University community service and its contribution to the Millennium Development Goals: a pan-African research project

Dorothy Nampota and Julia Preece

Abstract

This paper provides a comparative analysis of how four African universities applied their community service mission to address the internationally agreed Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). This was a one-year action research project funded by the Association of African Universities called *Implementing the Third Mission of Universities in Africa* (ITMUA). The study compared the practices and outcomes of university relations with their communities at the National University of Lesotho and the universities of Malawi, Botswana and Calabar in Nigeria. It used a case study approach to examine how the university engagement or service activities addressed the MDGs, particularly MDG1 (reduction of poverty), the nature of their engagement, and the challenges or policy implications for enhancing the way universities contributed to national development needs. The paper concludes that there is a need for an institutional strategy for community engagement that links more closely with the notion of service learning in order to realise its potential.

Introduction

Although the concepts of community engagement, community service and service learning are firmly enshrined in South African policy (Department of Education and Training, 1997; Department of Education, 2001), in other African countries this is not the case. The term 'community service' – as one of the university's three core functions – is often explicit in university strategic plans and/or mission statements but its application is often undeveloped.

However, on a global scale there is growing interest in the way universities address regional, as well as national and international development needs. This is reflected in higher education policy recommendations (World Bank, 2009), academic literature (Waghid, 1999; Fourie, 2003; Inman and Schuetze, 2010)

and international initiatives to stimulate 'engagement' (Pascal Universities and Regional Engagement (PURE), 2010). Relevant projects range from an integrated regional approach in Belgium (Joris, 2010), to the Gaborone learning city initiative in Botswana (Ntseane, 2010) and a range of service learning projects across South African universities (Nduna, 2007).

In the African context the Association of African Universities (AAU) received money from the UK Department for International Development (DfiD) to stimulate capacity building in higher education. The AAU included, in its areas of support, research into the university's third mission. The concept of the third mission is evolving; definitions are changing and so are the purposes. A primary focus of debate is the extent to which community service represents a philanthropic exercise by the university towards its disadvantaged neighbours and the extent to which the university engages with its communities and regions as a mutual learning project. This paper briefly reflects on that debate before introducing the ITMUA project which analysed the processes and impact of different practices among the partner universities.

Community, service, and engagement

Before addressing the notion of community service it is pertinent to reflect that the concept of community itself is open to interpretation. The adjectival connotation of 'community work' for instance implies some form of public good, while the noun can refer to any form of social, geographical or collective entity (Hall, 2010). Muller (2010, p.69) suggests that for universities, "communities are in practice, more or less anything that is in the university's external environment".

The university's mission of community service, therefore, suggests a uni-directional act of social purpose by the university to a geographical or collective group outside of its campus. In some sectors this simply entails organised courses for an external audience, and is known as 'outreach' (Oyewole 2010). Perold (1998) suggests there is an additional dimension of civic responsibility on the part of those performing community service, which is done voluntarily. Although Perold (1998) concludes that there can be two types of community service programmes (one that is humanitarian in focus and another which aims for radical change or empowerment of the community in need) there is a sense that these are still university, rather than community, led activities, often undertaken by individual members of staff.

The introduction of a 'service learning' dimension, specifically to nurture a sense of civic responsibility in students, is an attempt to encourage a more mutual relationship between provider and community. Service learning has become a feature, particularly in South African universities, whereby students are assessed on their own documented learning as a result of addressing community needs (Perold, 1998). However, service learning has been criticised for its focus on student, rather than community needs (Van Shalkwyk and Erasmus, 2011). This has led writers to suggest that we should move away from simply viewing the university as a provider, and think of ways in which the university can be a partner in development (see also Fourie, 2003).

In order to capture this wider vision for universities, the concept of community engagement is gathering currency. It is suggested that engagement implies a greater sense of partnership with agencies that also work in or with communities (Schuetze, 2010).

Engagement is fast becoming the preferred term for universities, as exemplified by Oyewole's (2010) recent presentation to a conference in Botswana on learning cities and learning regions. Here he described community engagement as consisting of "mutually beneficial activities and not philanthropy . . .[but instead]. . . focused and organized partnership" (powerpoint slides).

This shift in perspective about the university's third mission opens up possibilities in African contexts for privileging indigenous local knowledge and the functional role of education. Oyewole (2010a, p.20) terms this process of "better understanding of local knowledge for knowledge production that is relevant to African contexts" as "enabling knowledge". Oyewole (2010) points out that such interactions may stretch beyond mere outreach programmes, and involve a wide range of partners to stimulate understanding, economic growth, health improvement and improved citizenship responsibility.

