



The Role of University Community Engagement Programs in Influencing Higher Education Outcomes and Community Development: An Insight from Uganda

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ABSTRACT

A specialised approach to academic research, teaching, and learning known as community engagement entails actively involving communities in cooperative initiatives that improve university teaching, learning, and research objectives while also addressing the needs and opportunities of the community. In this paper, we investigate how university community involvement positively impacts higher education results and community development, primarily using one Ugandan public university and one Ugandan private university as examples. The concept of university community engagement, as well as its advantages and drawbacks for the institution, students, and community at large, were addressed in the present study. Communities gain from university community engagement as members and organisations from the community share and integrate their knowledge with that of faculty and students, resulting in an improved understanding of community issues and the development of collective capacity to address them, producing either or both short-term impacts and long-term transformational change. University community participation benefits students by enhancing learning possibilities that can result in new and improved outcomes in terms of academic learning, development of skills and competences, leadership, and good citizenship. Enhancing teaching and learning possibilities, growing student enrolment and retention, co-creating new information and ideas, providing opportunities for research, and improving the university's reputation are all advantages for the higher education institution. Despite the aforementioned advantages, community participation is associated with a reproach of being more difficult, expensive, and possibly problematic than conventional approaches of knowledge and instruction. Better methods for recording and communicating academic progress are required, and there's need to expand our awareness of important community engagement outcomes outside of the academic sphere. To promote sustainable community development and improve higher education outcomes, established and future higher education institutions must completely embrace and strengthen their community participation to a global scale. This may be accomplished through formalising community involvement, giving interested parties the necessary assistance and encouragement, implementing government policies that are supportive of the effort, and involving with as many international partners as possible.

Keywords: Community engagement, University outreach, University-Industry Linkage

1 Introduction

In today's educational contexts, it is becoming common for students to participate in academic activities with community partners (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Gregorutti, 2022; Mann & Bowen, 2021). University-community engagement takes on different forms, such as Community Service Learning (CSL) which places community service at the core of the student academic coursework, Community-based



Research (CBR) which involves collaborative research partnerships, Participatory Action Research (PAR), among others which all encompass a common theme - collaborative interactions among the university students, faculty and staff, with communities (Nelson & Stroink, 2020). University-community participation/engagements in any form are recognised as essential components of academic life in high schools and higher education institutions (Jones *et al.*, 2021; Mann & Bowen, 2021; Nelson & Stroink, 2020). Using universities and colleges to address community concerns is how the Canadian Alliance for CSL characterised CSL (Gemmel & Clayton, 2009). This definition is congruent with the basic academic mission and purpose of these institutions (Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). It is a kind of education which combines activities that promote deliberate learning with community service, reflection and reciprocity of knowledge, as emphasized by Gregorutti (2022) plus Mann and Bowen (2021). When the community is effectively engaged, collaboration to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes is possible for members of community groups and educational institutions. (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Gregorutti, 2022; Mann & Bowen, 2021, Purcell *et al.*, 2021). In order to address substantial social, economic, environmental, and health concerns at the community level, post-secondary educational institutions' intellectual and human resources are effectively mobilised through community engagement, according to Gemmel and Clayton (2009) plus Muwanguzi *et al.* (2023). It does this in a manner that is related to and consistent with the primary academic goal of colleges and universities.

Although the titles may vary, many universities include upper-administration departments for community involvement that include one or more of the words outreach, service, community engagement, and industry-academia linkage (Erickson, 2010). The idea behind getting students involved in community service is founded on the supposition that all parties i.e., university, learners, and community organizations give and receive valuable things in exchange (Erickson, 2010; Nelson & Stroink, 2020). Studies by Mann and Bowen (2021) and Erickson (2010) that examined the community benefits of a university outreach programme through the lenses of service-learning and community engagement found that university involvement in community programmes benefited communities in a variety of ways; the communities received tangible changes, their capacity e.g. in food production was increased, and creative abilities were stimulated (Erickson, 2010; Mann & Bowen, 2021).

