014).

The belief is also that this orienteering process creates the opportunities for enhancing societal impact in the form of social innovations and entrepreneurial opportunities for the involved stakeholders. This conceptual positioning is further informed by the principles of agency and the structural interplay between the community members and societal systems and structures such as universities. These innovative processes between individuals and structures which are linking up and sharing information and ideas are infused by norms, values and practices, all with the view of enhancing development initiatives in an innovative way (Carayannis and Campbell 2012).

In Figure 1 the Quintuple Helix Model is illustrated where the interplay between the different helices can be observed in a continuous and cyclical way with the aim to contribute to sustainable development.

The conceptual and practical approaches towards community development, with the emphasis on stakeholder involvement in the developmental contexts, have a historical context which progresses from the Triple Helix and Quadruple Helix to the Quintuple Helix Models. This developmental trajectory depicts the involvement of, firstly, university, industry or business and government as partners in this model. The inclusion of the "community" in this configuration resulted in the Quadruple Helix Model. The Quintuple Helix Model incorporates the inclusion of the natural and social-cultural and media contexts of communities which complemented the trail of developmental models (Park 2014; Provenzano, Arnone, and Seminara 2016).

Park (2014, 204) refers to the need to always consider the contextual situation and argues that the helices could manifest even as N-tuple models. However, the Quintuple Helix Model is the preferred approach mainly as a result of its inclusivity of the five intersecting helices which make the conceptual and practical aspects easier to manage and describe.
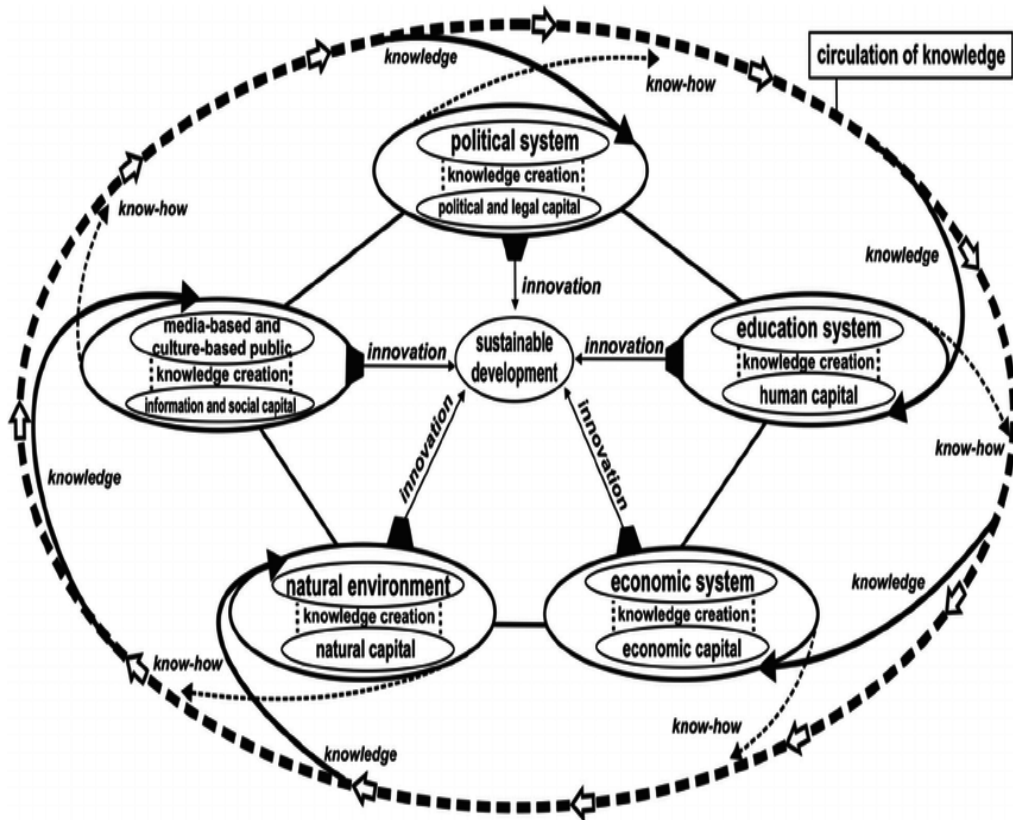
Figure 1: The Quintuple Helix Model and its function. Modified from Etzkowitz and Leydesdorff (2000) in Carayannis and Campbell (2012).

