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# IMPLEMENTATION FRAMEWORK
# STUDENT COMMUNITY SERVICE AND VOLUNTEERING CENTRE

UNIVERSITY OF PERADENIYA, SRI LANKA

Integrating Talent Development into Innovation Ecosystems in Higher Education

586227-EPP-1-2017-1-BG-EPP

INNOTAL

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**The framework outlines the design of the operations of the Student Community Service and Volunteering Centre created at the University in the frame of the INNOTAL project. It clarifies its place in the University structure, its activities and management, as well as applicable rules and regulations.**


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**OBJECTIVES OF THE CENTRE**

- Expose undergraduates to different communities or specific target groups who are at a disadvantage (socially, medically, economically, resource-wise or otherwise, i.e. lack of access to education facilities, lack of access to clean water, etc.) or need external support for their wellbeing
- Help students realize that they can instigate change in society (through awareness, motivation, solving community issues etc.) and provide them the tools to engage in change-maker activities
- Enhance students' awareness and improve their understanding of the social groups / communities they live in and the main factors that affect their social life
- To provide them an opportunity to identify research problems for their future studies related to social needs
- Help students build a variety of transversal and professional skills through volunteering and community service activities.

**ACTIVITIES OF THE CENTRE**

Community work or volunteering has being recognized very recently as a part of the university formal education system. At University of Peradeniya, it is currently limited only to one faulty out of eight. However, community work or volunteering is a culture in the society as well as among the university student communities. Many such activities are voluntarily organized in the university. They pursue specific objectives and address the urgent needs of Sri Lanka society, i.e. communities affected by disasters, motivation of school children in remote areas with fewer facilities, prevention of drug addiction among school children, farmer education sessions, waste management and pollution control activities with communities, environment cleaning activities, community-based water supply activities with NGOs, etc. Most of these activities are voluntary and are organized by different groups - student unions / societies / clubs, welfare units, individuals, functional groups, Career Guidance Unit, deans of faculties, etc.

However, one of the University Faculties has already considered embedding community work and volunteering into the internship module. There is a plan to ensure that it also carries credits in the future. This activity will be started in the year 2021 for the students pursuing the general Degree of Arts and those who are pursuing special degrees will start this activity by the year 2022.

Such changes would take time to implement in the other faculties but the INNOTAL Volunteering Center can take the initiative well in advance to formalize and coordinate such activities in other interested Faculties as well. The Center can play a major role in finding placements for Bachelor of Arts students in the near future.

Thus, the Student Community Service and Volunteering Center at University of Peradeniya is expected to carry out the following activities:

- The center will centrally coordinate volunteering activities for all the Faculties or other interested societies / groups, and link the external

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organizations that are looking for such support to relevant and interested persons and structures within the university. It will thereby facilitate the process of student placement.

- • The center will obtain the required approvals for conducting volunteering activities from the university administration and relevant external organizations according to the bylaws of the university.
- • The center will conduct prior training and build basic awareness for student groups to improve the quality of their volunteering service.
- • The center will help provide external expertise to address specific issues relevant to volunteering and community service whenever necessary.
- • The Center will provide physical space and resources (i.e. training facilities and training personnel) for activities whenever needed
- • The center will maintain records, collect feedback and conduct impact assessment on specific social activities carried out (education / training / awareness raising, etc.).

## CORE AREAS OF INVOLVEMENT IN COMMUNITY WORK AND VOLUNTEERING

The center will be involved in the following core areas of community development. The objective of community development activities is to provide basic needs and equal opportunities to different social groups.

- Awareness raising

Poor education, misinformation, limited access to ICT is still predominant in some social groups. Only about 1/3rd (34.1%) of the population has access to the internet at present (https://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm). Therefore, community development through enhanced awareness on various social issues such as the use of ICT for livelihood, access to education, self-employment, water and sanitation, health (i.e. chronic kidney disease, non-communicable diseases (NCD)), food and eating habits, entrepreneurship, etc. can help achieve better living standards.

- Motivating people

Some of the community groups are poor, socially backward, have limited access to resources and need to be motivated in all aspects of their lives. Such activities could be implemented through schools, religious organizations, village societies, women associations, school societies, etc. and this is a national need. Community development at University of Peradeniya should aim at helping community people to stand on their own feet, use locally available resources and improve their lives. Much attention should be paid on motivating school children in remote, less privileged areas to pursue their education.