Majority of academicians today for example, Araya-Pizarro and Verelst (2023), Mann and Bowen (2021), Muwanguzi *et al.* (2023), among others concur that student engagement in community-based activities improves educational results. In order to achieve these results, they also concur on a fundamental set of recommended practices (Purcell *et al.*, 2021). However, there is also disagreement over what constitutes best practices for community partners (Purcell *et al.*, 2021) and even what kinds of advantages participating students and communities might experience. Uganda's higher education system goes beyond the traditional notion of universities as locations for teaching and research, and instead should be viewed as an important intellectual resource that prioritizes community issues through community participation. This paper aims to increase knowledge of how community participation affects community development and higher education outcomes as essential responsibilities for institutions of higher learning.

Teaching, research, and community service have historically been the three main focuses of higher education's mission (Bender, 2008; Erickson, 2010; Gregorutti, 2022; World Conference on Higher Education, 2009). Although universities have traditionally engaged with their communities in a variety of ways (Gregorutti, 2022; Purcell *et al.*, 2021; Nelson & Stroink, 2020), community engagement explicitly fosters knowledge-driven relationships that have positive effects on both the university and the community (Mann & Bowen, 2021; Purcell *et al.*, 2021). In addition to raising overall research output and, most significantly, student learning results, community participation is a beneficial force that contributes to the success of Uganda's institutions of higher learning. This is as a result of the fact that, by definition, community engagement is impacted by how well university resources mesh with local circumstances (Mann & Bowen, 2021).

Community engagement has been seen as more difficult, more expensive, and potentially undermining traditional forms of knowledge and instruction, despite its enormous value to both the institution and the community. As a result, community involvement programmes have not received much institutional or financial backing (Stephens *et al.*, 2009). The situation deteriorates when institutional strategies for community development turn into competitive rather than cooperative efforts, prioritise short-term university revenue generation over long-term benefits to society, and ultimately turn knowledge into a commodity rather than a public good (Jones *et al.*, 2021). As indicated by Gemmel and Clayton (2009), there is need to expand our understanding of critical outcomes beyond the academic sphere and come up with new approaches to investigate and document the academic benefits that students get and share.

Except the recent work of Muwanguzi *et al.* (2023), there has not been much research done in Uganda on the effects of CSL and other community engagements on community development and outcomes in higher education. The lack of proper research in this field is due to a variety of factors. Due to the intricacy that results from including community as a variable, empirical study becomes challenging. Complexity is exemplified by factors like geography, cultural diversity, as well as a variety of personality types present in any society (Jones *et al.*, 2021; Erickson, 2010). It is also reasonable that study into the effects of community participation will lag behind other lines of study in the field's research agenda given that education-related scholarship has typically concentrated on students and teaching, as further emphasised by Erickson (2010). In fact, scholarly research into the phenomenon of CSL and other community engagements is still in its infancy and is just now starting to graduate to higher levels of research (Erickson, 2010, Gregorutti, 2022, Mann & Bowen, 2021, Purcell *et al.*, 2021).

This study attempts to review and explore the role of community participation in affecting community development and higher education outcomes in an effort to contribute to the research of students' community engagement. In order to understand and evaluate the impact that community service has on higher education outcomes and the community at large, it is intended that this research will spark a discussion among researchers. This study's main goal was to find out how community service affects outcomes in higher education and community development. The precise goals were to: i) understand the meaning of community engagement and how it has changed over time ii) investigate and assess how community involvement can improve community development and outcomes for higher education iii) provide future universities in the area with lessons learned from the achievements of particular institutions from Uganda; a public university (Makerere University) and private university (Islamic University in Uganda iv) recognise the constraints that communities and institutions experience when working together on community engagement.

2 Review Criteria

Information for the current study was produced using the document analysis method. With the use of document interpretation, a researcher can provide context and voice to an evaluation issue through this kind of qualitative research. The process of document analysis entails grouping information into themes, much like focus group or interview transcript analysis. The technique was utilised to gather pertinent documentary proof that would validate and support research-based findings. Analytical reading and study of a large amount of written material were required for the activity. This made it easier to extract pertinent passages that could be considered statements of fact to support proposed study aims. Journal articles, university strategic plans, project reports, and other items listed in the list of references were used as reading materials. Content was also created through observation, case study analysis, and conversations with university community outreach facilitators. The findings and responses to the question posed in the introduction are described in this section after a review of the relevant literature and observations. The part also explains the significance of the study's discoveries, presents the key findings, and places the findings in a larger context.