In addition, also significant in the Quintuple Helix Model are the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary qualities which are present at the same time. This is very significant because it combines in a co-creational way the disciplinary and indigenous knowledge fields provided by disciplinary and community experts. It is also important to note that the understanding of the five helices needs the involvement of the spectrum of natural, human and social sciences. The Quintuple Helix can thus also be proposed as a framework for transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary analysis of sustainable development and social ecology. It allows for the linking of knowledge and innovation to the environment. The Quintuple Helix also outlines what sustainable development might mean and imply for eco-innovation and eco-entrepreneurship (Diaconu and Dutu 2015, 12–14).

Involving community-based organisations such as non-profit organisations or NGOs in an inclusive way would build on the premise of stakeholders who are tied into a system or platform that facilitates community development through the use and application of research findings. This is supported by Kolehmainen et al. (2015) who indicate that the community also consists of ordinary people and their coordinated activities which can

be organised either temporarily or in a more permanent way, such as by NGOs and other associations. In a rurally based context, communities may be much closer to local government structures and local businesses which have their own dynamics to manage. The premise advanced is that collaboration within regional development networks should be clearly specified by focusing on knowledge-intensive developments (CHE 2016).

An important point for consideration is to understand that both specific and generally managed knowledge-based driven processes can be accommodated in the Quintuple Helix context. In this regard, university, business or industry, government, the community and its cultural and natural contexts are engaged purposefully to develop new knowledge, technologies and innovations with the aim of meeting both economic and societal needs. Knowledge-based development of remote, rural and less-favoured regions is very challenging as the preconditions are not naturally inclined to that line of development. This challenge requires visionary and strategic leadership enhancing the potential of innovative thinking and promoting innovative and entrepreneurial advances (Kolehmainen et al. 2015, 6).

Quadruple or Quintuple Helix actors need to be able to make decisions that share a common future by which the joint and shared visions are shaped. They also need to take actions to utilise and create knowledge resources and competences (Park 2014). Key stakeholders as espoused in this paper are the NGO stakeholders who are fundamentally important for their contributions to the intermediary platform whose premise is influenced by the workings and qualities of the Quintuple Helix Model. To understand their role, it becomes important to look at the NGOs as key role players in community development.

The NGOs as Collaborative Partners

The NGOs have three major responsibilities according to the Department of Social Development (2001, 7), namely to ensure, firstly, that the service programme is meeting the community needs in a most effective way, secondly, to establish a sustainable support base, and, thirdly, to ensure that the NGOs manage the people and resources in an accountable way. All three responsibilities can be strengthened by the inclusivity idea promoted in this paper.

Key values that underscore the work of the NGOs include, among others:

- being responsive to the needs and welfare of the people of South Africa;
- supporting participatory democracy;
- co-operating, collaborating and networking with other organisations around issues of mutual concern;

- applying people-centred development; and
- being mindful of the circumstances and concerns of the beneficiaries when making decisions that affect them.

The above-mentioned requirements and values align fundamentally and strategically with the Quintuple Helix needs. This also fits into the philosophy and operational requirements of the inclusive facilitating processes and functions of the intermediary platform and this also confirms that NGOs are ideally positioned to enhance social innovations.

NGOs are thus ideally placed owing to their community-based positions to be critically important for the functioning of an inclusive intermediary platform. In this paper, NGOs are seen, owing to their community-based locations, as a key stakeholder component of the inclusive intermediary platform. The platform is a facilitating system that ensures the use and implementation of research findings to the advantage of the communities who were involved in the provision of the data to the researchers.

Research Methodology

The research problem dealt with the following question: How can NGOs as stakeholders of an inclusive intermediary platform contribute to community development using research findings obtained through research at universities?

Research Design

A qualitative exploratory design was implemented. This allowed the researchers to determine the perceptions of the participants regarding their roles, activities, ability and willingness in a multiple stakeholder innovative platform to implement research done by university researchers. The participants were provided with the opportunity for an open, flexible and inductive approach into the phenomenon (Terre Blanche, Durrheim, and Painter 2006). The qualitative approach also had the benefit that the researchers could focus on the themes that emerged from the participants (De Vos et al. 2011). Babbie and Mouton (2001) add that, when following a qualitative approach, the focus will be on the research approach to get a comprehensive understanding of the social actions rather than attempting to generalise.

Sampling

A purposive sampling technique (Marlow 1993) was used in the study focusing on NGOs that were functioning in the surrounding community of the university. The researchers also made use of key informant sampling (De Vos et al. 2011) where a key informant was identified who was well known among the group of NGOs. This person assisted the researchers to identify several different NGOs that added valuable information to the focus group discussion. Electronic invitations were sent to the NGOs to inform them of the date and time of the focus group discussion.