The literature on community engagement stipulates that context will influence the specific nature of engagement, according to the "unique history, assets, and needs of the institution and the community it serves" (Brukardt, Holland, Percy and Zimpher, 2006, p.246). Mulroy (2004) suggests, however, that there are essentially two models of involvement – a dispersed model (where individual staff members work as individuals on self-initiated projects and which follows a community service approach) or a coordinated model (where

staff and students work together as teams across and within departments, reflecting the engagement approach).

In order to develop a coordinated model, Wade and Demb (2009) suggest the need for some institutional infrastructures which facilitate community engagement. They identify aspects such as mission and leadership, promotion and reward systems, policy and budget allocations, a faculty approach and enabling organisational structure.

The second part of this paper compares how far such baseline conditions were in place for the research partners. Since, however, the focus of the project was on the ability of community engagement to address one or more MDGs, in particular MDG 1 – poverty reduction, it will be useful to outline the research team's interpretation of poverty. Other related goals included MDG 2 – increasing participation in primary education and MDG 6 – reducing the spread of HIV and AIDS, amongst other diseases.

Poverty

It is now widely accepted that poverty is multi dimensional. This is reflected in the latest Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010). This shows there are variations in the nature and intensity of poverty across a range of dimensions which include literacy rates, HIV prevalence, and income levels.

It is also acknowledged that there are degrees of poverty intensity. Sachs (2005, p.20) provided three categories – relative, moderate and absolute or extreme poverty. Those in extreme poverty are:

> Chronically hungry, unable to access health care, lack the amenities of safe drinking water and sanitation, cannot afford education for some or all of the children and perhaps lack rudimentary shelter.

The moderately poor may lack basic amenities such as safe drinking water and ventilated latrines or poor clothing, while those in relative poverty have limited access to quality health care and education and have a lower than average portion of household income level or access to cultural and recreation activities compared with the average person in their country.

Sen (1999) extends our understanding of poverty in terms of its social aspects, or 'freedoms'. Deprivation of freedom includes lack of resources to act

independently for personal welfare or productivity. Lack of freedom is exacerbated by poor education or knowledge of how to challenge the systems that contribute to exclusion or deprivation.

Shaffer (2002) shows that there is some synergy between pressure from negative poverty stressors and the number of positive pressures or opportunities that can buffer the interlocking dynamics of poverty. So access to public services, employment, new technologies or skills for conflict resolution and other coping strategies can offset the poverty stresses especially those caused by shocks such as war or drought. Some positive pressures can be learned, others have to be provided.

The extent to which the research projects were able to assist in developing positive pressures varied, particularly since all case studies were time-limited. But these multi dimensional aspects of poverty and community service/ engagement provided an analytical framework for the comparative study.

The ITMUA project's research methodology

For the purpose of this study, the following definition of action research, cited in Stringer (2004, p. 4) was used:

> A participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes . . . in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people.

Action research inquiry entails a "cyclical process of design, collecting data, analysing data, communicating outcomes and taking action" (Stringer 2004, p.11). Action research, therefore, is a communicative process of capturing stakeholder views and taking action in response to those views and experiences in order to improve the topic of investigation. The ITMUA process involved four phases in each partner university: an internal audit of existing community service or engagement activities; discussions with stakeholders from the university, political, student and NGO communities; identification, and participatory needs analysis, of two small-scale case studies that could be monitored over a period of approximately six months; the completion of policy briefing papers followed by further discussion with the stakeholders about how to develop the university's third mission.

The focus of the evaluation process in this paper is the case studies themselves though reference is also made to the institutional audits. Part time researchers were employed to record monitoring visits, evaluation interviews and focus group discussions. The qualitative data from the case studies were often collected in the local language, then translated and transcribed by the researchers, from which each country team looked for patterns and themes which could be analysed with reference to particular socio-cultural and economic contexts.

The overall questions were:

- What processes were involved in conducting the community service activity?
- What were the perceived benefits to community, university, other providers?
- What were the main challenges in terms of organisation, addressing the community problems etc?
- What were the recommendations for improving and sustaining the university's role in terms of engagement?

Although action research is not designed to provide generalisable findings, the comparative nature of this study provided opportunities to make context specific and cross-country analysis. For this purpose five criteria were taken from Schweisfurth (2001) to ensure a rigorous process. These were: *selection*, *verification*, *cumulation*, *generalisation* and *application*.