3 Evolution of University Community Engagement

Scholars and policymakers both domestically and globally are increasingly asking for a "Triple Helix Model" in order to encourage institutions to get more involved in community development (Gregorutti, 2022). According to this concept, universities must transit to a third "revolution" (societal development) in the twenty-first century, following the second revolution (research) in the twentieth century and the first revolution (teaching) in the nineteenth century (Gregorutti, 2022). Partnerships among universities and the communities where they are situated are required under this new revolution (Gregorutti, 2022; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023; Nelson & Stroink, 2020). To this end, Gregorutti (2022) urges that community engagement is a key criteria for university rankings and quality accreditation.

Extension and rural advisory services, contract research and policy analysis, community-based research, educational programmes and continuing education courses, specialised courses, technical help, and business incubators are just a few of the activities that universities cover (Nelson & Stroink, 2020). Whether they are rural, commercial companies, or public institutions, they all share the belief that higher education institutions should use their knowledge to the advantage of communities (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Gregorutti, 2022, Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). However, communicating with a population that isn't students calls for unique abilities, as articulated in Purcell *et al.* (2021)'s investigation into faculty participation in community engagement in higher education.

University-community service is not a novel concept in Uganda's higher education system. Ever since the mid-80s, "community engagement" has replaced the term "outreach" in discussions and practice surrounding community service in higher education. Community engagement denotes a relationship between a community and a higher education institution that is less paternalistic, more reciprocal, and inclusive (Bender, 2008; Mann & Bowen, 2021, Purcell *et al.*, 2021). In order to enhance Uganda's higher education system, it is imperative that universities make a sustained, institutionalized, and university-wide commitment to community participation and research in this field. There is need to promote, design, campaign for, and implement a community-engaged pedagogy with an aim of reconfiguring the core missions of Uganda's tertiary education.

4 Conceptualizing Community Service/Engagement

Higher education institutions recognise that there is some overlap between their three responsibilities for teaching and learning, research, and community engagement (Nelson & Stroink, 2020). Service-learning and some kind of community-based research are present where these functions overlap (Mann & Bowen, 2021, Sandmann & Jones, 2023). This strategy views community involvement as a necessary component of a university's ongoing operations. This idea makes the assumption that all research and instruction ultimately engage the community, whether directly or indirectly, and have a social, economic, or cultural influence, as highlighted in previous works (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Gregorutti, 2022; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). According to Gregorutti (2022), Purcell *et al.* (2021), plus Nelson and Stroink (2020), it is this community-inclusivity in the actions of institutions of higher learning coupled with the positive impact on both the communities and universities that gave birth to the terms 'engaged university', 'walking university', 'community-engaged pedagogy', and 'community-campus engagement'. Universities have been actively promoting "community engagement" in recent years, yet there is conceptual ambiguity, disagreement, and contestation that is mirrored in the greatly divergent definitions of what constitutes "engaged practice." In order to realise new ideas for university community engagement, universities are attempting to define what "community engagement" or "social responsiveness" implies as well as what strategic and systemic changes are already occurring or should be occurring (Kruss, 2012).

Community involvement is defined as the cooperation and reciprocity-based exchange of information and resources for the mutual benefit of universities and their surrounding communities (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Gregorutti, 2022; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). According to Gregorutti (2022) and Purcell *et al.* (2021), community engagement is a particular approach to academic research and teaching that entails

collaborating and/or partnering with external communities (business, industry, schools, governments, non-governmental organisations, associations, indigenous and ethnic communities, and the general public) in order to address needs and opportunities in the community while also advancing the university's goals for teaching, learning, and research. This corroborates with Sandmann and Jones (2023) with a perspective that community engagement is an academic undertaking when the advancement of knowledge and understanding is viewed as being dependent upon external sources of wisdom and competence. According to Mann and Bowen (2021) plus Melaville *et al.* (2006), CSL combines academic study with community service to enhance learning, instil civic duty, and build communities. The service project fulfils a need in the community that students have recognised (Melaville *et al.*, 2006). It also links to academic objectives and gives students a chance to reflect and celebrate.