The NGOs confirmed their attendance. Nineteen participants from nine different NGOs participated in the discussion. The participants were both senior practitioners as well as practitioners working with community members daily. Most of the NGOs had been operating within the community for the past 10 years and were very knowledgeable regarding the needs within the community. In the context of this study, NGOs can be described as both formal NGOs that have been in existence for a number of years functioning in more than one province, as well as newly formed NGOs that were created on the basis of community needs. The NGOs covered a range of areas of expertise including youth development, HIV/AIDS awareness and caretaking, community development, child protection, and caring for the elderly in the community.

Ethical Considerations

The role of the researchers and the aim of the study were explained to the participants. All ethical mandates were ensured in line with the university's Research and Ethics Committee. Anonymity was further ensured by not naming the different NGOs that participated in the study. All participants voluntary agreed to participate as they had the opportunity to make an informed decision for taking part after receiving an electronic invitation and a further explanation before the start of the formal focus group discussions. The participants were also given the opportunity to withdraw after the aim of the study and focus group discussion was explained to them. All participants agreed to form part of the discussion.

The two researchers explained the aim of the focus group, whereafter the group members were asked whether this was what they understood from the invitation that was sent to them to participate in the focus group discussion. The participants then all signed informed consent letters to take part in the study.

Trustworthiness and Data Collection

Before starting with the formal focus group discussion, the participants were asked to complete the qualitative questionnaire regarding some of the critical aspects that were to be discussed in the focus group to get their unbiased individual opinions. This contributed to the trustworthiness of the study as there was a triangulation of data obtained from the individual viewpoints of participants, as well as the collective ideas as they emanated from the focus group discussion (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007). This further allowed individuals who perhaps did not have the courage to make comments in the focus group to also voice their opinions. Aspects mentioned in the questionnaire were also discussed in the focus group. One of the benefits of a focus group is that it allows participants to be stimulated by other thoughts and viewpoints and encourages rich discussion.

The following key elements were covered in the questionnaire and focus group discussion:

- Identifying the concept of community

- Views on communicating research findings back to the communities who provided the information

- Role as NGO in giving back research findings to communities that provided the researchers with the information

- Significance of the sharing or giving back of research findings to the community

- University's role to assist with community development

- Who should take the responsibility to use research findings for community development purposes?

- Who should be consulted before getting involved with or doing research in a specific community?

- Ideas on the multi-stakeholder approach in giving research findings back to the community

- Role as NGO in the planning, executing and analysis of research projects in collaboration with university researchers

The researchers used one intense focus group discussion, with well-controlled comfort breaks in between, that lasted five and a half hours. The focus group discussion provided the opportunity to generate new insights and viewpoints that enriched the data (Bryman 2016). It was also congruent with the theoretical premise of the study that focused on multiple stakeholders' views. The atmosphere in the group could be described as positive and vibrant and the participants were all optimistic about the discussions that were held. All participants had the opportunity to introduce themselves and the work that their NGO was doing in the community.

The focus group discussion was digitally recorded and transcribed. The researchers also kept field notes and discussed observations with each other to contribute to the trustworthiness of the study. Triangulation also took place where the theoretical framework and methodological orientation were benchmarked which further ensured that the trustworthiness of the research was secured (Creswell and Plano Clark 2007).

Data Analysis

The recorded focus group discussion was transcribed verbatim and analysed using NVIVO qualitative data analysis software. All the questionnaires were also analysed and different nodes were developed and entered into NVIVO under the questions that were posed in the questionnaire. This contributed to a rigorous data analysis process.

The researchers made use of a thematic analysis. Themes from both the focus group and the questionnaire were coded into nodes in NVIVO. This allowed the researchers to sort

and analyse all the data. Nodes were combined and themes and sub-themes were developed. The process of discourse analysis also took place where the "envivo" quotes of participants were categorised under the themes.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The size of the focus group could be viewed as both a limitation and delimitation of the study. In terms of limitation it might have had an influence on some of the members' willingness to contribute; this was, however, redressed as a delimitation by giving all participants a qualitative questionnaire before the start of the focus group discussion to add their individual views to the topics discussed.

The size of the focus group contributed to the lengthy discussion as all the members introduced themselves and their service delivery fields.