The basis for *selection* of the case studies was their potential for multi disciplinarity – therefore encouraging cross department cooperation – and involvement of a variety of stakeholders. Some cases were new initiatives resulting from initial stakeholder discussions, others were follow-ups or developments of existing projects.

Verification requires "comparison to other examples of related research, and theories generated by them" (Schweisfurth 2001, p.217) and *cumulation* is concerned with ensuring that the case studies are subject to wider discussion in the public research domain. A team meeting and conference presentations at an international conference created opportunities for comparative discussions and the theoretical framework presented in this paper assisted in the verification process.

Generalisation in this context would mean that our comparisons would generate insights and understandings of general issues that might influence the implementation of community service in African universities.

Application is concerned with explaining "what is happening rather than what ought to be happening" (Schweisfurth 2001, p.221). The teams were able to identify patterns that might be applicable in similar contexts across the case studies and that could inform policy recommendations for improvement in the way the university's third mission is addressed.

For reasons of word limitations the case study activities and their outcomes are summarised as a table before proceeding to the comparative analysis and recommendations.

Summary of case studies and findings, taken from chapters in the published technical report (xxxxxx 2011)

Projects	Interventions	Student involvement	Staff involvement	Partner agencies	MDG focus 1 Poverty reduction 2 Access to basic education 4 Child health 6 Prevention of HIV 7 Environmental sustainability 8 Partnerships for development	Community identified benefits (examples)	University identified benefits (examples)	Articulated challenges (examples)
BOTSWANA 15-20 members of remote rural community in D'kar	Leadership, advocacy, business skills for self sustainability		Ba Isago University Development Department	Kellogg Foundation Letloa Trust	1 7	Valued university consultation with the community; learnt how to sustain my business, how to work with people. . . .to sustain ourselves	Understood need for persistence, understand-ing and patience. Widened my knowledge on how communities differ	Expected to be given farm equipment. Need to continue to monitor and support the community. Need to link with more organizations
BOTSWANA 23 women Oodi Weavers community owned cooperative	Marketing, entrepreneurial and management skills	University of Botswana Business Clinic volunteers	UB Adult Education Department		1	Grateful for opportunity to discuss our problems freely; . . .want to develop the skills we have learned	Improved our teaching, research and social engagement skills (staff); helped us understand the concepts we had learned (students)	Our course requirements impact on the volunteer time we can spend on the project

CALABAR 12 female sex workers, in Atakpar	Tailoring skills to move out of sex work; HIV awareness		Adult Education, Nursing, Vocational Education Departments	Police	16	Happy people like you will help us; have learnt a lot about how to protect ourselves against HIV/AIDS and other diseases. University deserves commendation for this work	Community service should be a collaborative engagement between university and community; it has opened my eyes to the need to review our curricula to be more relevant.	When you come you should always give us something because we are hungry (community); University should provide a minimal budget for community service work (staff)
CALABAR 15 female farmers in Uwanse	Production of organic fertilisers, improved planting, bookkeeping, marketing skills		Adult Education, Animal Science, Crop Science Departments		17	You have helped us improve our indigenous practices.	We have learnt how much we can help our local people; happy to build on indigenous African technology. This is a joint solution-searching endeavour	How can we measure the significance of our work if we cannot continue (staff).

Project	Activities	Service learning	Partners	No.	Community impact	Staff/student learning	Comments
MALAWI Muula community Based Childcare Centre project (CBCC) 80 children	Training in child care curriculum. Building a borehole	Curriculum and Teaching.	Curriculum and Teaching, Home Economics Departments (but initiated by one staff member).	Saanich Municipality (Canada) — 2 4 8	I now can handle the children's reading better; children are cleaner now and educate the parents.	The project has helped us to network and learn how to liaise with partners.	Community members are very dependent … expect things should be provided for them (staff); please work with us for longer (community)
MALAWI Nyana Group Village Headman community project (GVH) 18 villages	Irrigation farming, cropping, drug & alcohol abuse, water safety, HIV/Aids prevention	Theatre for Development (service learning) 80 students	Fine & Performing Arts, Curriculum & Teaching, Sociology departments	Farming NGO, AIDS Support group — 1 2 6	Activities helped us understand & solve our own problems … We can now challenge our leaders	Improved on how to plan for teaching (students); Learnt how to make our curriculum more relevant (staff) Activities of the different disciplines built on each other	Staff involvement was not consistent; community service is not recognized in promotion criteria (staff)
LESOTHO Mohoma Temeng women's self help group 20-40 members, 17 villages	HIV/AIDS care & prevention. Income generation, business & marketing skills. Building ventilated pit latrines.	Science Education and University of British Columbia volunteers	Environmental, Nursing, Non-Formal Education, Adult Education, Science Education Departments (but initiated by one staff member)	Government clinic; University of British Columbia (Canada) — 1 4 6	Now we sell vegetables, and can calculate profits, have learnt to market and maintain hygiene, people disclosed their HIV status and more got tested.	Learnt how to link theory with practice… learnt a lot about culture; learnt strategies for teaching adults; community service should start with community needs	University should get more organisations involved; make refresher visits; we expected to receive more assistance like materials.