Community engagement is a joint venture among universities and their community partners that entails an exchange of knowledge and experience to realise mutual benefit rather than being a separate or distinct activity within a university (Gregorutti, 2022, Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). Knowledge results and products that are valued assets for both academia and the community interest are produced by engaged research, teaching, and learning (Jones *et al.*, 2021; Nelson & Stroink, 2020). As a result, higher education shifts from being a passive generator of information to being an active participant in collaborative discovery activities that benefit a wide range of stakeholders (Nelson & Stroink, 2020). According to Gregorutti (2022), many academics acknowledge the financial support from universities towards community-based research.

In accordance with the fundamental academic mission and purpose of these institutions, CSL is characterised by the Canadian Alliance for CSL as a strategy for engaging universities and colleges in addressing community challenges. When attempting to convey the significance of CSL to institutional leaders, such a formulation is especially helpful because it links CSL to the fundamental academic mission (Mann & Bowen, 2021). Communities are served by emphasising the mobilisation of resources to address pertinent challenges, and educational and governmental policy makers are served by demonstrating the applicability of CSL to public policy. This concept was developed to provide a clearer explanation of the advantages of CSL in terms of both educational and community results (Mann & Bowen, 2021). A more inclusive definition of CSL has recently been taken into consideration, moving away from one that primarily focused on outcomes that were identified as mutually beneficial for community organisations and educational institutions, and towards one that incorporates and is more open and explicit about the benefits participating students themselves achieve (Gemmel & Clayton, 2009). In community engagement, academic partners' research, teaching, and learning activities are improved as faculty, students, and members of the community collaborate to exchange knowledge and address community issues (Gregorutti, 2022; Holland & Ramaley, 2008; Mann & Bowen, 2021).

5 Benefits of University-community-engagement to the University and Student

Jones *et al.* (2021) highlighted three models through which the effect of university-community engagement is realised; (i) the social justice model, which emphasises community empowerment, learner integration of classroom material with practice-based learning, and interactive community service projects (ii) the economic development paradigm that prioritizes innovation, technological transfer, and economic growth through community involvement, and (iii) the public good concept centered on improving the world by supporting community development, revitalization initiatives, and the formation of responsible citizens who are dedicated to a sustainable future for all.

CSL is a sort of experiential learning that has been shown to have academic and pedagogical value and is crucial in producing significant plus distinctive learning results (Mann & Bowen, 2021, Purcell *et al.*, 2021). As a result, this contributes to the validity of CSL as pedagogy rather than just a nice but ancillary kind of community service for students in higher education (Gemmel & Clayton, 2009; Mann & Bowen, 2021). In this regard, Mann and Bowen (2021) plus Jones *et al.* (2021) emphasized the need for thoughtfully-designed

community-engaging curricula as well as service-learning course design in institutions of higher learning, in a bid to reflect, reciprocate and contextualize experience for students, faculty and community partners.

Nelson and Stroink (2020) reported the emergence and development of novel, varied courses, including 'Food Issues in Northern First Nations' as a fruitful result from the participation of faculty, staff, and university students with several community groups including food banks, government and non-government organisations, on the theme of food security and sustainable food accessibility. This collaborative interaction also gave birth to several research articles accordingly. Relatedly, a quasi-experimental study provided evidence that a service-learning pedagogical model not only boosted the criminal justice statistics students' applicability of statistics in the criminal justice field, but also equipped them with professional skills for career success (Mann & Bowen, 2021).

As a matter of fact, community outreach programs are not only a great boost to the University's public image/reputation plus social responsibility, but are also lobbying platforms for faculty scholarships (Mwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). Ultimately, this improves the human resource quality of the university (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023, Gregorutti, 2022).

Students from Makerere University reported that the project improved their learning, skills, and knowledge on community work and food processing in a food value chain enhancement project carried out in the Nakasongola district of Uganda with assistance from Save the Children - Uganda (Figure 1) (Kisambira & Alhaj, 2009).



Figure 1: University students (in yellow aprons) and farmers displaying their processed products (A); Brainstorming and sharing ideas on agro-processing among students, their lecturer and farmers (B). (Kisambira and Alhaj, 2009)

According to Melaville *et al.* (2006) plus Mann and Bowen (2021) who cited a number of research in support of this assertion, including students in more real-world learning settings would considerably improve student achievements. About half of the 761 students in 35 classrooms who participated in a study of the Colorado Learn and Serve Programme showed significantly higher levels of civic responsibility, school engagement, and community involvement than non-participants (Melaville *et al.*, 2006).