Presentation of Findings

The following themes and sub-themes were derived from the data analysis that answered the specific research question of this paper, namely: How can NGOs as stakeholders of an inclusive intermediary platform contribute to community development using research findings as obtained through research at universities?

Finding will be discussed under the following headings:

- NGOs as a strategic partner in community development;
- NGOs as a facilitator in community development and the university as agent for sustainable development.

Theme 1: NGOs as a Strategic Partner in Community Development

From both the focus group discussion with the participants and the completed questionnaire it was clear that the NGOs could be viewed as a strategic partner for community development. Discussions centralised around the following sub-themes: NGOs work within an already established network within the community contexts, and have many self-drive initiatives and the ability to work with limited resources.

Sub-theme 1.1: NGOs have Established Networks within Community Contexts

NGOs working within a specific community generally have partnerships and knowledge of that community and could be very valuable to a university researcher in conducting research and ensuring that the research findings are communicated back to the communities, thereby possibly contributing to development. One of the participants in the focus group mentioned,

> We [NGOs] work closely with our communities so we are ideal to partner with in passing the findings back to the community.

This was also supported by another participant who said,

> Having a good relationship with the NGOs in the community can help the university to understand what is going on in the community.

The NGOs mentioned that they could further assist to identify all the relevant stakeholders within the specific community, such as local government and relevant businesses in the private sector that could contribute to initiating a strategy to give feedback on research findings.

Sub-theme 1.2: Self-drive Initiatives and Ability to Work with Limited Resources

NGOs working within a rural community context do not always have many resources available at their disposal. The participants conveyed a message of having a lot of self-drive and working with limited resources. One of the participants mentioned,

> … we need to work with what we have …

They further mentioned that having a university as a resource in their community could contribute to having the latest information within a specific knowledge domain.

It was very important for the participants to ensure that development within the communities is created and, as one participant stated,

> ... let the community take ownership and let's not create dependency.

This theme of not creating dependency and expectations within the community was also confirmed in the questionnaire. It was also emphasised that,

> ... researchers and different stakeholders who are not always working with the communities on a regular basis should not come and make promises, it is us [NGOs] that are left here when everyone leaves that needs to deal with all these often empty promises.

Theme 2: NGOs as Facilitators in Community Development

In analysing how the NGOs could be part of an intermediary platform, it was clear that NGOs can create spaces and opportunities for dialogue as they know the communities and how to deal with the needs within these communities. Most of the NGOs indicated that they were severely understaffed with limited resources, and thus were open to work with the university as part of a multi-stakeholder platform in dealing with community issues. One of the NGOs indicated in the questionnaire that being included in a multiple stakeholders' platform was important as

… this means unity and unity is what we need to learn as people!

Sub-theme 2.1: Creating Platforms for Capacity Development, Dialogue and Interaction

By understanding how NGOs could be a facilitator in community development, the participants mentioned that NGOs could assist with capacity building in communities, and one of the participants stated that,

> … by giving feedback on research findings it will assist communities to be hopeful as there might still be solutions for the challenges they are facing …

Another participant mentioned in the focus group discussion that,

> … we (NGOs) are the bridge that create(s) discussion spaces …

The participants had further practical ideas and, as stated by one of the focus group discussion members,

> … research findings can be communicated through community-based workshops, as well as electronic media and meetings.

This was supported by another participant saying,

> … community members are the cornerstone of community engagement.

In the questionnaire, the participants mentioned that they could serve as a mediator between researchers and communities to enhance participation among community members and stakeholders.

Sub-theme 2.2: Creating Opportunities for Development

In working as part of a multiple stakeholder platform participants mentioned that they could also assist researchers in identifying opportunities for universities for both student learning as well as research. One of the participants mentioned that the value of research findings could also enhance sustainable development,

> … findings might assist communities to identify possible business ideas ...

and another participant mentioned,

> … it can help increase the knowledge within the community.

A very important comment was made in one of the questionnaires that,

> research findings often get lost in a professional journal and valuable information never reaches the people in the community.

The possible role of the NGOs within the intermediary platform was further emphasised not by only mediating or facilitating but also as mentioned by one of the participants,

> We [NGOs] can also assist with the interpretation of findings.

Intervention plans of NGOs can further be enhanced with continuous research, and the participants mentioned the need for research to determine the impact of their services in communities as well assist them with reporting back to funders on the value of their services in the community.

