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The New Paradigm of Integrating Community Engagement Concept in Ethiopian Public Universities: Challenges and Opportunities

Introduction

Less than 20 years have passed since Ethiopia's national legislators explicitly mandated Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to promote societal development by proclamation no. 650/2009, which was later updated to proclamation no. 1152/2019. (FDRE, 2009; FDRE, 2019). Since then, research and discovery (knowledge advancement), teaching and learning (knowledge transmission), and community service (application of knowledge) have been the main duties of Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions. Due to its operational definition, the community service mandate—also known as "the third mission"—which is part of corporate social responsibility (CSR) encountered significant structural and functional issues.

According to the definition, "Community Service" means any unremunerated service that is performed by academic staff or students of HEIs with the knowledge of the responsible office; it is undertaken for the benefit of the public, its institutions, or for non-profit organizations (*MoSHE, 2019*). The localized ethnic political sentiment believes to be the cause of this definition. Politicians hoping to further their careers confuse the potential implications of university construction by associating it with the possibility of receiving "the third mission" at no cost to the people i.e. put the community as service receiver only. This creates non-reciprocating implementation of 'the third mission' in Ethiopian HEIs. The third mission culture that permeates Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions views these institutions as the exclusive providers and implementers of all resources, including community development. It is thought that this culture has contributed to the development of dependency syndrome in the local community that has been receiving these services. Because of this, the Ethiopian Ministry of Education has committed to redefining "the third mission" and envisions standardized, knowledge-based community engagement as a central function of Higher Education Institutions. This is because it is necessary to move from the previous model of "community service" to one of "community engagement," which fosters mutual relationships and reciprocity between the community and HEIs. Therefore, the new paradigm of 'the third mission' start working with setting operational definition to curve the challenge. In addition, the connotation ('the third mission') makes important stakeholders (at all levels: ministry of education, the university, college, and department) to give lesser attention this mandate. Hence, the new paradigm of redefining the approach of implementing 'the third mission' expected to correct the challenges of structural and functional of HEIs, resource allotted (share of budget, credit hour of staff, student engagement, etc.), and systematic link that connect HEIs with local and international community.

The new operational definition of the 'the third mission' of Ethiopian HEIs explained as: "Community Engagement (CE)" describes the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national and global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge, resources, and practices to address pressing societal problems in a context of partnership and reciprocity according to operational definition of Community Engagement Directive for Higher Education Institutions, Ethiopian Ministry of Education (MoEDR1, 2019).

In the culture of 'the third mission' thought, emerging universities of Ethiopia have been sandwiching between the challenges from two sides: on one hand; budget allotted for society development project is the smallest portion of budget government allotted for each institution, on the other hand; the community ever increasing development demand. Thus, the paradigm shifts on "the third mission" aimed to save Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions by providing a chance to combine resources from all parties involved and help in expanding the institutions' reach for community development.

Additionally, as required by HEIs decrees, can foster collaborative planning, execution, and reporting of societal development initiatives and assist government efforts to reduce poverty. (FDRE, 2009; FDRE, 2019; United Nations, 2015). The process will not be easy, it calls for repeated multi-sectoral stakeholder collaborative dialogue to create awareness on the new paradigm of community engagement framework and strategies: service receiving to collaborating for service realization (United Nations, 2015).

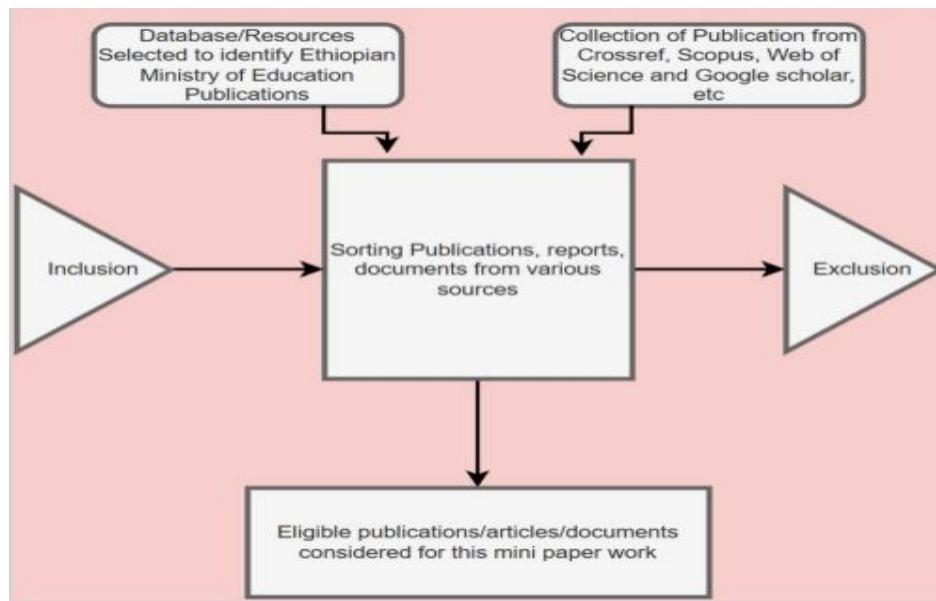
Therefore, corporate social responsibility mandate that given by UNESCO decree to HEIs is important for community dwelling in developing countries like Ethiopia and based on the concept Ethiopian HEIs have been working to improve the livelihoods for realization of sustainable economic development single handed. Introduction of community engagement approach to pool the necessary resources (such as expertise, material, and financial resources) is brought both opportunities and challenge and hardly studied (UNESCO, 1998; FDRE, 2009; FDRE, 2019; United Nations, 2015).