For more than a decade, Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU), Main campus has been extending community outreach programs to the local communities in Mbale district and other surrounding districts like Sironko, Soroti, Bukedea, Namutumba, among others. For example, 93.1 IUIU FM, the University's radio station reaches out to local communities, sources for community members with a passion for broadcasting, news reporting and other media-related activities. These individuals are given hands-on training by staff, faculty members and senior students to develop their competence. Evidently, some of these trained community members consequently enroll for media and communication-related programs at the University whereas

others eventually get job opportunities at other media houses as a result of these outreach programs. By arranging a one-week radio workshop in January 2024, Department of Mass Communication and IUIU FM hoped to close the gap among young people, such as high school students, vacationers wanting to try their hand at radio-broadcasting, and seasoned professionals looking to hone their craft. The training programme addressed a broad range of subjects, including the principles of radio production, screenplay writing, voice modulation, audio editing, efficient use of broadcast equipment, investigating new trends, and the challenges of sustaining audience engagement in the digital age. Besides equipping participants with the techniques and skills of radio broadcasting, they got an opportunity of hosting live mini radio talk shows on 93.1 IUIU FM (Figure 2). Field competences of the Mass Communication students were polished, bringing their career dream of journalism to reality. This additionally increases the university's community impact and public repute. Universities are no longer exclusive ivory towers for the privileged; rather, a successful university seeks to improve the community in which it exists. IUIU made this kind of contribution.



Figure 2: A community participant of the radio broadcasting workshop delightfully conducting a mini radio talk show at 93.1 IUIU FM

Through this radio station, the Food Science and Nutrition Students also get an opportunity of directly engaging with community members who have several nutrition/diet-related concerns, and give nutritional counselling accordingly to such individuals, guiding them on healthy food choices and how to ensure food security amidst scarcity and poverty. This has undeniably helped the students deal with real-life scenarios in their career fields, enhanced their competence and greatly benefited the society with free nutritional knowledge.

Similarly, in November 2023, the IUIU faculty of law established the legal aid and enlightenment clinic, which is a great addition to the university's list of community engagement programmes. Its goals are to give the general public access to essential legal services and to give law students real-world experience through community legal outreach programmes and legal counselling. One of the main goals of this legal clinic is to close the gap between legal education and the real-world application of the law, as well as to improve the

lives of those consulted by means of lawful but peaceful conflict settlement. Law students gained invaluable real-world experience handling real legal challenges in the Pallisa district's legal aid clinics in the areas of Pallisa town council, Pallisa secondary school, Apopong community, Gogonyo community, Gogonyo secondary school, and Akisim community. Student projects covered a wide range of legal topics, from housing conflicts and job challenges to family law and immigration issues. "We are training students to be future lawyers who are not only interested in money but to serve the community as well. We are not just training them to be lawyers in the chambers." stated the Dean of the Faculty of Law.

Additionally, by ending violence against the community's most vulnerable groups, this effort improves social justice and equity while bringing justice closer to the people. Communities are made aware of the different forms of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, including how to draft a will, manage a deceased person's property, and obtain letters of administration, among other things, through these legal aid and enlightenment clinics. Law students saw that a large number of community members suffer in silence as a result of their lack of legal knowledge. Law students said that these kinds of community outreach programmes made it clear to them that the law affects society in real ways and serves to advance justice, peace, and security in the nation. Because students gain an understanding of the practical applications of the material they study, it also enhances the quality of legal education. As the exercise exposed law students to the legal realities and difficulties that people face, it also developed in them a humanitarian spirit of giving back to the community. This project could lead to cooperative research between these communities and IUIU as well as further educational possibilities for the community people taking part in the study.

Service learning has a favourable impact on students' goals as well as abilities in relation to their employment and careers/professions (Gregorutti, 2022; Mann & Bowen, 2021; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023), plus enhancing planning skills, interviewing ability, and a greater desire for future education (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023). Research indicates that students who engage in service learning are more likely to select vocations that assist others or that they find personally fulfilling (Gregorutti, 2022, Mann & Bowen, 2021; Melaville *et al.*, 2006). Students who had completed community service in Canada agreed in the Gemmel and Clayton (2009) report that CSL was accomplishing much more than just improving their school experience.

