Higher Education and Participatory Development
Participatory Development

This document is:
- the product of academic-practitioners from Asia, Africa, South and North America, and Europe, who came together in November 2006;
- intended as a platform for dialogue rather than a decisive statement;
- to be followed by future meetings, a proposed Journal, and a possible International Association;
- an invitation to join our effort to promote stronger linkages between universities and participatory development.
Participatory development is the process through which people, including the poor or the marginalized, shape projects, programmes and policies that affect their lives. It contributes, and responds, to poverty reduction, empowerment, gender equality, social inclusion, respect for human rights, and sustainability. It is an essential component of good governance. It grounds development in people’s cultures and priorities.

The participatory approach to development is effective across a wide range of sectors – from sanitation, to literacy, to micro-finance.

Higher education and participatory development
Universities and other higher education institutions already make significant contributions to, and benefit from engaging with, participatory development. They could do much more.

Engagement helps universities to improve the quality, relevance, and effectiveness of their teaching and research missions. It encourages them to reflect on their role in reproducing inequalities and to put more energy into finding solutions to challenging social problems.

A collective vision, purpose and goals for universities and participatory development
We believe in the need for a shift away from top-down processes towards both participatory approaches in education, action and research, and bottom-up planning and decision-making processes beginning at the grassroots level.

We recognize the benefits of collaborative and participatory processes that link theory with practice, and action with reflection. These approaches can lead to unique and diverse knowledge emerging from local conditions, linked also to knowledge generation at a global level. Such processes have the potential to respond to inequities due to poverty and social injustice by strengthening citizen rights and voices, influencing policy making, enhancing local governance, and improving the accountability and responsiveness of institutions.

We recognize that, throughout the world, knowledge and power influence development processes. Education at all levels plays a critical role as transmitter, reproducer or resister of a complex weave of knowledge and power relations. Education is itself becoming transformed through changes in its purposes and priorities.

These changes are influenced by new global standards and the transfer of policies, curricula and methods of assessment between countries. Our vision, purpose and goals reflect our belief that we must engage proactively in the shaping and development of universities and higher education institutions that promote positive change for all.

Our vision is that another world is possible, in which all individuals are recognized both as productive, educated citizens and as potential agents of change. We see universities embodying democratic values, making strong connections between head, heart and hands, and recognizing that their institutional goals go beyond the generation of wealth and the advancement of self-recognition.

Our purpose is to advocate and support the role of universities, colleges and other institutions of higher learning in:

- training educators to develop pedagogical strategies and teaching and learning processes that contribute to collaborative social learning, for goals of participatory development and social change;

- becoming sites of resistance to unequal power relations;
strengthening their own democratic planning and governance as other social institutions and development actors confront issues of representation and democratization in the field;

finding appropriate ways to demystify and make concrete the practice of participation, producing social change which removes economic marginalisation;

influencing wider structural, institutional and political forces as they educate individuals and local communities.

Our goals for universities and higher education institutions throughout the world are:

• a policy environment that facilitates direct and active engagement in participatory development processes;

• a community of learners, drawn from social, cultural, political and education institutions and civil society, sharing their experience, knowledge, skills and wisdom through an integration of research and practice;

• a curriculum that supports excellence, scholarship, rigour and validity of learning and teaching whilst assuring the rights, inclusion and voice of all;

• a strong and vigorous institutional base that values and encourages the continued well-being and development of all its members.

Our guiding principles include:

• Respecting diverse interpretations of knowledge and beliefs;

• Achieving common understanding, trust, humility and ownership of our actions;

• Recognizing the importance of commitment and political will to make change happen;

• Responding to critical problems whilst managing risks responsibly;

• Listening to and hearing the voices of others;

• Sharing control over and access to resources;
• Being accountable for our actions to all those with whom we engage;
• Moving beyond rhetoric to practice;
• Maintaining a reflexive and continuous learning approach to our collective efforts;
• Ensuring that our engagement as outsiders in other contexts is informed by an understanding of our identity and the potential impact of our own assumptions, beliefs and myths on processes of development and change;
• Involving all interested parties in all stages of the process;
• Reporting results to all parties in understandable language/terms.

