

## The Role of Educational Institutions in Sustainable Development in Rural Area

Mr.Navnath Bombale<sup>1</sup>, Mrs.Archna Dnyaneshwar Tandale<sup>2</sup>

1 Asst. Prof. M.V.P. Arts, Commerce and Science College, Trimbakeshwar  
Email: [joynavnath@gmail.com](mailto:joynavnath@gmail.com)

2. Asst. Prof. M.V.P. K.P.G.Arts, Commerce and Science College, Igatpuri  
Email: [Tandalearchana52@gmail.com](mailto:Tandalearchana52@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

The Educational institutions in higher learning are shaping the minds of students with academic knowledge, professional skills and also social skills to contribute to the society. But, how much they are contributing to help the community needs to be studied. The Bahá'í Academy, Panchgani, is conducting educational programmes for promoting Education in Universal Human Values, for higher educational institutions. It is conducting subsequent service learning activities through its programme “Fostering Personal Development and Social Progress”. Its primary goal is to foster the personal development of college and university students, as well as to build their moral capacities and empower them to contribute to social progress. The Academy courses have been designed over many years of research and experience to build the capacity of youth to become change makers — visionaries with practical feet and value-based approaches. This study presents a case study of community projects carried by the students of SMBT College of B. Pharmacy, Dhamangaon, Nashik, in collaboration with Bahá'í Academy, Panchgani in Pandhurli village from 2014 to 2021. They addressed various social issues. A survey was conducted in the village through questionnaire and interviews to identify the issues in the village and awareness programmes were conducted by the students to address those issues. This research was carried out to study the impact of those community projects and observed the changes which happened as a result of the community project carried out by the students in the Pandhurli village community.

Introduction: As per NEP, 2020 the curriculum should be holistic, multidisciplinary, flexible and innovative. The NEP states that all HEI curricula must include credit-based courses and community engagement and service projects. Universal human values, life skills, seva/service lessons, and participation in community service programmes will be considered essential components of a holistic education (NEP 2020). Accordingly universities and colleges are trying to adopt and design the curriculum in such a way so that students should develop their academic knowledge, professional skills and life skills/ social skills. Since the year 2004 the programme of the Bahá'í Academy, “Fostering personal development and social progress” has been adopted by the universities, colleges and institutions of higher learning. The programme of the Bahá'í Academy is focused on providing the students to develop their academic knowledge as well as they are able to practice moral behavior and contribute to the social progress by service learning activities. Service learning activity is the integral part of the programme because if student learn the theory then he should practice/ apply his knowledge for better learning. It helps to develop community while students are applying their knowledge for betterment of society at the same time students understand the concepts with clarity.

Service-learning in higher education provides opportunities for students to develop intellectually, socially, and spiritually. Service-learning is more than just extension services or outreach activities: it connects a community's knowledge and needs with course content and student action in the field for the purpose of learning. This study was carried out to evaluate the impact of service learning activities carried out by the students of SMBT college in the village Pandhurli over a period of 7 years from 2014- to 2021.

Review of literature: Because community service learning is not made compulsory, it can be a co-curricular activity or programme. It is something that students do outside of or in addition to their academic studies that plays an important role in other areas of development. Rest and Narvaez (1991) recognized community service as a means of promoting students' social and moral development. Community service learning programmes have been used as an interesting pedagogy for the past two decades. According to Jacoby (1996), it is the methodology and teaching technique that connects academic learning and community service so that each helps the other achieve educational goals. Community service learning is important in developing social skills by fostering ethical and responsible citizens.

In today's world, commercial agendas have influenced many of our educational institutions' goals setting, whereas in the past, one of the main objectives of public education institutions was to instill civic responsibility in students (Sears, 2003).