The opportunity to collaborate with communities to effect major change inspired students to show interest. Their understanding of local concerns was expanding in ways that reading books or attending lectures alone could not (Gemmel & Clayton, 2009). Students also developed specific skills and talents and obtained a better grasp of possible career paths and opportunities for their own personal and professional growth. This corroborates with Mann and Bowen (2021)'s report in which speech language Pathology students who were engaged in international service learning in Botswana exhibited improved and multicultural interaction skills. Furthermore, Gemmel and Clayton (2009) observed that students achieve notable outcomes in terms of employment experience, comprehension of non-profit management and governance, professional development, and the realisation of their "change the world" goals.

Gregorutti (2022) and Muwanguzi *et al.* (2023) assert that effective teaching strategies improve student retention, career choice, academic achievement, and the development of social and civic responsibility. Giving students the opportunity to learn outside of the classroom allows them to gain knowledge through practical application and develop advantages such as motivation, self-confidence, communication skills, and self-esteem (Mann & Bowen, 2021; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023).

An engaged teaching programme that includes student learning guarantees graduate employability while sharing cutting-edge knowledge with the government, business, industry, school, and community-based contexts that students are a part of (Gregorutti, 2022; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). Students can also advance a sense of commitment to their career, lifelong learning, and community improvement through work-integrated learning, internships, academic service-learning, international experiences, and other forms of experiential learning (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Mann & Bowen, 2021).

Community service enables meaningful ties with the community, which enhances staff and student learning and their comprehension of society (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023; Sellamna & Gebremedhin, 2015). Engaged teaching methods significantly improve the lecture-heavy knowledge delivery that is typical in most universities because of their positive effects on students' learning and development (Gregorutti, 2022). The higher investment in experiential and active learning models - which rely on interactions with outside partners for engaged teaching and learning, is what leads to improved learning gains (Araya-Pizarro & Verelst, 2023).

6 Community Development as a Result of University Community Engagement

Successful collaborations with institutions have a significant positive impact on communities (Gregorutti, 2022; Mann & Bowen, 2021; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). Engagement means that communities are collaborators in knowledge creation and interpretation through cooperative research and learning activities as opposed to being solely academic laboratories (Sandmann & Jones, 2023). Giving communities credit for their intellectual assets and allowing them to engage in knowledge creation directly raises the community's ability for action as well as problem-solving. Engagement opens up university knowledge resources to communities, enhancing their social, economic, environmental, and cultural capacity (Gregorutti, 2022; Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023, Jones *et al.*, 2021). A higher feeling of corporate and societal duty, and consequently, the common good, can be achieved through increasing the number of knowledgeable and engaged citizens (Jones *et al.*, 2021). According to Sandmann and Jones (2023), this can enhance overall educational levels, create educated dialogue on issues that affect quality of life, and promote social cohesion plus social transformation.

Information transmission and exchange that directly benefits private sector companies, especially spin-off companies established from collaborations with external researchers and CSL, has historically helped communities (Mann & Bowen, 2021). By creating novel knowledge alliances that result in immediate and measurable fiscal paybacks, the development of novel interventions, programmes, policies, and practices that enhance social cohesion, safety, health, education, environmental sustainability, and civic involvement increases this capacity (Sandmann & Jones, 2023). Gains from engagement may also have indirect but nonetheless demonstrable economic impacts (Muwanguzi *et al.*, 2023). Targeting socioeconomic inequality, for instance, could improve societal health, reduce reliance on welfare and remedial education, reduce crime and violence, and increase volunteerism rates. Engagement in a culture that values entrepreneurship and innovation can boost social capital and economic stability. Engaged learning and research activities, for instance, strengthens small companies' ability to engage in social and commercial entrepreneurship in response to possibilities and needs within the community.

According to Jones *et al.* (2021), an exchange programme between low-income women entrepreneurs in the area and academics at Viña del Mar University enhanced the marketing strategies for the former's products, which included home décor, dresses, ponchos, and hats. Additionally, the programme helped the Valparaíso Region of Chile (South America) grow productively. Similar to this, a clinical placement programme for service-learning that Australian speech pathology students at La Trobe University began in 2015 and piloted in Cambodia has produced effective therapeutic interventions over time to support Cambodian children and their families who have communication and swallowing difficulties (Jones *et al.*, 2021).

