Training the next generation of community-based participatory researchers

Official launch of the Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium

Community-based participatory researchers from universities and civil society organisations from 10 countries gathered in New Delhi in India in mid-November to kick off the Knowledge for Change or K4C Global Consortium.

K4C is an initiative of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, and has as its goal training the next generation of community-based participatory researchers.

The K4C Global Consortium was officially launched on November 13, 2017 at the National University of Educational Planning & Administration (NUEPA), in New Delhi. The launch was chaired by N.V. Varghese, Vice Chancellor, NUEPA. Over fifty participants joined the event. Mr Shigeru Aoyagi, UNESCO Director in New Delhi, who delivered the inaugural address of the meeting, congratulated the Chair for starting such a path-breaking initiative for training next generation researchers in community-based research, and also complimented the chair as being “the most important and active chair in the world”. He also committed the full support of UNESCO to the K4C initiative.

K4C will bring about social change by building new knowledge through action partnerships between Higher Education Institutions and local stakeholders. In order to do so, the K4C Network will train the next generation students and professors on Community Based Research (CBR). Community Based Research is intended as an ethical approach to research that equitably involves community members, organizational representatives, and researchers in all aspects of the research process. Every partner contributes expertise and shares in decision making and ownership of the research agenda to help find solutions to critical societal issues.

“There is a need to recognize the value of linking community-based knowledge with academic knowledge. Higher education cannot be delinked from community and societal problems. Addressing inequality and unsustainable development around the world demands community sensitive knowledge creation,” said Rajesh Tandon, UNESCO, Co-Chair and Founder-President, Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA).

Previous research led by the UNESCO Chair has shown that despite high demand for training and learning about doing Community Based Research, formal, structured training opportunities are scarce. Presently, university training in Community Based Research is limited and offers little practical exposure to the students. The K4C Network will help build new ways of learning Community Based Research and creating conditions needed for innovative models of research and research training programs to flourish. It will offer a variety of means to enhance individual and institutional research training capacities and support the transition of K4C trainees to the workplace in academic and non-academic settings.

“Our aim is to produce more than 1300 community based researchers and mentors over the next five years through this initiative,” said Dr N.V. Varghese. A first wave of training mentors that will actively work to set up training programs in learning hubs across the world will participate in a Training Mentorship Programme that will run from January to June 2018.

The official launch of the K4C Consortium was preceded by a three-day planning meeting at PRIA Head Office, in New Delhi. The meetings were facilitated by the UNESCO Co-Chairs, Budd Hall and Rajesh Tandon. Attending the meeting were K4C hub coordinators from India (Manju Singh from Manipal University, Jaipur; Reeta Venugopal and Priyamvada Shrivastava from Pandit Ravi Shankar
Shukla University, Raipur; and Mousumi Mukherjee from Jindal Global University, Sonepat), Indonesia (Abd’ Ala from UIN Sunam Ampel University, Surabaya), Italy (Andrea Vargiu from University of Sassari), South Africa (Darren Brendan Lortan and Savathrie Maistry from Durban University of Technology) and also the prospective coordinators from Spain (Ines Cambra Marin from University of Catalonia) and Uganda (Stephen Langole from Gulu University).

The team of the Foist Laboratory at the University of Sassari considers being part of the K4C Consortium from the very beginning as a great privilege. There couldn’t be a better way to celebrate the Foist Lab’s 40th anniversary than moving ahead to set up the first European K4C training hub. Two people from Sassari will be joining the first cohort of the Training Mentorship Programme and will develop the necessary sensibility, expertise and knowledge needed to start up a brand new study curriculum in CBR at the University of Sassari. Their work will be supported by a team of four experienced supervisors. Thus, potential is there to build on long time experience in training researchers and practitioners in CBR and to further develop pilots and more recently lessons learned through EnRRICH: a EU funded project which aims at embedding Responsible Research and Innovation in Higher Education curricula.

People working at the Foist Lab are very much looking forward to this new development which Foist will pursue in close collaboration with local CSOs, in order to ensure strong connections with societal needs and capabilities. After long time work in the education and social work sectors, it is expected that participation in the K4C initiative will enable Foist to develop transdisciplinary dialogue and collaboration: in fact, K4C strong connection with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is intended to provide a solid operation framework along with the possibility to connect local issues with global challenges while blurring existing boundaries among disciplines.