Traditionally, educational institutions have prepared students for the demands of the world by emphasizing critical thinking and social responsibility, as well as the importance of contributing to the community and participating in social activities. This idea supports John Dewey's (1937) stance, a higher education pioneer, that it is the responsibility of all societies to provide equal opportunity for educational advancement to all. He believed that all members of a society have a responsibility to be socially responsible and to engage in critical thinking in order to improve the overall quality of human interaction. It is believed that improving the overall quality of human interaction can be accomplished by instilling social skills that can be developed during childhood and nurtured by helping others. Voluntary assistance to others leads people for engagement in community service (Dewey, 1916).

Previous research indicates that learning through community service fosters greater accountability to fulfill social responsibilities (Kolenko et al. 1996) and provides students with an opportunity to grow into a civically engaged environment (Godfrey 1999). Such learning allows students to practice giving back to society as a whole while also supporting classroom learning through experiential activities, one of which is community service (McCarthy & Tucker 1999). It provides students with life skills that benefit the community and society as a whole by incorporating community service into the core curriculum. Furthermore, it assists teachers in integrating education, learning, and humanity (Andrews, 2007). Students become more active as a result of their involvement in community service programmes, and educational organizations become involved with the community and begin working on societal issues.

The domains of community service learning, community work, civic engagement, and voluntary or honorary work with society have recently become more popular and popular research study topics, and researchers and educators have begun to recognise the importance and psychosocial requirements of giving back to the community (Ferber 2007).

Sustainable rural development is critical to a country's cultural, social, and environmental viability. Because global poverty is largely rural, poverty eradication is critical. Poverty representation extends beyond the urban-rural divide, with sub-national and regional implications (UN, 2009). As a result, it is critical and valuable to organize, as needed, rural development initiatives that contribute to sustainable livelihoods through global, international, national, and local efforts. Rural development strategies should consider the remoteness and potential of rural areas and provide targeted differentiated approaches in the fields of health care, hygiene and cleanliness, medical facilities, education, transportation, socio-cultural issues such as caste discrimination, addictions, water management, availability of drinking water to villagers, availability of toilets, and so on.

Students must improve their abilities to comprehend and address these various issues. They must develop the skills, expertise, and knowledge required to address these issues. The goal of Service Learning Activities is to instil in students a sense of community and a desire to help others by implementing innovative methods for the socioeconomic and cultural development of rural villages.

Benefits of Service Learning Activities for Rural Community Partners Increases collaboration opportunities with HE institutions, Provides opportunities for participation in the teaching and learning process, fosters personal and professional development of students, and prepares them to be responsible citizens of tomorrow.

### Community Service Implementation

Service Learning Activity is a method of involving students in service activities that meet community needs along with learning curriculum and/or content relevant to the service and reflecting on the service experience. A learning component that is balanced with the service aspect should be developed to maximize the benefits of community service. By learning and helping others at the same time, you can develop your culture and society, as well as learn about life and create character that will impact the world in the future.

Service is a component of the community service project in which students spend time assisting the general public in meeting their needs; reflection is simply a scheduled account of one's own thoughts and experiences. This can be accomplished by keeping daily journals. Students are professionally developed through community service projects. It initiates community development using students' academic expertise and empower students to work with other students to provide solutions for issues and problems of the community. (P.G. Gurusamy Pandian, 2020)

The following figure demonstrates the benefits of Service-Learning for a rural community as well as to the students:



Figure 1: Source- Bender, S. (2014 )

The first phase of the project involves determining the project's requirements. Figure 2 illustrates this. Students visit nearby rural villages and conduct surveys, interviews, and interactions with village leaders, local self-government, and common peoples to identify the specific needs of the community. The identified problems may be related to poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, daily living problems, water and sanitation, irrigation, and farmer needs, as well as other social issues such as gender equality and addiction among youth, prevalent prejudices and caste discrimination, and so on.