In conducting our literature and secondary data review, we meticulously selected sources to provide a comprehensive overview of the evolution of corporate social responsibility (CSR) in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Our research involved an extensive search of multiple academic databases, including Google Scholar and Web of Science, to ensure a broad and diverse representation of perspectives. We also relied on institutional databases, with the FDRE Ministry of Ethiopia being a primary source of data on the country's higher education institutions. We examined Ethiopian universities across all four generations and considered their respective dates of establishment to assess their experiences in fulfilling their CSR. Additionally, we gathered basic information from the official websites of each university for two key reasons: first, to link their establishment dates with their experience in CSR, and second, to understand their working definitions of corporate social responsibilities. To ensure our literature review was focused and relevant, we used keywords such as "community service," "community engagement," "corporate social responsibility," and "higher education institutions of Ethiopia." This careful and systematic approach provided a solid foundation for analyzing the challenges and opportunities within the paradigm of CSR in Ethiopian higher education institutions. Hence, the purpose of this research paper is to bridge this research gap and the aim of paper is to assess the new paradigm of Integrating Community Engagement Concept in Ethiopian Public Universities.

Methodology of the study

Several publications, organization documents such as Federal Democratic Republic Ethiopia Ministry of Education and websites visited as an approach grasp important information to realize the objective the paper. To make clearer review approach, the illustration below (Fig.1) to serve as conceptual diagram of the entire review processes. The article/publication/document selection criterion was not limited to geographical areas where the studies were conducted. The recent time frame is considered from 2020-2023 for articles but others time also considered with exception of the timeline specified to see the retrospect literatures about the issue at hand. Various databases were considered during reviewing such as (UNESCO, Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia Ministry of Education, more than 20 universities', etc.). The keywords/search terms and combination of words from the topic the essay was used. As illustrated by conceptual diagram (Fig.1), database-based search, material collections, inclusion and exclusion of eligible/ineligible material was the process used as method for preparation of the paper.

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of the review process



Source: own illustration

Retrospective and Present Literature Review

Concepts and definitions taken from the sources of these databases are put together make understand the literature is about. The concept of university social responsibility (USR) is very explored in the literature, but there is not a single definition (Ribeiro et al., 2021). The operational definition HEIs in Ethiopia is showed on the introduction section of this paper. The definitions are from book that extracted the concept from 1998 UNESCO Decree for HEIs: World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action (UNESCO, 1998; Ribeiro et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2023). UNESCO chair in CBR (2015, p.3) proposes that: Community University Engagement (CUE) as a 'concept implies relationships between universities and communities, which is mutually beneficial and adopt a bidirectional flow of information between the two; this engagement between universities and communities can be at the local, regional, national or even virtual levels, and aimed at the co-creation of knowledge, which is beneficial to society at large' whereas Benneworth et al., (2018, p.28) defines CE as: 'a process whereby universities engage with external organizations to undertake joint activities that can be mutually beneficial, even if each side benefits in a different way'.