Benefits of community involvement in university students' educational experiences include developing community capacity and dedication to individual learning and education. When university students participate in mentoring or tutoring activities with children and youth, the norm is set that going to college is attainable for everyone, regardless of their financial situation.

Several institutions of higher learning in Uganda have set up coordination units on their campuses as well as community involvement programmes in order to help communities. For instance, Makerere University's private sector engagement forum is a division that organises university collaboration with the private sector. By providing them with access to processing facilities and technical support to improve their capacity in

production, marketing, and business management, the Food Technology and Business Incubation Centre (FTBIC) at this university gives students and recent graduates a platform to try their hand at entrepreneurship. To interested graduate entrepreneurs and other clients in the food industry, the FTBIC provides product development, training in food processing, access to contract processing, food analysis, and technical advice, particularly on subjects related to quality management, processing, and packaging (Muyonga, 2015). FTBIC also has a mobile fruit and vegetable processing plant (Figure 3) designed by Makerere University staff that has been deployed in various parts of Uganda in order to help and facilitate communities in processing mangoes and tomatoes, enabling crop stabilisation and value addition (Muyonga, 2015). The FTBIC has improved ties between the university, the corporate community, as well as research in food science and technology. Students at Makerere University majoring in Food Science and Technology reportedly had access to hands-on training through the FTBIC, which boosted both their technical and entrepreneurial skills, according to Muyonga (2015). The aforementioned author also said that the Food Science and Technology courses would be revised to reflect the knowledge gained from the community involvement and the incubation project.



Figure 3: *Mobile fruit processing plant processing mangoes in Yumbe district, Uganda. (Muyonga, 2015)*

In order to improve the food value chain in Nakasongola district, Save the Children - Uganda and Makerere University teamed in 2008. In order to add value to agricultural products and transmit better processing methods from the university to the farmers, the project involved around 15 farmer groups from 9 sub-counties (Kisambira & Alhaj, 2009). Through the formation of food microenterprises based on local produce with assistance from students and associated organisations, the project aimed to increase the incomes of farmers and food security. The establishment of food processing facilities, training provided by university students, and market connections for local producers' goods all benefited the communities (Kisambira & Alhaj, 2009).

In the same vein, Mann and Bowen (2021) gave an insight of the positive impact realized from the community, university, and extension initiative that includes a satellite food bank; the community-based participatory action research approach increased the community's healthy food availability, accessibility, and consumption, in addition to availing a free knowledge opportunity for preschool children and older adults.

Over the years, Islamic University in Uganda (IUIU) has continuously organized medical camps in different rural districts of the country, to extend medical services towards the poor yet vulnerable communities. For

instance, a free medical surgical camp was held in the West Nile region in October 2023 by IUIU, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and private medical practitioners in Uganda. Over 2,000 patients received free medical care at Yumbe Regional Hospital and Yumbe Health IV center, as well as hernia screenings and surgery (Figure 4). The one-week camp's primary focus was on hernia surgery, screening, and counselling. Most of the patients were from South Sudan's refugee communities in the area as well as Yumbe, Moyo, Koboko, Maracha, Madi-Okollo, and Arua. The Yumbe District Health Officer praised IUIU and its partners for saving many lives by bringing medical services close to underprivileged communities that needed them but could not afford them. The health officer stated that it was challenging for the major health facilities in the aforementioned districts to perform surgeries on patients with such conditions due to the shortage of specialists. Due to the increasing number of such patients in the region, some patients (beneficiaries) requested for the medical camp duration to be extended for at least 2 weeks.



Figure 4: *Medical practitioners carrying out hernia surgery on a patient during the IUIU-OIC medical camp in West Nile Region, Uganda.*

Relatedly, IUIU Female campus' medical centre quarterly organises medical camps from where it offers free medical services to nearby communities like Kabojja (Figure 5). Such services include HIV testing, counselling and guidance, dental services, ears, nose and throat screening, typhoid screening, urinalysis, cancer screenings, maternity and child-health services, male circumcision, blood donation, ultrasound scan services, among others. Services of this camp have greatly improved the health status of nearby communities and enhanced the relationship of the university with the communities around.