The first phase of implementation involves developing an action plan based on the community's assessed needs. The project's next step is to integrate with academic expertise. It must be related to community needs, curriculum, and student interests. The second phase is the process of implementing community service projects. Based on the prepared proposal, students create a plan and conduct community action. The target group's and community agencies' feedback will be incorporated and used to create a structured plan for implementation. Based on the project's requirements, the students form partnerships with local institutions such as village panchayats, municipalities, anganwadis, self-help groups, rural schools, village leaders, and

care takers. Following implementation, students evaluate the project's impact and sustainability and prepare a presentation(Baha'i Academy, 2015).

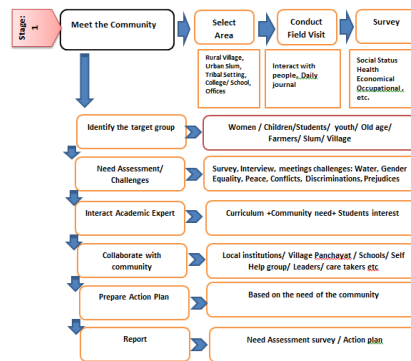


Figure 2: Service Learning Activities Stage: 1

Figure 2: Source- GurusamyPandian&Ashifa (2020)

The present investigation tried to evaluate the role of community service projects carried out by the students of SMBT College in the village Pandhurli for the rural development.

## Methodology:

This study addressed various prevailing issues/challenges for the sustainability of the village, which is basically for implementing community service projects by students of SMBT College. The purpose of carrying out this research was to explore the impact of community service learning activities carried out by the students. Thus, the research question to guide the study was: What are the impacts of service learning activities carried out by the students over a period from 2014 to 2021?

The study was carried out in Pandhurli village. Qualitative research method was applied for the present research study. The students carried out the service learning activities in the following four stages:

Four stages of the Service learning activities :.( Baha'i Academy, 2015)

**1. Preparation stage:** At this stage consultations are held at various levels. At the level of the study group, group members / co-learners consult to select a target community. Once this is done they arrange initial interactions and consultations with the community members to access and identify social needs and available resources of the community. Students co-relate them with the curriculum, find more facts and analyze the needs. Together with the community members an action plan is prepared. A partnership between the study group and the target community is necessary to ensure full participation of the stakeholders in the process for social action. Survey forms, government or media reports, or other sources of information can be used to identify the needs of the community and their available human and other resources. A sample "Need Assessment" format is available in this module. During this stage the study group/ co-learners will engage in critical thinking -- a skill needed to bring about change. Therefore asking critical questions becomes a necessity to understand the problems and needs more deeply. After assessing the needs, the study group/ co-learners can involve the community members in preparing an evening programme of show and talk, commonly known as the "Happy Hippo Show". Happy Hippo Show is an interactive theatre art form. It provides platform where presenters and the village people interact on specific issues to find solutions together. (www.bahaiacademy.org/bahaiacademy/ and http://acmerussia.ru/zipopo.html)

**2. Implementation stage:** The possibilities for action are enormous. The students' capabilities, enthusiasm and concern for others are continuously enhanced as they pursue their service learning activities. Besides working with the community members, students also learn working with the institutions. Throughout this stage the students must keep in mind the vision and aim of their plan. Students are encouraged to keep a daily reflective journal of happenings and the personal or social lessons they learn, whether small or big, or the questions they wish to learn about. These journals are of great benefit to them to monitor their progress and evaluate their activities. It will also help them in preparing their final project reports.

**3. Evaluation stage:** This is a stage when one looks backwards to prepare for the next move forward. The service learning activities generate a lot of experience and knowledge. Reflection enables the students and stakeholders to internalize those experiences and examine their connections with their own personal development and their impact on the community they served.

Evaluation or reflection is not simply a report sharing session. What makes reflection a transforming experience is when the actors compare their original assumptions and perceptions with the real experience they have had in their service learning activity. Questions are asked and investigations are encouraged so that a new level of understanding is achieved.

Another important aspect of the evaluation stage is when the study groups/ co-learners decide what changes they would like to bring about to improve some aspects of their service learning. Use of artistic presentations, songs, poetry, skits, etc. is encouraged during the reflection sessions.