Theme 3: View of University as Agent for Sustainable Development

Reaching out to the NGOs in the community elicited notions among the participants, noting that this information was also very important in moving forward with the CE strategy for the university and in ensuring positive relationships between the university and the surrounding communities. One of the participants stated,

> Universities should provide structures to allow for free exchange of information and experience

while another mentioned clearly in the questionnaire that,

> Their [universities] role is to assist local communities with development projects as they have a good mission of developing the community.

The university in driving these intermediary platforms could assist the NGOs by "building capacity of local NGOs to respond to the local needs in the community". It is very important for universities to be contextualised within the global context but also always to ensure that they are locally relevant. One of the participants viewed universities as

> … having got a lot of networks that could be helpful for communities to address their needs.

This was further supported by another participant who mentioned,

> Universities should not be viewed as separate but as part of the community, it [the university] does not consist of structures, but of people and they are coming from this community.

One of the participants made a very valuable observation and mentioned that,

> Intermediary platforms can work but they must not become too big with too many people.

Discussion

The involvement of NGOs as stakeholders from the community can be regarded as very valuable as this contributed to getting access to the relevant community members and to ensuring the identification of opportunities for social innovation (McKelvey and Zaring 2017). The NGOs immediately could identify their role within the suggested intermediary platform to assist with strategically connecting university researchers and students to learning and research opportunities that would be beneficial in focusing on development within the community. Thus, as a stakeholder within the Quintuple Helix context (Carayannis and Campbell 2012), the NGOs could assist with the development of social capital that could contribute to sustainable development. The continuous interaction of knowledge exchange between the university context and the NGOs could further assist social innovative initiatives in solving problems and challenges in the communities (Verharen 2015).

As identified by the NGOs, having an integrated partnership with universities' knowledge sharing could enhance a different way of thinking within a specific societal context. As supported by Neumeier (2012), these new ideas are inspired through collective, intentional and goal-directed actions. Findings supported inclusive development with the focus on ensuring that communities are involved and should take ownership for development initiatives. Dependency should not be created by promoting and suggesting solutions for communities, but rather by ensuring inclusive dialogues with all stakeholders. This ties back to ensuring both interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary engaged research activities that make meaningful impacts in society (Grobbelaar, Schiller, and De Wet 2017).

The need for partnerships to deal with societal concerns is emphasised by NGOs due to a serious lack of resources and human resources. The participation of universities in community development through scholarly research activities inspires hope for communities that often bear the brunt of poverty and social exclusion. The intermediary platform serves as a creative way whereby collaboration with NGOs can allow strategic entrance and connection for researchers in communities. Within the intermediary platform any societal concern could be dealt with by utilising the Quintuple Helix Model. The intermediary platform needs to be informed by scholarly research and these findings then need to be communicated back to communities. The nature of the research findings, in other words, is the core determinant of who comprises the membership of such an innovative intermediary platform as an inclusive system. By identifying relevant stakeholders as guided by the different helices, stakeholders can collectively add their knowledge (refer to Figure 1) to the societal concern and inclusively agree on possible ways to resolve the issue and ultimately contribute to sustainable development (Kolehmainen et al. 2015)

It is also important to state that the need to sensitise stakeholders about the collaborative opportunities created and facilitated through research requires the strategic positioning of such actions. Universities must ensure that they create the enabling conditions for

their researchers to pursue such collaborations through the development and management of their teaching and learning, research and CE policy frameworks. Furthermore, from a research methodological perspective, curricula must be reviewed to include the value of "giving back" to communities as a natural way of enriching the lives of such people. The moral and ethical challenges should also not escape the value that it adds to scholarship and graduate attributes that researchers need to embrace. The transdisciplinary nature of such intellectually driven collaborations can enrich the curricula and quality of the CE missions of universities. On a personal level, researchers can develop sensitivity towards communities and societies and their relationship with institutions, realising that knowledge does not exist in isolation from the context within which they exist. Knowledge production in this regard is co-created through active collaborations.

Conclusion

As the core function of the university is to produce knowledge, such knowledge should translate into development (CHE 2016). CE as scholarship practice can ensure a creative inclusive strategy to translate research findings into development opportunities. This is supported by Glass, Doberneck, and Schweitzer (2011) who mention that these collaborative partnerships lead to innovation discovery activities. NGOs can thus be strategically positioned by utilising findings from research to enable meaningful interactions between universities and communities. By aligning them in this way they are enhancing their own missions as entities, plus they are responsive to the needs and welfare of the communities. This is in line with supporting the values of participatory democracy, co-operating, collaborating and networking with other organisations around issues of mutual concern, as well as being mindful of the circumstances and concerns of the beneficiaries when making decisions affecting them.

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