- Promote equality

Community services could be focused on providing equality to all

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people/ethnic groups living in a village/geographical location. Such activities should assist social groups in getting equal chances and opportunities to obtain resources and equality in education, health, etc.

- Change the way of thinking

Community services at University of Peradeniya should consist also of programs for the community with the objective of raising awareness about new directions and changing life styles. Initiatives to enhance social justice should be pursued. There should also be actions to minimize misbehaviors, drug addition, smoking, etc.

- Solving community-specific issues

Specific problems faced by people in a community could be solved through community programs in the affected areas jointly with the relevant government/external agencies. The affected people should be encouraged to assist in these activities if the government agencies are involved in a programme. Such actions could be implemented through 'Samurdhi' authority as they are directly involved in poverty alleviation through various community development activities including self-employment projects. This program is run by the government of Sri Lanka and has a well-organized island-wide network. They target the community living below the poverty line.

Community work planning within the university depends on the specific regional needs and the demand from external stakeholders for such work. On the other hand, whether or not different student groups are available to attend to such activities depends on their academic program / faculty. Especially the students having clinical training find it very difficult to engage extensively in such activities as they study throughout the day and the week. However, if the faculties were interested in identifying volunteering activities and community work as a part of their curriculum, this issue would not arise. Unfortunately, the mindset of most of the faculty members is that volunteering and community service are unrelated to studies. Students on the other hand are very much interested in engaging in community work as it is a part of the Sri Lankan culture. Existing community-based activities/ awareness programs on education (training for national examinations), literature (university literature festival), water, health and sanitation (jointly with NGO's such as World Vision, CapNet Lanka, etc.) see an enthusiastic student involvement and are conducted collaboratively with different stakeholders. The Volunteering Center will coordinate such activities, and will organize events jointly with external organizations.

The other common area of involvement is providing soft skills to school children especially in remote, less privileged, areas, with the assistance of external stakeholders like Lion's club, Rotary club, school-based parent/alumni associations, etc. The motivation of school children in remote areas to engage in studies is a very special community service and the center will work with the student societies and clubs to provide this service, which is similar to soft skills training. Every year the center will train about 100 volunteers (students) of the Robarosiya Student society as trainers and they can be engaged as leaders of the trainings. Other students will

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assist them in conducting such trainings. At present, the Robarosiya Student Society is hosted by the Career Guidance Unit. The members of the Robarosiya Student Society are continuously trained as volunteer trainers (Training of Trainers) in psychosocial counseling, socio-emotional skills, personality development, etc. so that they can assist community services. These activities are already initiated and a large number of school children has benefitted by them. These activities enhance the soft skills of undergraduates, too. The main responsibility of the center will be to work out the logistics, obtain the required approvals and facilitate the prior training of undergraduates (Training of Trainers programs) in all Faculties, except the Faculty of Arts.

The Faculty of Arts will be assisted by the Center to organize student placements for volunteering activities as it is a formal activity of that faculty. According to the regulations of the university, a Center like the INNOTAL Volunteering Centre cannot intervene into the academic programs of the faculties but it can facilitate their activities.

**POSITION OF THE CENTRE WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY STRUCTURE**

As the above-described activities are related to skills development at faculty level, it is better to establish faculty cells. The Volunteer Center will work with individual faculties for networking and other logistical support as needed by the faculty cells. Therefore, the faculty cell will be operated under the administration of the Dean of the faculty and managed according to the guidelines of the respective faculty board. This will facilitate the specific expected outcomes of different degree programs.

**COMMUNICATION WITH EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND RECIPIENTS**

It would be ideal to develop an electronic platform for digital communication with stakeholders and the recipients. However, this may raise a lot of issues with respect to technology and interests. It is advisable to start the activities with email communications which is happening without much trouble even at present. Communication with recipients could be better managed through mobile apps like Whatsapp groups as these are preferred by the students. However, work reporting still needs to be done as hard copies and reflective diaries could be introduced to students to record their experience. In addition, a student log book could be introduced to record activities and record the observation of the external stakeholders.