University Community Engagement as CSR: Global trends and practices

In response to the increasing dynamism and complexity of the environments in which organizations function, including higher education institutions (HEIs), stakeholder theory was developed in the 1980s. One of the main goals of stakeholder theory's development is the creation of value for local communities (Langrafe et al., 2020). The 1998 UNESCO World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-first Century: Vision and Action, which emphasized the social tasks of the entire higher education system, was conceived in a much more democratic spirit, as cited by (Reisinger & Dános, 2021). As the study showed that higher education institutions have been contributing to development through their missions, but still higher education systems need to respond to several challenges according to various demands from society (Olo et al., 2021). This is where the current popularity of HEIs' corporate social responsibility as university social responsibility originates (Reisinger & Dános, 2021). The declaration was believed to lay stepping stone for European HEIs university social responsibilities. As a result, the global trend of CSR in HEIs revealed a variety of experiences. For instance, in the case of Hungary, the research revealed that university social responsibility is one of the new approaches to this third mission and has gained more traction in recent years in Hungarian

higher education and there has been a university social responsibility program for almost 20 years (Reisinger & Dános, 2021). Like this, community engagement—also known as corporate social responsibility—is not new idea in Indian higher education, but it has taken on a new meaning and perspective in the last ten years due to a number of factors, with India gradually becoming a hub for CE in the Global South and having enormous potential to develop further in the future. (Singh et al., 2023). The authors claim that HEIs in the Global South are closely trailing behind HEIs in the Global North when it comes to CE in higher education. It is noteworthy that various nations exhibit varying degrees of maturity concerning the integration and mainstreaming of corporate social responsibility activities within their higher education discourses. Universities in North America and Europe have rebranded themselves and taken on more active and entrepreneurial missions. It's unclear how and to what extent African institutions are strategically shifting their positions in that regard (MoE, 2015). In addition, the book by Singh et al pointed out that now adays community engagement has defined values and principles as shown on table below (Table 1). Built on these values and principles, CE in HEIs can take multiple and diverse forms and can be adapted in different ways, depending on the local context, and understanding of the practice (Singh et al., 2023).

Table 1. Value and Principles of CE

Values	Principles
Capacity	Mutual interest and needs
Commitment	Multi-function focus
Contribution	Equality of opportunities
Continuity	Incentivization for mainstreaming CE
Collaboration	Embedding partnerships
Conscience	Mutual respect

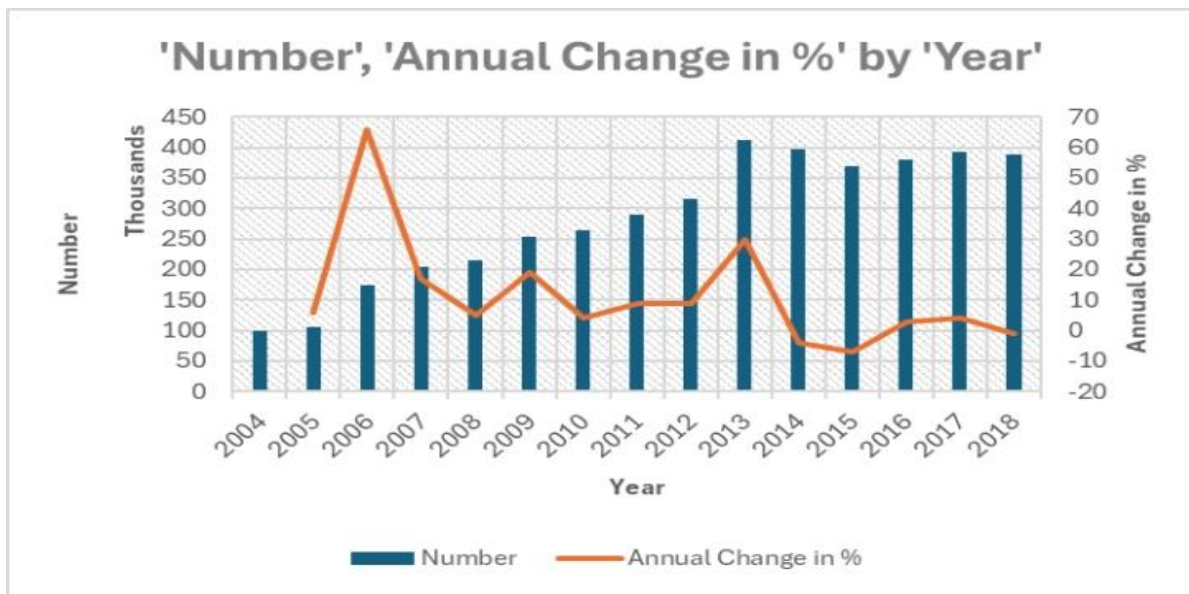
Source: adapted from Singh et al., 2023

Despite its crucial role in social transformation, higher education institutions face a number of internal and external challenges and barriers that must be overcome in order to realize the world we envision. These include differences in audience types, the political climate, and stakeholder interests (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021).

