



African Journal of Higher Education COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



AJHECE is an online open access journal hosted by Rhodes University Library, Makhanda (Grahamstown), Eastern Cape, South Africa.

The focus of AJHECE is Community Engagement and Development Research addressing topics on social injustice, poverty, corruption, inequality, unemployment and epistemic injustice, among other social and economic issues.

The main aim of AJHECE is to contribute to building a body of knowledge on Community Engagement (CE) for the African continent. The journal aims to publish and report on a wide range of aspects relating to Community Engagement and Community Development in Southern Africa, the region and elsewhere, with a strong focus on research and praxis. The journal's publications will reflect the diversity of practice in Community Engagement and the diversity of voices that participate in the co-creation of knowledge for individual, community and societal well-being. The journal actively seeks out international dialogue within the global South and partnerships between the global South and the global North that provide perspectives on and for Community Engagement in South Africa and the rest of the African region. By providing a forum for researchers, scholars, practitioners (community and institutional) and policy makers, the key objectives of AJHECE are to:

- Contribute to the body of knowledge on CE produced in Africa; encouragement of the African voice and voices from the global South in general, which may aid in combating epistemicide and marginalising alternative knowledge paradigms at higher education institutions.
- Grow community engagement as a discipline with philosophies, theories and praxis relevant to the African context, and a practice that contributes to the various dimensions (social, economic, cultural, psychological, spiritual, and political) of human and community development.
- Embed community engagement in all activities of the university, especially research, and signal the importance of scholarly work on community-university partnerships.
- Advance collaborative research methodologies, especially community-based participatory research (CBPR), where communities and academics are knowledge co-creators and collaborators in research practice and knowledge dissemination. This kind of research, which values the input of and produces knowledge for and with local communities, can contribute to the process of decolonisation of universities in Africa.
- Provide a space for professional development, discourse and debate on community engagement and sharing knowledge through the scholarship of engagement in the African context, the global South and partnerships with the global North that provide perspectives on and for Community Engagement in South Africa and the rest of the African region.
- Incorporate an author and young editorial board members support programme to encourage new authors in the field to establish themselves as scholarly writers and a new generation of editorial board members.

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Foreword

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Often, higher education community engagement serves as a 'bridge' between the university and its 'external' communities. It will take some time as community engagement, the public good arm of higher education institutions, progressively (albeit slowly), builds strong, trusting and sustainable relationships with local communities. While the word 'community' is not limited to people of a specific geographic area that is located in close proximity to a university, it is nevertheless, important for universities generally to make attempts to establish collaborative relationships with local communities, so that they can play their developmental and transformational purposes in contemporary South Africa. Universities need to see themselves as an integral part of their surrounding communities just as they are of the broader society nationally and globally.

Community engagement research, for the promotion of knowledge democracy, and community engaged teaching, for the promotion of experiential learning through critical service learning, are dependent on the nature of community-university relationships. Knowledge building in community engagement requires us to be mindful, to be aware of the interconnectedness of people and the environment, and of all forms of life. Mindfulness increases collaborative knowledge creation and knowledge sharing (Issac, Dhir & Christofi, 2024). Laila Marouf (2023) affirms that when we understand the whole spectrum of knowledge, with all its multidimensionality and interconnections, we can cultivate our abilities as leaders to reach deep into ourselves and out to others. Knowledge mindfulness requires us to be active and mindful in the way we understand and relate to knowledge, its creation and purpose.

One of the objectives of the African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement is to build a body of knowledge on Community Engagement which is context-specific but relevant globally. This second issue of the journal focusing on the theme of *relational ways of learning, knowing, and being in African universities*, challenges us to break out of old ways of thinking and embrace different ways of relating to communities. Importantly, not as 'apart' from universities but an 'integral part' of the whole and must therefore be considered co-creators of knowledge that affects their wellbeing and life through engaged research and engaged teaching. Community engagement as the 'bridge' between communities and universities has a significant role to play in enhancing the interconnected relationship between these two systems through collaborative knowledge creation.

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