The target communities should be identified by different disciplines of study programs. Any requests originating from the community and received by the university, faculty, CGU or other Departments should be processed and selected according to the requirements of the faculty cell. In addition, there are several community service organization in the country. They select communities in need and may request the assistance of university students in implementing various actions in service of these communities. As an example, private TV and radio channels such as “Sirasa” and “Derana” conduct various community services and the centers can select communities with their assistance. “Sirasa -Gammedda” is such a voluntary community service and they seek the support of the university to provide voluntary

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services to rural, less privileged communities. Students in the health services could work with hospital patients which is relevant to their formal education. Similarly, freedom should be given to Faculty centers to select specific communities together with the students of the respective Faculty to conduct training programmes.

**RULES AND REGULATIONS FOR THE SELECTION AND PARTICIPATION OF STUDENTS IN VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY SERVICE**

Students will be selected for the volunteering and community services mostly based on expressed interest, as volunteering is optional by definition. The center that has been opened in the 2019/20 academic year has decided to base the selection on the first-come-first-serve principle.

The center will encourage participation by raising awareness on the activities and stressing their advantages to the target students. However, faculties will decide whether it is going to be compulsory or optional. The first center in operation at the Faculty of Arts has made participation optional based on the recommendation of their faculty. Based on experience of conducting activities in future, each faculty will formulate their own selection criteria to provide equal opportunity to each student.

**RULES FOR LINKING VOLUNTEERING AND COMMUNITY SERVICE ACTIVITIES TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT**

Sri Lanka has a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society and therefore, working environments are also the same after graduation. Therefore, in assigning students to community services and volunteering, the coordinators pay attention to promoting social pluralism by creating mixed social groups of students as much as possible. The second rule is placements targeted at developing team working skills. Teamwork is identified by the industry as one of the skills most lacking among present graduates. The other key skills are the socio-emotional competencies; the ability to cooperate with others, motivational and self-regulatory skills or self-control. Finally, each faculty will consider the expected programme outcomes of a particular degree programme and try their best to help build the expected skills and competencies of that programme when placing students for the volunteering activities (i.e. Psychology graduates are placed in counselling services, drug rehabilitation centers, etc.).

**RULES FOR ENSURING THE SAFETY OF STUDENTS ENGAGED IN VOLUNTEERING ACTIVITIES ORGANIZED BY THE CENTRE**

Students' safety during volunteering activities is currently ensured through mutual understanding and verbal agreements between the coordinator and the external partner. However, to formalize the arrangements, each faculty has to prepare MoUs and come to an agreement with the external party. The faculty centre that has just started this activity during the pandemic period is in the process of drafting such regulations for approval. Currently a faculty coordinator is appointed to oversee the whole programme, including student safety and workplace issues. To make it more effective, team coordinators are also appointed for small groups to monitor and communicate with students and the community groups/workplace administration continuously. For regular instant communication, they use simple group communication tools like WatsApp. This system is found to be satisfactory under the present context but needs to be formalized in the

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future in order to ensure sustainability. So far we have not engaged in placing students in UN agencies and when that is started, we have to follow UN safety regulations and guidelines as well.

## QUALITY ASSURANCE PLANS

Each faculty has its own Quality Assurance Cell. Since the work of the Center is a continuous process, the plans will be updated regularly based on the student and external party feedback, identified weaknesses and gaps in the programme.

The monitoring activities related to the volunteering programme will be the responsibility of the team coordinators. The University provides facilities and resources for the coordinators to visit and monitor the progress of implementation of various activities. The same mechanism is used for student industry trainings by some of the faculties. Issues of implementation and student and external partner feedback are communicated to the overall coordinator by the team coordinators. An annual summary is reported to the respective faculty board for taking corrective actions in future programmes.

Since the university/faculty are expected to offer volunteering and community services as an optional training activity, there will be no formal assessment. However, students will have to maintain a reflective diary and a record book to record their daily work. The responsible external partner will also make his/her observations about the students' performance during the activity period. Student will also submit a report to the respective department and make a presentation after completion on their experience. Student feedback will be collected and analyzed by the programme coordinator and it will be used for the continuous development of the volunteering programme by each faculty. In addition, the faculty will conduct external stakeholder consultation meetings to get external feedback and use the inputs to minimize the weaknesses and further improve the training. Such meetings are usually conducted by the faculty Quality Assurance Cells.

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