Ethiopian Higher Education Institutions

According to World Bank and UNDP, Ethiopia is the second most populous in Africa after Nigeria with about 123 million people (2022) and is growing at an annual rate of 2.6 percent, making it the second highest in Sub-Saharan (MoE, 2018; UNDP, 2022). According to Ministry of Education (MoE) of Ethiopia educational statistics 2022/23, the country has 52,202 schools with 26,457,127 students and 752,580 teachers (MoE, 2023). Despite the disparity in enrolment and graduation rates, research on higher education conducted by Dilla University scholars revealed a trend of increase in regular undergraduate enrolment and graduation rates at Ethiopian government universities. For example, enrolment was soaring showing significant difference in 2007, 2013, and 2016, and graduation rates were gradually increasing. These shifts (**Figure 2**) could be attributed to the emergence of second, third, and fourth generation universities. Hence, the scholars pointed out that the emergence of universities in the second, third, and fourth generations may be responsible for these shifts (Mekonnen Yimer et al., 2022).

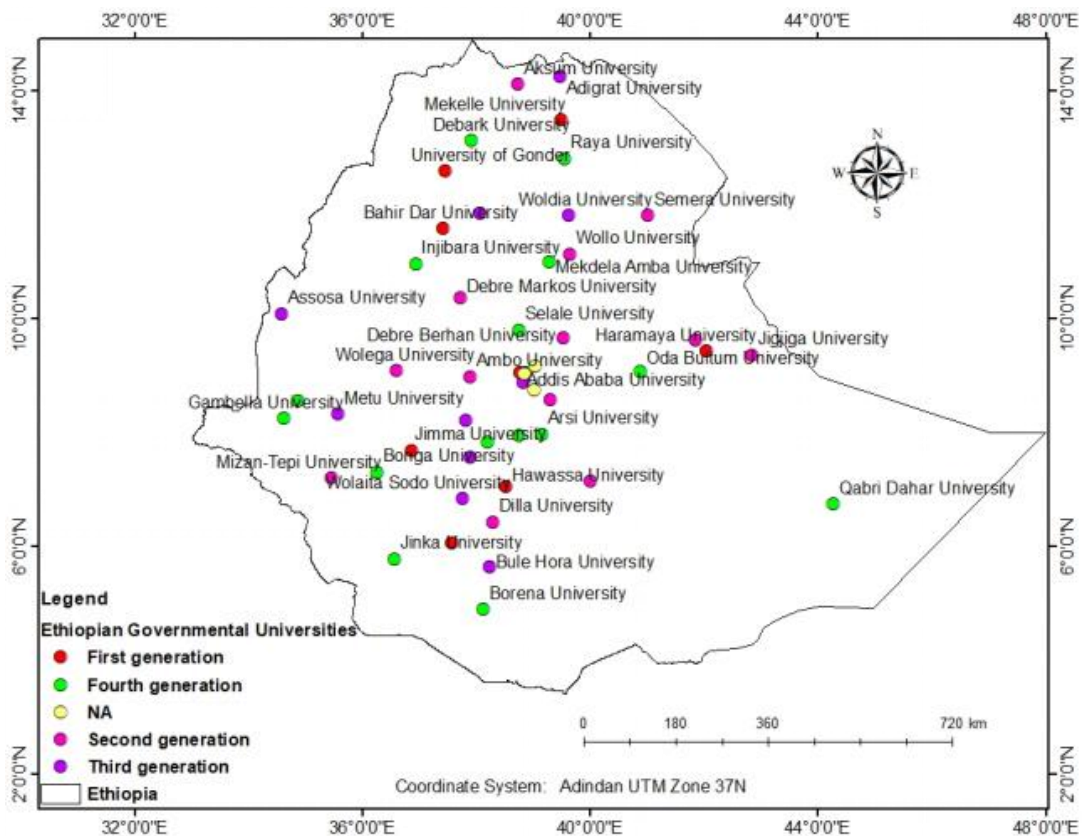
Figure 2. Ethiopian Higher Education Enrolment Trend



Source: using published data (Mekonnen Yimer et al., 2022)

Recently due to strict procedures followed by MoE the number of students enrolled in Ethiopian higher education is decreasing but no recent data found. As Table 2, Ethiopian higher education enrolment showed ever increasing number of student population in public universities located all over the regions of the country, Figure 3.