LESOTHO Roma Pensioner project 50-200 pensioners	Health checks Income generation/ savings. Gardening Avocacy & support against abuse	Counselling & Nursing volunteers	Nursing, Nutrition, Agriculture, Theology, Business Management, Adult Education Departments	Police Bank Post office	1 7		Learnt that we should unite with other institutions like the university because the police cannot combat crime in isolation; are now aware of small businesses we can start . . . know what is a balanced diet	Learned that whether one is young or old, s/he is still a person; gained experience of putting theory into practice; there is a spirit of oneness, division of labour within the departments; pensioners were afforded a platform to talk about problems (students); university has to work in collaboration with the community, not decide what they need (staff)	Will the university make follow up on what has been taught; university should assist us with funds (community); university should involve all faculties; community service should be included in our curriculum unlike now when we are volunteering and sometimes have to skip lessons (students)

Findings

The remainder of this paper summarises a comparative analysis of the institutional approaches to the case studies, followed by some observations on the way the case studies functioned across each institution, particularly in relation to the MDGs. These findings draw on the full technical report edited by the project coordinator, summarised in the table above.

Institutional infrastructure

As discussed earlier, Wade and Demb (2009) had recommended that an institutional infrastructure is necessary for successful implementation of community service activities. The initial audit revealed that community service was identified in the strategic plans of all the partner institutions but there were no institutional offices for community engagement activities and all the stakeholders said the university should work more collaboratively with them.

The evidence showed that there was no dedicated budget allocation for community service work beyond the AAU research funds. This meant that many projects operated on a volunteer basis with limitations for continuity.

Community service approaches

The various ITMUA case studies revealed differing levels of involvement, perhaps reflecting the aforementioned varied definitions that can be presented on a continuum from 'outreach' activities, to community service, then to community engagement alone – or engagement with service learning as follows:

> Outreach – community service – community engagement – community engagement with service learning

Two projects which had been initiated by an individual university member started out as outreach or community service activities, but most of the projects evolved to a greater or lesser extent into community engagement because of their collaborative, multi disciplinary approach and emphasis on

tracking mutual learning outcomes. The extent to which projects reached the far end of the continuum varied.

The D'Kar project in Bostwana was initiated by a university department but involved extensive consultation with community members though no students were involved. This project is placed between the continuum categories of community service and community engagement. The Calabar projects leaned more towards the notion of community engagement because more than one department initiated the activities, but no students were involved, thereby falling short of the service learning element of community engagement.

The Oodi Weavers project (also in Botswana), on the other hand, leaned more towards the community engagement end of the continuum because the cooperative was an existing project which students engaged with in order to discuss how to improve their business. The implementation of this project, however, fell short of 'service learning' due to lack of assessment procedures for the students' learning.

Other case studies that inclined more towards community engagement were the two Lesotho projects – Mohoma Temeng and Roma Pensioners – where there was multi disciplinary collaboration and external agents were involved. Students were involved on a voluntary basis but were not assessed on their learning.

In Malawi, the Muula CBCC project incorporated student assessment of the learning that took place, thereby reflecting the 'service learning' concept. Similarly, one of the activities conducted at Nyanya GVH community, Theatre for Development, included student self assessment on the learning experienced. The other activities in the latter case study were conducted by students on a voluntary basis but, by the nature of their design, enabled students to learn about becoming good citizens.

It can also be argued that many of the projects offered opportunities for what Oyewole (2010) described as 'enabling knowledge'. Theoretical knowledge was being applied in different contexts, but in the process new, locally useful knowledge was developed by both students and staff.

The collaborative nature of community engagement

All the projects entailed a needs analysis discussion with the community groups to determine the focus of the university participation.
In most cases the partner institutions did not conduct their activities in isolation. Collaboration was at two levels – at one level it involved one or more departments. At another level, it involved participation of members outside the University and target community (Nampota, 2011).

