



RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNIVERSITY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL INNOVATION: A SOCIAL SCIENCE PERSPECTIVE WITH AN INDIAN CONTEXT

***Ms. Shubhashri Gopalkrishna Kamalapur**

Assistant Professor, School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Chanakya University Bengaluru

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received 30th January, 2025

Received in revised form

17th February, 2025

Accepted 26th March, 2025

Published online 30th April, 2025

Keywords:

Social Innovation, Universities, Higher Education, Community Engagement, Interdisciplinary Collaboration, India.

*Corresponding author:

Ms. Shubhashri Gopalkrishna Kamalapur

ABSTRACT

The global community heavily relies on universities, not only to create knowledge, but also to impact social values and social enterprises. The discussion about how higher education institutions serve as catalysts for social innovation has received much attention, especially in scholarly theoretical discourse across research, engagement, and collaboration. This paper adopts a social science framework to analyse several cases from various regions, emphasizing case studies in India, as the profound impact universities make on social dilemmas come to fruition. We conclude that with high integration into social systems, universities can innovate in substantial ways and effect social change or transformation. Additionally, empirical, policy, and comparative case study data provides depth to the discussion on a global scale.

Copyright©2025, Shubhashri Gopalkrishna Kamalapur. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Citation: Ms. Shubhashri Gopalkrishna Kamalapur. 2025. "University as a Catalyst for Social Innovation: A Social Science Perspective with an Indian Context". International Journal of Recent Advances in Multidisciplinary Research, 12, (04), 11086-11087.

INTRODUCTION

Social innovation is becoming more and more viewed as an essential way to meet societal challenges such as poverty, inequality, and sustainability. Universities, as knowledge-producing organizations, have unique opportunities to contribute to social innovation by conducting research, training future leaders, and working in partnership with the communities. This paper aims to analyze the opportunity for universities in terms of social innovation and the lens of social sciences, considering the institutional context, policy contexts, and external collaboration contexts, with a specific focus on India.

Conceptualizing Social Innovation: Social innovation is defined as new solutions that improve the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. Social innovation involves new social practices, organizational forms, and new modes of collaboration that advance collective problem solving. Drawing on sociological and economic theories, social innovation is framed both as an outcome and a process that leads to sustained social change. As defined by Mulgan et al. (2007, p.8), social innovation occurs at the boundary of the public, private, and civil society sectors, and relies on dynamic interactions between the different actors in each sector.

The Role of Universities in Social Innovation: Higher education institutions promote social innovation in various ways:

Research and Knowledge Development: Higher education institutions produce new knowledge which informs policy and practice in fields such as social policy, environmental sustainability and public health. Furthermore, empirical evidence suggests universities who involved in social research tend to have a greater impact on regional development (Etzkowitz&Leydesdorff, 2000).

Community Engagement and Partnerships: Many universities run community-based projects that engage local stakeholders in co-developing solutions to social issues. In the case of India, the Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA) initiative sees universities working directly with rural communities.

Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Universities can foster interdisciplinary approaches to social problems by integrating insights from sociology, economics, political science and environmental studies.

Incubation of Social Enterprises: Universities provide resources, mentorship, and funding to support social entrepreneurs, through incubation business school and

innovation labs. One example is the NSRCEL, which incubates social startups at IIM Bangalore.

Case Studies of University-Led Social Innovation in India

This section presents case studies from Indian universities, illustrating successful social innovation initiatives:

Case Study 1: IITs and Sustainable Development: The Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) have led in pioneering research in clean energy, water conservation, and rural development, in collaboration with industry and government. A study by Patel & Sharma (2021) shows that IIT Bombay's research on solar energy is a significant factor in India meeting its renewable energy targets.

Case Study 2: Ashoka University and Social Entrepreneurship: Ashoka University has supported social innovation through its Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy in a number of programs, such as grassroots initiatives and leadership programs. According to a study by Chatterjee & Mitra (2019) 60% of social enterprises incubated at Ashoka University can sustain for 5 or more than 5 years.

Case Study 3: Gandhian Universities and Rural Development: Gujarat Vidyapith and Mahatma Gandhi University have responded to Gandhi's influence by focusing on community-based learning, rural development, and self-sustaining programs. A rural livelihood impact study showed Gandhian universities contributed to a 30% local employment (Gupta, 2016).

Case Study 4: University-Community Collaborations for Public Health: Universities in India such as JNU and AIIMS have engaged in public health outreach programs aimed at malnutrition, sanitation and epidemic responses in marginalized communities. A maternal health program initiated by AIIMS was able to reduce maternal mortality rates by 15% in maternal mortality rates in districts served (Singh & Das, 2021).

Challenges and Opportunities in the Indian Context

- Notwithstanding the potential of Indian universities to advance social innovation, the following challenges may negatively affect social innovation efforts:
- Bureaucratic structural frameworks that can impede collaborative interdisciplinary coordination as well as prompt funding considerations.
- No designated funding for the efforts of social innovators limits scale.
- Difficulty of collaborative interdisciplinary research for professional academics, the adherence to academic silos hinders engagement with research intended to exam diversity.

However, opportunities may be granted through the following:

- Utilization of digital technology in education: The advent of artificial intelligence and big data advances discovery in social impact.
- Philanthropic-community-university partnership leveraged through government policy; The National Education Policy (NEP), (2020), anticipates and

encourages 'experiential educational practices' around design, entrepreneurship, and social change.

- Enhanced Student engagement: Community- university partnerships enhance grassroots engagement for social change around youth-led innovation hubs.

Global Perspectives & Examples

Indian universities can consider global examples, such as

- Stanford University's Social Innovation Review: A review of reports focusing on actionable evidence involving social entrepreneurship.
- The European Union, Horizon 2020 Program: A funding agency for university-based social innovation focused on sustainability and governance.
- African centres of excellence example of building university-based community social intervention models - the World Bank Funded Africa Centres of Excellence (ACE) Project improved university-based social interventions in agriculture and health.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Universities are instrumental in driving social innovation by promoting research, interdisciplinary interchange, and community involvement. In the Indian context, the collaboration among academia, government, and the private sector may enhance social innovation in addressing social problems. Future studies may also develop more in-depth methods to evaluate university-led social innovation in India, frameworks that engage more fully systemic issues to promote social impact, and advance policy recommendations.

REFERENCES

- Bhaduri, S., & Kumar, H. (2011). Universities and innovation in the knowledge economy: A socio-economic perspective. *Science and Public Policy*, 38(3), 181-190.
- Chatterjee, D., & Mitra, A. (2019). The role of higher education institutions in fostering social innovation: Case studies from India. *Journal of Social Entrepreneurship*, 10(1), 56-75.
- Etzkowitz, H., & Leydesdorff, L. (2000). The dynamics of innovation: From National Systems and "Mode 2" to a Triple Helix of university-industry-government relations. *Research Policy*, 29(2), 109-123.
- Gupta, A. K. (2016). *Grassroots innovation: Minds on the margin are not marginal minds*. Random House India.
- Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Retrieved from <https://www.education.gov.in>
- Mulgan, G., Tucker, S., Ali, R., & Sanders, B. (2007). *Social innovation: What it is, why it matters and how it can be accelerated*. The Young Foundation.
- Patel, R., & Sharma, P. (2021). Sustainable energy innovations in Indian higher education institutions. *Renewable Energy Reports*, 12(4), 215-230.
- Singh, R., & Das, P. (2021). University-driven social innovation in India: An empirical analysis. *International Journal of Innovation Management*, 25(7), 2150012.
- Tilak, J. B. G. (2015). *Higher education in India: In search of equality, quality, and quantity*. Orient BlackSwan.