Figure 3. Ethiopian Higher Education Enrolment Trend



Source: Map Prepared by Wondifraw Nigussie, 2024

The Context of Ethiopian HEIs: Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing ‘the third mission’ of higher education

During the 20th century, Ethiopia's higher education system encountered challenges such as inequitable access, outmoded curriculum, inefficient resource usage, and poor educational quality (Endrődy et al., 2022). Since its genesis, higher education in Ethiopia has been through three governments whose ideological makings hold different forms: three regimes in Ethiopia, namely, the Imperial (1916-1974), the Socialist (1974-1991), and the Revolutionary Democratic regimes (1991-2018) (Aboye, 2021; Gurmessa & Bayissa, 2015; Journal & Vol, 2020). According to a decree, Ethiopian HEIs are required to carry out the society development mission, which enhances their reputation (FDRE, 2009; FDRE, 2019; Elifneh, 2015). The usual context of ‘the third mission’ work on operational definition of ‘Community Service’ which non- reciprocating flowing from one direction: from university to local community. With very few exceptions, Ethiopian HEIs and university faculty are young, and it is not useful to compare them to institutions in Europe that are 500, 250, or even older. For example, the oldest university, Bologna, established in 1088 (Zelege & Hirko, 2018). There are advantages and disadvantages to the new paradigm's implementation. Opportunities for resource pooling will impact societal problem solutions, but the primary difficulties will still be limited collaboration and internationalization due to the country's institutional capacity limitations.

The table (Table 2) depicts the total lists of Ethiopian Public Universities with details such as year of establishment and generation. Based on their establishment Ethiopian public universities are grouped into 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th generations. **University generation is exceptional to Addis Ababa University because it is the oldest, largest, and top-ranked public university in Ethiopia (Kitaw et al., 2020).** Studies and government strategy documents showed that there is noticeable difference among the ‘old’ and latest generations of Ethiopian universities in terms of quality of **educational and research infrastructure and facilities and their faculties**. Recently established university generations (**3rd and 4th generation universities**) have poor campus environment, are encountered with poor connectivity and a lack of technical expertise to properly develop and use ICT for academic and research purposes (MoE, 2018). In addition, Universities’ research capacity is constrained by low available finances and by a small supply of capable researchers (MoE, 2015). Generally, according to Ethiopia Education Roadmap (2018-30), **majority of universities in Ethiopia have concentrated on teaching, and are not participating actively in research, community services and development endeavours of the country** as expected. Most faculties are engaged on teaching only. Only few faculties, especially in first generations universities involve in research (MoE, 2018).

Table 2. Total List and Data Summary of Public Universities in Ethiopia

No.	University	Year established	Generation
1	Addis Ababa University	1950	*
2	8 Universities	1999	1 st Generation including AAU
3	13 Universities	2006	2 nd Generation
4	10 Universities	2007-2011	3 rd Generation
5	19 Universities	2012 - now	4 th Generation and others

Source: Own table based on data from FDRE Ministry Education and Universities website

The table just show how young are HEIs in Ethiopia. The nation's first university, Addis Ababa University, was founded in the 1950s, marking the establishment of the country's higher education system. the early 1990s, when the Ethiopian government started to restructure the higher education industry. Between 1996 and 2005, the number of public universities increased significantly as a result of the reform, and which reached 50 in 2020 (MoSHE, 2020; Chalchisa, 2012).

To make clear how young Ethiopian universities are, Addis Ababa University was the first only university with some colleges in different parts of the country until 1999. In 1999 most of the colleges under Addis Ababa University decreed and upgraded to universities with additional two new universities (Arba Minch and Mekelle) to increase the number of universities into eight. In 2006 additional 13 universities added and then from 2007 to 2011 another ten added to increase the

number of universities 31 public universities in Ethiopia. With exception of Addis Ababa University and those universities in the first generation with age of less than 20 years. Currently public universities sum up to 50, including those higher institutions under the army and regional state 19 universities established after 2011 to date (MoE website; (Chalchisa, 2012).

Nowadays there is new paradigm in Ethiopian HEIs that have essence of differentiation into research universities, university of applied sciences, science and technology universities, and comprehensive universities (MoSHE, 2020). (MoE, #12). As one can clearly understand from the table (Table 2.) most Ethiopian HEIs are newly emerging and young to be innovative and reputable in international context due to resource and institutional capacity limitation. According to Ethiopian HEIs proclamation no. 650/2009 and the revised proclamation no. 1152/2019 the responsibility given to HEIs to contribute societal development coupled with enormous community development demand due to the prevailing poverty in local community give HEIs a huge burden to shoulder. This calls for paradigm in Ethiopian HEIs to revisit their organizational structure, systematic link of their institution with local, regional, national, and international communities structurally as well as functionally.