The department level collaboration reflected Mulroy's (2004) two models of involvement. Dispersed models, for example, were observed in the Calabar projects where individual staff members, rather than teams, were involved. Also, although the original Muula CBCC case study in Malawi involved staff and students of a whole department, only one member of the department was actively taking part at the time of ITMUA's intervention. Examples of the coordinated model were the two new projects of Nyanya GVH in Malawi and the Roma Valley pensioners in Lesotho.

The second level of collaboration involved participation of other stakeholders outside the university and target community. Only two case studies involved university collaboration only and these were the Female Farmers in Calabar and the Oodi Weavers in Botswana.

In the rest of the case studies, local and international stakeholders played a part. For the Calabar Female Sex Workers, for example, the police were involved because of the sex workers' concern about how they are treated by law enforcers. Similarly, local police provided educational input for Lesotho's Roma Pensioners, where local Bank personnel were also involved. The Malawi Nyanya GVH involved collaboration with local NGOs.

Three projects involved international partners, mostly as funders, although they participated in other activities as well. These included Mohoma Temeng in Lesotho which collaborated with the Canadian University of British Columbia. The Botswana D'Kar project involved the American Kellogg Foundation. Similarly, the Malawi Muula CBCC implementation involved Saanich Municipality from Canada.

In general, multi disciplinary collaborations were regarded as necessary in the implementation of all the projects. Whilst some of the collaborations increased

funding opportunities, others enhanced the process of addressing varied but interconnected needs faced by the communities.

However, two issues were highlighted that impacted on the sustainability of this collaboration. First, staff and students often complained that they received no recognition or reward for their work in assessment procedures. Secondly there was evidence that the short term nature of the projects (linked to lack of university frameworks for this work) created sustainability and dependency challenges amongst community members – as evidenced in summaries highlighted in the table above.

The community service outcomes

MDG focus

All projects contained activities that contributed to areas of need highlighted in one or more MDGs – particularly in relation to efforts at poverty alleviation (MDG1), reducing the spread of HIV/AIDS (MDG6) and increasing opportunities to access basic or primary education (MDG2). However, additional MDGs were also reflected.

In Malawi, for instance, while the Muula CBCC project initially targeted MDG 1 and 2, the needs of the community necessitated addressing MDG 4 on child health and access to potable water. Similarly, due to the assistance offered by Saanich Municipality, MDG 8 featured, relating to international partnerships.

The Calabar initiative with Female Farmers responded to MDG7, which is concerned with environmental sustainability, through making and using organic fertiliser. The D'Kar community project in Bostwana, due to involvement of the Kellogg Foundation, addressed MDG 8.

For Mohoma Temeng MDG 4, relating to child health and sanitation through construction of latrines, was included with MDGs 1 and 6. The Roma Pensioners' activities in the same country included health checks of the participants, and counseling on different problems, which both contributed to health of the pensioners. However, MDG 1 was the main focus through encouragement of pension savings, income generation and skills for sustainable gardening – which served as one way of reducing hunger.

All projects addressed MDG number 1 (poverty reduction) which is now discussed in relation to its multi dimensional nature.

Levels of poverty

As described earlier, poverty in this study was interpreted in its wider sense. While at one level poverty was linked to the human development indicators (UNDP, 2010), at another level, poverty was linked to absence of freedom or capability (Sen, 2002) for productivity or personal welfare. Sach's (2005) categorisation of 'relative', 'moderate' and 'absolute' poverty also enhanced our understanding of the poverty reduction implications for the different target communities of the ITMUA study.

The two communities in Malawi could be categorised as communities in 'absolute' poverty. The Muula community, for example, was perpetually hungry, lacked safe drinking water and sanitation, lacked shelter, and children – especially those under the age of five – lacked education and good nutrition. Although some people in the Nyanya GVH community had safe drinking water, others were drinking from the rivers, children were dropping out of school due to lack of money to support small school projects and were hungry. The poverty reduction gains for the Muula community were largely in terms of enhancing resources such as increased food supplies, borehole construction, and an early childhood learning centre. For the Nyanya GVH community, resources for poverty reduction were reflected in terms of knowledge and skills which they used to improve their lives.

The two Calabar communities were also in 'absolute' poverty with the female sex workers risking their lives in order to get money and the female farmers striving to get basic resources including food and income. The resources acquired to address poverty reduction for both groups were again knowledge and skills to enhance their lives and to some extent generate income. For example, while the female farmers learnt better cropping systems and making of organic fertilisers to enhance the environment for continued agricultural productivity, the female sex workers learnt new tailoring skills and strategies to prevent HIV/AIDS infection.