Our key actions may include the following:
• Advocating for approval by university governing bodies that outreach from universities to local communities in both the North and the South is a high priority; outreach projects or programmes, and any support that facilitates these, should conform to the principles of participatory development;
• Making an inventory of existing university-based participatory development projects and programmes, highlighting innovations and good practice;
• Supporting and engaging in processes whereby priorities of participatory development are generated by communities and are informed by local voices and knowledge, and whereby research protocols are developed by indigenous communities for people, especially outsiders, who want to work with them;
• Promoting active engagement of administration, faculty and students in systemic participatory development; for example, by:
• decentralizing education and learning processes to communities
• establishing inter-professional education teams taught by faculty from different disciplines
• using a range of viable communication tools, including the internet, for remote discussion
• exchanging faculty
• seconding students to other (North/South) universities for specific projects
• exchanging library privileges, especially through internet access to northern university library sites;
• Working on both outcomes and processes of specific institutional change within the higher education sector, including:
• curriculum change
• hiring/recruitment of persons with participatory development experience
• fund-raising and resource identification
• participatory research programme development
• advocacy with decision-makers and accreditation bodies
• creation of participatory processes inside university decision making itself, including community representation;
• Taking a strategic view of the growth and evolution of participatory development processes by establishing realistic, yet challenging planning and implementation cycles for institutional strengthening;
• Engaging proactively in policy dialogues around development and change processes, at both the local and the global levels;
• Producing publicity for participatory development, including:
• on campus – news articles, websites, lectures, meetings
• in academia – papers, conferences
- through popular communication – press articles, popular magazines, TV, radio, web-based media, e.g. Wikipedia;

- Working with funding agencies to have participatory principles included in the requirements for funding.

**Why do universities have a unique role in undertaking these actions?**

Universities and higher education institutions are, by nature, international in their outlook. Their role as producers as well as transmitters of knowledge is important in a globalizing world, as well as in the national contexts in which they operate. Universities must also be willing to be “receivers” of knowledge. We are at a critical moment in our planet’s history, when moral and ethical global and communitarian efforts are needed urgently. Knowledge and the processes of learning are shaped by power relations, and the institutions and forums where teaching and research take place tend to reinforce the relationship between power and learning – a relationship that often is unequal and defined by those who can gain economically from it. Universities should be natural defenders of diversity and strong opponents of bland cultural uniformity. They constantly need to be challenged to take up these roles more actively, to foster critical analysis of social issues, and to avoid an ivory tower approach which excludes the voices of other community members. They are in a strong position to provide and receive opportunities for dialogue on how to counteract the increasing negative power of globalization over education. One of our greatest challenges is to help universities become spaces where critical analysis of social issues is fostered and to help them achieve and promote inclusion of the voices of all community members in democratic and policy processes.
Challenging questions that warrant further dialogue
Although benefits of participatory development have been seen throughout the world and are becoming more widespread, it is still the case that many people are not involved in such processes; many universities do not yet engage in ways that we have outlined in this document. Part of the reason for this is that there are still many questions which warrant further dialogue. We therefore need to continue and nurture a strong and active debate. For example:

• How should we strengthen networks of people both inside and outside university contexts, to link and develop relationships between institutions in the North and the South?

• To what extent can greater political will help to create more opportunities for engagement and collective learning?

• Should universities and higher education institutions help more in the systematic documentation and demonstration of change?

• Are they in a position to provide training and education for activists and community organizers, especially helping young people to develop and sustain their energy and idealism for positive change?

• Can they support research processes by facilitating the sharing of roles by students, staff and members of different communities?

• Should they also allow people to access new technologies and other forms of capital usually directed only for powerful enterprises, a process in which they can influence the priorities of the system of production itself?

Other questions will undoubtedly emerge as the dialogue around these issues continues.

Our invitation
We invite all those who are interested in working collectively towards the purpose and goals described above, who aspire to a similar vision, and who recognize the value of the guiding principles, to join us in our effort to support university engagement in participatory development. We are happy to receive additions and ideas that help to further our key recommendations, as well as a critique of those key actions. We welcome those who are engaged in a wide range of activities including the use and promotion of experiential learning (e.g., co-operative inquiry, practicum, community service learning, credit for products, internships) and of research and practice (participatory action research, health promotion practice, community-based participatory research, participatory evaluation, participatory planning, participatory governance, local economic development activities, social and environmental justice).

Background
The International Forum on Universities and Participatory Development was hosted by the University of British Columbia (UBC), 20-22 November 2006, with funding support from the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC). Initial suggestions and impetus for the Forum came from Thailand, Vietnam, Brazil, and Canada.

Planning of the Forum’s programme was led by: Peter Boothroyd, Prof. Emeritus, with UBC colleagues; Sheldon Shaeffer, Director, UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education, Bangkok; Peter Taylor, Fellow, Participation, Power and Social Change Team, Institute of Development Studies, Sussex.

The final programme included presentations and action-oriented discussions by participants from Botswana, Brazil, Chile, Canada, Ghana, Kenya, Nepal, Nicaragua, Switzerland, Thailand, Uganda, the United Kingdom, United States of America, and Viet Nam.

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