

Best Practice -2

Title: Community Engagement and Empowerment through University's Outreach Programmes

Objectives:

The following objectives guide the university community programs.

1. *Social Mobilization of Vulnerable and Marginalized Communities*
 - To engage and mobilize vulnerable and marginalized communities around University campuses.
 - To promote social inclusion and community empowerment.
 - To organize community meetings and establish community groups.
2. *Promotion of Livelihood, Skills, and Financial Inclusion/Literacy*
 - To enhance livelihood opportunities for community members.
 - To develop vocational skills and improve financial literacy.
 - To provide training programs focused on skill development and financial inclusion.
3. *Development of Employment and Entrepreneurial Capabilities*
 - To develop employment opportunities for community members.
 - To enhance entrepreneurial capabilities, especially for women.
 - To empower women within the community through targeted programs.
4. *Institutionalizing Technical Support, Monitoring, and Learning in communities.*
 - To establish systems for providing technical support to community initiatives.
 - To ensure ongoing monitoring of community engagement activities.
 - To promote learning and adaptation for the sustainability of community initiatives.

The Context:

The University of Kashmir often focused more on academic excellence and in recent past recognized the need to expand its outreach and community-based interventions. This realization was driven by several contextual features and challenging issues that highlighted the necessity for a more engaged and inclusive approach. In the past, the university had a limited scope of community engagement, primarily focusing on academic and campus-centric activities. This lack of outreach meant that many vulnerable and marginalized communities in the surrounding areas, which are predominantly backward with poor socioeconomic status, were not benefiting from the university's resources and expertise. These adjoining rural and urban communities faced significant socio-economic disparities, with high levels of poverty, unemployment, and low literacy rates. The population is predominantly conservative and culturally diverse, further complicating efforts to implement change. These issues underscored the need for targeted interventions to uplift and empower these populations with special focus on women and young girls. The university recognized the need to create pathways for youth employment and entrepreneurial ventures to tap into their potential. The communities also faced various cultural and social barriers that impeded development and participation. The university aims to address these pressing issues and foster sustainable development in the region by implementing a range of initiatives targeting social mobilization, livelihood promotion, skill development, financial inclusion, and technical support.

The Practice:

The University of Kashmir's outreach program is a significant initiative in Indian higher education, characterized by its structured and holistic approach to community engagement and empowerment. This practice involves the formal adoption of nearby communities and villages, committing the university to their long-term development and signaling a deep, sustained engagement aimed at addressing their socio-economic and cultural needs. By adopting these communities, the university ensures a continuous and focused effort to uplift and empower the local populations. To maximize the impact of its initiatives, the university has established strong partnerships with government bodies and NGOs operating in these locations. These collaborations facilitate a thorough assessment of community needs, allowing the university to tailor its programs to address specific issues and identify potential beneficiaries effectively. These partnerships also enable the university to leverage existing resources and expertise, enhancing the overall effectiveness of its outreach efforts. Comprehensive assessments are conducted to understand the unique challenges faced by community members, including high dropout rates, socio-economic disparities, and gender inequality. These assessments help identify potential beneficiaries for various training and capacity-building programs. The university places a strong emphasis on community ownership, encouraging active involvement in the planning and implementation of initiatives. Social resource mapping is performed to link service providers, both governmental and non-governmental, with the community, ensuring that resources are effectively utilized and accessible to those in need. The university's outreach programs focus on building entrepreneurial skills, particularly among youth and women, to promote economic self-sufficiency. Key sectors within the community are identified, and targeted training programs are developed accordingly. For instance, through the USHA SILAI Schools initiative, local women in adopted communities receive training in tailoring and sewing, enabling them to establish income-generating units. In the similar vein, a project titled, *A Participatory Capacity Building and Skills Enrichment Training Program for Women from Marginalized Backgrounds in Kashmir (Project Savera)*, in collaboration with MOOL and sponsored by Tata Aerospace, has empowered many women to become financially independent. Another significant project is the partnership with Save the Children on peace education, which trains teachers, students, and community members in conflict resolution and socio-emotional skills required to make schools a zone of peace. This initiative aims to foster a peaceful and harmonious environment within the community, addressing both immediate and long-term social challenges. Also, the Sagg Eco Club engages community members in climate action and environmental conservation efforts, promoting sustainable practices and raising awareness about environmental issues. Despite its successes, the outreach program faces several constraints and limitations. The conservative nature of the local population can sometimes resist change and external interventions, requiring persistent and culturally sensitive approaches. Financial constraints also limit the scale and reach of the initiatives, making sustained funding a continuous challenge. Another challenge that greatly influences these initiatives is the lack of incentivizing the contribution of teachers as far as Academic Performance Indicators (API) or career progression is concerned. In the current academic framework, teachers' contributions to community service and outreach programs are often undervalued and do not significantly impact their career advancement.