**4. Presentation:** In this stage the study groups/ co-learners share with others what they did and achieved during the various stages of their service learning activity. They are encouraged to use different methods such as display/exhibition, artistic performance, celebration, presentation, wall bulletins, or articles for this purpose. This is a very important stage and it generates awareness among others and consolidates the students' own learning. The college may wish to arrange the demonstration Programme so that it can also acknowledge the services of the students and other stakeholders. It can prove to be the source of great joy and confidence building for the students and strengthen college ties with the community.

### **Participation:**

Service learning activities were conducted by the B. pharmacy 2nd year students of SMBT College of Pharmacy, Dhamnagaon, Nashik. They carried out the activities over a period of span from 2014 to 2021. Every year about 60-65 students from 2nd year B.Pharm. had undergone the training on "Education in Universal Human values" conducted by Baha'i Academy. They conducted service learning activities in Pandhurli village. This village was adopted by the college for community service. Every year different batches of the students continued service learning activity in the village. Around 300 students participated in this service learning activity through the span of 2014-2021. About 170 families participated in these projects and approximately 700 family members benefited from the Service Learning Activities.

### **Issues Addressed by the students:**

1. Environmental Cleanliness and hygiene-(2013-14)
  - i) Plastic waste management
  - ii) Management of household garbage- (wet and dry)
  - iii) Management of household wastewater



- iv) To create awareness about household and public toilets
- v) Awareness about generic medicine

The students carried out the survey in the village by interviewing the villagers about these aspects. They created awareness with the help of Happy Hippo Show, displaying of posters, consultations with the family members and members of Gram Panchayatas well as school children.

2. Caste discrimination-(2015-16)the students collected information about prevailing caste discrimination in the villagers. Then they created awareness about unity in diversity through Happy HippoShow and posters and visited the families and discussed with them about the importance of unity for development of the village as a whole.
3. Awareness about de-addiction-(2015-16)A survey was conducted to find out the extent of addiction (Alcohol, tobacco,gutkha, ganja) among the village youth, and the students carried out Happy Hippo Show to create awareness about de-addiction and its importance for betterment of families.
4. Decision making process of Gramsabha-(2015-16) a survey was also conducted to find out whether the villagers are part of decision making process in Gramsabha.They visited households and convinced and explained the importance of active participation in the decision making process for the betterment of village and villagers.
5. Awareness about Generic Medicines- (2016-17, 2020-21) The students carried out a survey to find out the awareness about generic medicines among the villagers, and as Pharmacy students, they took the initiative to educate the villagers about the generic medicines. They contacted the village doctors and persuaded them to prescribe generic medicines as they are low cost medicines affordable by the tribal people of the village. About 60 students shared their helpline numbers with villagers and provided about 100 medical shops lists in Nasik city where generic medicines were made available.

### Findings and discussions:

1. Environmental Cleanliness and hygiene-
  - Plastic waste management
  - Management of household garbage (wet and dry)
  - Management of household wastewater
  - To create awareness about household and public toilets

The result of the survey indicated that the problems pertaining to the above mentioned issues were very much severe in the year 2013-14,therewas un-cleanliness on the roads, garbage everywhere, dirty and open drainage, drainage water flowing on roads. When the students began their service learning activities along with the gram panchayatin the village, as can be seen from the figure3, the intensity of environmental issues dropped down to 72% in the year 2015-16 and with consistent activities carried out by the students every year, the environmental problems were found to be reduced to 5% in the year 2020-21.

**Conclusion:** The impact of service learning activities carried out by students was effective in reducing the environmental and hygiene issues in the village substantially, showing that consistent efforts, if carried out can result in positive changes.

Household toilets / Public toilets- In the beginning year 2013-14, 64.7% people responded that there were no toilets in the village and people were going in the open fields for defecation. But as the awareness activities

began, it reduced to 43% and in the year 2021 only 7% people responded that there are no public toilets, which indicated that with the awareness program taken by the students and the actions taken by the grampanchayat, the situation was greatly improved, as can be seen from fig. 4.