Figure 5: *Community members ready to receive medical services from the IUIU Female campus' medical centre team.*

7 Authors' Viewpoint

Undoubtedly, higher education institutions have a responsibility of supporting the development of sustainable communities, and actively engaging students in this cause, for the benefit of all the three parties involved. There is increasing evidence of the collaborative efforts and services that universities engage in with their surrounding communities. Many a times, the achievements realized are locally-focused. However, for the community benefits to be more impactful, far-reaching and long-term, community engagement needs be internationalized. This can be achieved by universities engaging with as many external stakeholders and international partners as possible, which shall enable university operations reach a wider scope, foster interculturalism, diversity, increase global reputation and opportunities. To our best knowledge, there is a dearth of information concerning internalization of university operations with the community.

Sustainable Development Goals being a key theme in most community endeavors, it is prudent for universities to strategically align both their curricula and engagements with the community towards this common theme. This way, the benefits that accrue from such engagements shall not only be more impactful but also market the university locally and across borders. Universities rewarding, encouraging and motivating staff and faculty who are proactive in community service/engagements and community-oriented research bring up a sense of social responsibility. Additionally, it is better if results of such engagements are published and made freely available to all community members.

In Uganda, community-campus engagements are mainly evidenced in skill-based plus service-based programs such as food science, medical and allied-health science programs, environmental science, engineering programs, social sciences, among others, than theoretical programs. However, it is important to note that just a few of such interactive collaborations have a global touch, and in most higher education institutions, community-campus engagement programs are still in their infancy. This is mainly due to little institutional financial support, to extend university service to the most-deserving communities which are sadly usually located in rural or hard-to-reach areas. We urge Uganda's ministry of higher education to enact a community-engagement policy and models that will act as a roadmap for education institutions towards active engagement with the communities. This will directly or indirectly influence institutions' top management to source for funding or resources that will positively respond to this call. Unfortunately, the

authors could not find information on whether higher education institutions in Uganda and the communities involved in the university-community initiatives have ever evaluated the outcomes of such engagements.

8 Conclusion

Through the active participation of students, institutions, and community people, CSL is a significant method of involving higher education institutions in understanding and addressing community issues. These initiatives are most successful when they are purposefully created to incorporate the resources, needs, interests, and assets of all the three constituencies. Communities gain from the sharing and integrating of the knowledge of community members and organisations with that of faculty and students. This leads to a better understanding of community issues and the development of a community's capacity to address them, producing either or both short-term impacts and long-term transformational change. Students gain from improved learning opportunities because they result in better academic learning, the growth of skills and competences, and leadership. Institutions gain from greater chances for teaching and learning, higher student enrolment and retention, collaborative generation of fresh knowledge and concepts, chances for research, and increased institutional prestige—all of which improve the results of higher education. Only if students are involved in learning that relates to the outside world and helps communities grow will the goal of educating all students to high standards be completely realised. Despite the fact that no single strategy can ensure success, community-based learning is a crucial way to meet several objectives.

9 Recommendations

To respond to claims that institutions are unresponsive, inconsistent, and indifferent to community concerns, institutions must engage the community more directly and build more mutually beneficial partnerships. Uganda needs to create a national strategy on higher education community participation that will serve as a roadmap for institutions and community partners on how to involve students as well. Policies must be put into place to encourage interinstitutional cooperation on vital local or international goals. Beyond the academic sphere, there is a need to widen the scope of our understanding of crucial outcomes. Future universities will be interested in adopting CSL programmes for their schools as a result of this. To track the effects of community participation on students, institutional productivity, and community capacity, universities should construct key performance indicators in this regard. In the same line, we advise including community engagement in government assessments of institutional profiles and the institutional assessment regime. Universities should create evaluation standards for community service that are distinct from academic ones. Additionally, excellent community service efforts must receive the same recognition as academic work, including teaching, learning, and research. Clear and unambiguous criteria that can serve as a foundation for evaluating staff, students, and institutional performance and foster career growth are necessary for community service evaluation. Additionally, we urge for universities to amplify their contributions to society through internationalisation of such engagements and the curricula. In this context, universities shall play a pivotal role in steering up the linkages of local communities to the global society and global society to the local communities. There is also need for both universities and communities to evaluate the impact of their engagements.

10 Declarations

10.1 Competing Interests

No conflict of interest exists, according to the authors.

10.2 Publisher's Note

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