

# Foreword

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The birth of the *African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement* marks a significant milestone in the quest to deepen and strengthen our understanding of community engagement theory and *praxis*. Community engagement is at the intersection of research, teaching and learning and society. It is through community engagement that university research and teaching and learning are placed at the service and benefit of the society and, in return, the university's intellectual endeavour is enriched and societal development advanced. So, in the pursuit of their missions of teaching and learning and research, universities must keep their public good purpose at the front and centre.

Anchoring the practice of community engagement on rigorous theoretical foundations must be one of the strategic objectives of this important journal. A statement attributed to Immanuel Kant says that “theory without practice is empty; practice without theory is blind.” This interplay between theory and practice is of fundamental importance in the development and advancement of the scholarship of community engagement. This symbiotic relationship between theory and practice is key in shaping and driving the creation of a rigorous knowledge base for community engagement. While some work has been done towards the theorisation of community engagement and the advancement of the scholarship of community engagement, this journal will provide an added impetus towards defining and refining the contours of community engagement and the deepening of its scholarly moorings. It will enhance, deepen and broaden our understanding and philosophical insights into the role and purpose of our universities in the creation and sustaining of a better society and a better world.

This journal will also serve as a preeminent platform for researchers, scholars and community engagement practitioners to exchange knowledge and ideas on how best universities can contribute meaningfully, positively and sustainably in the communities in which they are located. Indeed, through engaged research and collaborative learning, universities and local communities can co-produce relevant knowledge that can address myriad of challenges facing our communities and the universities can benefit from the vast knowledge and experience that reside in their surrounding communities.

Given the importance of community engagement in any society, its theorisation should guard against what Kettley<sup>1</sup> refers to as “epistemological parochialism and truncated theoretical frameworks.” By necessity therefore, the theorisation of community engagement should break epistemological boundaries in much the same way that the conception and practice of community engagement should eliminate the imaginary boundaries between the society and the academy as we endeavour to forge mutually beneficial, respectful, ethical, reciprocal, sustainable and knowledge-driven partnerships with our local communities for the social good.

This journal can, and should, distinguish itself from others on the strength of the quality, impact and authenticity of the scholarly voices that will find expression in it. And, may it always be a source of relevant, creative and impactful ideas, knowledge and practices for a more equitable, just, sustainable, humane and inclusive future for Africa and the whole of humanity.

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1 Kettley N (2010, “*Theory Building in Educational Research*,” London, UK: Continuum.