**Conclusion:** The impact of service learning activities carried out by students was quite effective in construction of household and public toilets, with the initiative of gram panchayat and individual households in the village. In the year 2020-21 there were mere 9% houses which did not have toilets as compared to the year 2013-14 when the activities were started, 64% of the houses did not have toilets.

## 2. Cast discrimination in the village

From the feedback received regarding caste discrimination in the village, it was observed that in the year 2013-14 when the service learning activities began, 18% of people said that there was caste discrimination observed among the villagers, whereas in the year 2015-16 it was 35%, and in the year 2020-21, only 9% people said they faced caste discrimination.

**Conclusion:** Even though the findings indicate that there was more percentage of people said there was caste discrimination in the year 2015-16 as compared to 2013-14, but the situation in 2020-21 was encouraging, where only 9% people responded that they faced caste discrimination in the village.

3. Awareness about de-addiction- From the data related to efforts taken for de-addiction to alcohol, tobacco, gutkha and ganja etc. It was observed that there was no remarkable change in addiction among the villagers. It more or less remained the same. In the year 2013-14 it was 60%, in 2015-16 it was 50% and in 2020-21 it was 56%.

**Conclusion:** The findings related to the study on de-addiction indicated that more efforts or different approaches need to be taken to address this issue.

## 4. Decision making process of Gramsabha

The data on this aspect shows that in the year 2013-14, there were 27% people responded they were not involved in the village decision making process of Gramsabha, while in 2015-16 only 17% participants said they were involved in the decision making process. Whereas in the year 2020-21, 81% people responded that they were no longer associated in the decision making process

**Conclusion:** As can be seen from the observation, that in the year 2013-14, 2015-16 there were more people associated with the decision making process of the village, since there were many issues to be addressed, but in the year 2020-21 very less percentage of people were involved in the decision making process, as many of the issues have been resolved.

6. **Awareness about Generic Medicines-** Initially there was a lack of knowledge about generic medicines among the villagers in the year 2015-16, where almost none of the villagers had any idea about the generic medicines. The students then prepared Happy Hippo Show, posters and they visited house to house and explained the importance of generic medicines to create awareness among the villagers. And they were provided with the contacts where Generic medicines will be available. As a result in the year 2016-17, the percentage of people not knowing about generic medicines was 78% and in the year 2020-21 only 22% people were unaware about the generic medicines as can be seen from

**Conclusion:** From the findings it can be concluded that the consistent actions taken by the students to create awareness about generic medicines has shown a very remarkable improvement and the percentage of villagers who were aware about the generic medicines, increased to a greater extent and so in the year 2020-21 the percentage of people who were ignorant was only 22%. Further consistent action to address the issue may result in the whole population being aware about generic medicines, which would help them to purchase medicines at very low cost.

### Overall Recommendations and Conclusion

A Service Learning Activity is based on community service and may incorporate service into academic outcomes or co-curricular activities. Community service activities are planned under the supervision of college administrations or adults who assist students in becoming socially responsible and who educate and train other members of the community who work in some way to develop the society and improve the environment and living conditions. According to the findings and results of the research study, community service learning Activity improved the conditions of garbage collection and disposal, drainage water, and plastic waste spread. People stopped throwing away household waste.

There were toilets constructed in each household with the inspiration of the students and the action taken by the Gram Panchayat. The villagers started segregating their household garbage and Ghanta gadi was stated for the collection and disposal of household waste. Few farmers started using the wet waste in their farms as manure/compost. The awareness about the generic medicines increased among the villagers. It was observed that through consistent Service Learning activities conducted by the students, with the initiatives taken by the Higher Education Institution, they were able to improve the conditions in the village. This study indicates that the role of educational institutions in rural community development, can contribute to address the various issues of the village and bring about improvement in the conditions. And hence the Higher Education Institutions can play a major role to address the various challenges through the Service Learning Activities for rural development.

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