Evidence of Success:

Our community engagement initiatives have made a substantial impact in the regions surrounding the University campuses. Through focused efforts on training and empowerment, we have successfully reached and benefited numerous women and communities.

1. Under collaboration between Social Work Department and USHA International, We have successfully trained a total of 150 women, equipping them with essential skills to enhance their livelihood opportunities. The Classical Silai School program has not only trained these women but also provided 70 sewing machines to support their entrepreneurial endeavors. Also, the Satellite Silai Schools have trained 80 women, ensuring that even remote areas benefit from our

programs. To further support ongoing skill development and production activities, we have established one training cum production center. Our initiatives have covered four districts—Budgam, Bandipora, Srinagar, and Ganderbal—reaching a total of 108 villages. These efforts have collectively contributed to improving economic stability and empowering communities in these regions.

2. The Area Community Development programs, under the Department of Lifelong Learning (DLL) at the University of Kashmir, focus on two villages: Mir Behri and Shanpora. These programs cover the entire population of these areas, which totals more than 4,000 people. Through these initiatives, we aim to foster comprehensive community development and address the specific needs of these populations with special attention given to livelihood and skill development. Development of Skill centre in the trades of Papier Machie (**103** Candidates trained), Self-employed Tailor (**25** Candidates Trained) & Bridal mehndi (**50** Candidates Trained) in three adopted areas Mir Behri Dal; Rakhi Zakura; and Shanpora, Habak respectively all in the near vicinity of University of Kashmir
3. In collaboration with MOOL/ SAGG Eco Campus and TATA Aerospace, the Department of Social Work, UoK trained and build capacities of local women in Lar Ganderbal and empower them to establish their own income generating units.
4. Through various sensitization programs and community visits, the university has reached thousands of women in both rural and urban areas. The areas covered include Nargistan, Leper Colony, Fakir Gujri, Ladoo, Sonwarai, Kangan, and more.
5. We have organized successful events such as exhibitions at the University of Kashmir and refreshment camps at religious sites, enhancing community engagement and visibility.
6. Community Assessment Reports have been submitted by various departments, including the Department of Social Work and the Department of Sociology, to the concerned government departments. These reports provide valuable insights and recommendations for further community development and support.

Problems Encountered and Resources Required:

The major problems and challenges are highlighted below:

- Community members often expect immediate financial benefits, while programs focus on long-term gains. Identification of target groups among of widely diversified populace is challenging.
- Mobilization of equipment / lab gadgets to the community setup and lack of University owned space like Skill centre / Community College/ Lab/ Workshop in the adopted communities
- Recognizing outreach in official roles and API scores can boost academic and researcher participation.
- Additional financial resources and transportation facilities are necessary for sustained outreach efforts.
- Increasing awareness and initial engagement among community members is crucial.
- Cultural and social barriers can limit participation; programs must be culturally sensitive and inclusive.

- Effective coordination among university departments and stakeholders is needed for impactful outreach.

Notes and Proofs:

Project Savera: A Participatory Capacity Building Program for Livelihood Generation among Women	<u>SAGG Eco Village</u>
	<u>SAAG/MOOL Eco Campus and TATA</u> https://youtu.be/EkxLjE51fIs?si=dSJcEAu5loaviCi
Activities	https://moolsustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/MOOL-Annual-Report-2019-2022.pdf
USHA Silai School Program In Partnership With University of Kashmir	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vrZj9Q2dotc https://youtu.be/nEk3h1tDsHc?si=Tou96T-MadUq-FTV https://socialwork.uok.edu.in/Main/Gallery.aspx?Gallery=e542092f-cb5d-45bb-8b87-19e6a57797fa https://socialwork.uok.edu.in/Main/Gallery.aspx?Gallery=7d201279-f3ac-4188-9eff-d6ef7ab203e8
Peace Education Programme	National level conference on peace education inaugurated at KU - Greater Kashmir https://socialwork.uok.edu.in/Main/Gallery.aspx?Gallery=95d2af14-be33-4ca5-bffe-974e55fe8961