In terms of theory (research) and practice (implementing the new paradigm) of CSR in HEIs there seems to have limitation. A study conducted at three universities in South Africa on the community engaged teaching-learning modality has concluded that a transformation in nursing education can be achieved through the appropriate integration of community engaged teaching-learning into program design and curriculum development, as well as the use of explicit community engaged teaching-learning methods with intentional outcomes for students and communities (Muzeya et al., 2020). The Case-study of SCR on Addis Ababa University as recommended similar study replication of higher learning institutions in the country would refine and allow for generalizations of results as there is no study in the area about CSR in Ethiopia (Elifneh, 2015). The key finding of the study indicated that there is still the need for more efforts to improve the social responsibilities of the university.

Hence, HEIs making significant efforts to curve whatever the challenges in university social responsibility to opportunities. CSR is resource demanding, for example, the post-Bologna HEIs of Europe looking for ways in which to articulate the social dimension of HEI and their “third mission” fostering public-minded alumni through powerful experiences of engagement for both the students and the community (Coelho & Menezes, 2021). Among the innovative approaches to build community belongingness a genuine relationship that has a meaning is important specially to involve HEIs students to the work of community engagement (Haddow & Brodie, 2023). Furthermore, to cultivate the essence of CSR in HEIs its essential to begin from curriculum inception as a research paper pointed out that during the student-hood in higher education the design of teaching and learning scenarios with focus on social action projects shall ensure that the graduates are not only fit for labour market but also cooperative, thoughtful, and responsible citizen (Muzeya et al., 2020). By and large, Community engagement can serve as a vehicle through which the objective of nation-building and sustainable social development achieved (Singh et al., 2023).

Summary

As several literature pointed out and the concept of CSR to be put in practice in best proper way all stakeholders must be clear with the central essence of the concept/the paradigm. In case of Ethiopian HEIs top management (those from ministry of education, University president and vice presidents), middle level management (college deans, directors to community service, research, and technology transfer), lower-level management (department head), staff (teachers and technical staff) and student should be clear with the corporate social responsibilities of universities. The same from the local community side because the reciprocating benefit call for equal understanding of the concept from both sides.

Even though Ethiopian HEIs are so young that the institutional, staff, resource, etc. capacity is not giant but on adays the world is open to take lessons and the sooner they can discharge their responsibilities because of ‘the late comer advantage’. It’s clear that institution which are emerging, with young staff,

less exposed to the international similar scenarios, nurtured from curriculum not designed in view of CSR, faced new paradigm evolved from the previous but without knowing what was the former one, etc. are a real challenge that emerging universities of Ethiopia should face to be able to cultivate CSR principles and realized the community development mission.

Operating 'the third mission' single handed pooling all resources (financial, professional, material, etc.) from a university will not sustain the mission. The paradigm importance of shifting to community engagement in that it is a good strategy to pool of resources from all concerned stakeholders this can sustain the development of the society. The issue at hand requires a strong foundation that make sure third mission linked with the other two important missions of HEIs: teaching-learning and research. To start with the former, Universities should commit to the development of curricular/extracurricular activities to improve students' educational level and skills in sustainability (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Like with thematic research area must aligned with the local community development priorities. Approach of community engagement is better not only matching fund but also other non-finance resources for collaborative community development projects.

Generally, the essence of CE in HEIs win-win and realistic and make an opportunity to enhance the mission HEIs in a such way that bring the mutual beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources, encompassing all three of the dimensions of higher education, i.e., teaching, research, and societal development, realizing widening of capacity and development in both sides for community wellbeing. To this end, opportunities are conducive environments from local to international scope whereas challenges are issues related to linking CSR from inception of curriculum, community awareness about the CE paradigm, etc. In conclusion the new paradigm is very important in that it value the principle of working "with" community partners and not "for" them.

In conclusion, the international HEIs in the globe have been supporting staff from HEIs of developing countries in order to enhance their institutional capacity through scholarship, for example, Stipedium Hungaricum is the playing significant role by awarding about 50 post graduate Ethiopian universities each year. Therefore, such good start of nurturing and enhancing HEIs in developing nations like Ethiopia will have massive importance higher education sector capacity and economic development of the country.

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