The Lesotho and Botswana case study communities were living in 'relative' to 'moderate' poverty. Most of the Roma Pensioners had access to basic necessities. Their poverty reduction was in the form of knowledge and skills such as savings, income generation, gardening and nutrition that enabled them to lead better lives. The rest of the communities were in 'moderate poverty' – Mohoma Temeng, Oodi Weavers and D'Kar beneficiaries. These communities gained largely in terms of knowledge and skills for self reliance and income generation.

Knowledge and skills leading to new freedoms and capabilities

The new knowledge and skills of community members led to changed behaviour amongst the community members in most projects. For example, the Muula CBCC enabled parents to prepare better food for their children which led to improved nutrition for under-five children. In addition, it was noted that the behaviour of children in relation to hygiene had improved. The Nyanya GVH gained courage to speak out against the evils of their community leaders and extension workers thereby challenging inequitable systems that perpetuate exclusion and isolation in their community. Mohoma Temeng and Female Sex Workers projects resulted in more people going for HIV tests and ensuring that they live positively with the virus. The Roma pensioners were encouraged to go for regular health checks, while the D'Kar members and Oodi weavers became better business managers and the female farmers in Calabar observed better cropping systems.

Staff and students also gained new knowledge and skills. This was manifested through the adaptation of textbook knowledge into usable knowledge at local levels. Potential development of 'enabling knowledge' was evident in the projects of Mohoma Temeng and Calabar's female farmers where participants highlighted mutual learning about indigenous practices. The same was true for the two Malawi projects with Muula CBCC developing improved understanding and approaches to the theories of Early Childhood Education and Development and Nutrition. The Nyanya GVH project resulted in improved use of Theatre For Development for awareness raising of local issues. The students enhanced their understanding of education theories and how they may be applied in different contexts.

Finally, two case studies – the Nyanya GVH and Roma pensioners – highlighted a further benefit for community members. Both provided evidence that the interventions gave the target groups an enhanced sense of voice. In the Nyanya GVH project, community members voiced their concerns through drama about the way they were being treated by leaders. The Roma pensioners were able to articulate their personal concerns to the student counsellors in a way they had previously been denied, particularly regarding issues of abuse. This sense of voice links to Sen's (1999) perspectives on poverty reduction.

Policy implications

The analysis of the eight case studies leads to a number of observations. These relate both to the processes and outcomes of community service (Nampota, 2011). The first is that recognition of community service in the policy statement or strategic plan of the university is not enough to ensure that this is implemented across the whole institution. Rather, the concept should be recognised in the organisational structure of the university in terms of policy guidelines, perhaps involving a coordinating office and linked to student and staff assessment procedures.

Related to this issue is that community engagement requires long term university commitment. In the absence of sustained collaboration, community members do not have time to move from a state of dependency to self reliance – as reflected in their ongoing requests for resources from the university. This is a major issue in relation to sustainable development (Fourie, 2003).

Thirdly, effective, community-led collaboration enables all stakeholders, staff, students and the community, to gain knowledge, skills and understanding from each other. Where this happens, new knowledge suitable for local contexts can be enhanced for all partners.

Almost all the projects entailed multi disciplinary involvement, an aspect which was commented on by different participants and which reflects the multi dimensional nature of development needs.

Following these observations, four policy recommendations are proposed in this paper. The first is that community service should be represented in the university structure – for example with a coordinating office similar to that for research and teaching. This is likely to ensure that an appropriate budget is allocated for the activities and would help maximise resources and benefits to community development work. A second related recommendation is that university policy should recognise and encourage staff and student community engagement through staff promotional incentives and student assessment

procedures thereby ensuring recognition of service learning and community engagement as mutually supportive activities.

Thirdly, all community engagement activities should be preceded by a needs analysis involving relevant stakeholders in the community. Evidence from these case studies indicates that this helps enhance community responsiveness to university involvement.

Fourthly a wide range of linkages external to the university should be taken into consideration for effective community engagement. This includes linkages across departments to ensure multi disciplinarity as well as consideration of the additional benefits of involving external partners.

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Dorothy Nampota
Centre for Educational Research and Training
University of Malawi

dnampota@cc.ac.mw

Julia Preece
School of Education
University of KwaZulu-Natal

preecej@ukzn.ac.za