VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

Kampala . Uganda

Community Engagement Policy

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1.0. Preamble

The vision of Victoria University is designed to enable it become a premier Higher Education Training Institution in Uganda, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation. The University is keenly aware of its social responsibility and, therefore, endeavors to engage with all relevant communities within the ambit of its activities. The University identifies these engagements as one of its fundamental core functions, hence focuses its full commitment to supporting the community outreach/engagement plans as long-term strategy.

This policy is purposed to ensure the alignment of the University's core mandate and values, thereby ensuring that the tenets of its existence, are ingrained in the principles of integrating community engagement into the core business of VU, as opposed to being merely a training institution.

2.0. THE PRINCIPLES

In its quest for engagement, VU shall share its expertise as an overarching philosophy underpinning activities relating to teaching and learning, research/innovation, consultations, contract research, patents and products. This is because, the element of sharing of expertise is a major contributing factor to the University's outreach, in terms of scholarship, social transformation and other forms of interaction with external parties on the basis of reciprocity and collaboration. Hence, through scholarships, the University strives to attain the status of an 'engaged institution' and, in so doing, it aims to foster the notion of discovery of all forms of knowledge, integration (connections across disciplines and with external contingencies) while applying dialogue between theory and practice for relevance, thereby providing solutions to real problems. Thus, as part of becoming a learning organization, Victoria University is conscious of

its responsibilities and commitment to its stakeholders in contributing to transformation of society through design, development and implementation of curriculum fit for purpose.

3.0. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the VU community engagement policy are to;

3.1 Foster the spirit of community outreach/ engagement as a core mandate of VU's existence.

3.2 Guide the engagement plans with communities during research/innovation and teaching/learning and outreach activities;

3.3 Maximize outputs and benefits for the University and its community partners;

3.4 Foster a strong community ethos for socio-economic transformation in a sustainable way.

4.0. THE SCOPE

This policy is applicable to activities and actions where the University, its staff and students engage with the Community. It should be read in conjunction with other related policies such as the Statutes, Human Resource Manual etc.

5.0. POLICY STATEMENT

In order to contribute towards the wellbeing and empowerment of all members of society, VU requires that this policy is embraced and operationalized by its staff and students, irrespective of the originating community/communities, when conducting activities related to research/innovation, teaching and learning, community service and outreach initiatives, in an attempt to influence the societal impacts. In short, the structural integration of community

engagement into all activities of the University, is of utmost importance, and underpins all activities undertaken by the University with an emphasis on the sharing of discipline based expertise.

6.0. EXPRESSIONS

The following terminologies or phrases shall express the contextual framework within which this Policy operates.

6.1 Community Engagement

Community engagement is defined as activities performed by the University staff and or students, primarily aimed at uplifting or supporting society and or individuals in need of assistance or engagement. Community engagement as a core function of the University exists to nurture and manage partnerships with communities, with the intention to facilitate cooperation between various communities and the university, as well as to provide the means whereby both parties can actively discover knowledge, teach and learn from one another in a reciprocal, mutually beneficial manner. Conversely, community engagement as a guiding philosophy of VU, is envisaged to contribute towards creating an environment in which student learning and research relevance will be enriched by the need and relevance of the society. In this way, the institution's commitment to reciprocate, redress, develop and transform all surrounding communities will be of utmost priority.

The following criteria will determine whether an activity meets the prerequisites for true community engagement.

i. Resonate with the vision, mission and core values of the University.

ii. Be linked interactively to an identifiable group in a community outside/inside the Institution.

iii. Interaction should be actively linked to identifiable needs of both the University and the community. In other words, there ought to be a clear evidence of the benefit for both the community and the University.

iv. There ought to be the element of sustainability in every activity the University aspires to engage the community.

v. The context of engagement should be conducted within a mutually defined relationship/partnership with all concerned.

Based on the above criteria, clearly, exclusive teaching and research activities that do not include a reciprocal community component cannot be regarded as forming the ethos of the University. Consequently, to satisfy the above listed criteria, those modules where students are required to conduct community-based research should involve activities where the students or academics actually engage with the community by undertaking activities in conjunction with and within the very midst of the community.

6.2. Communities

The definition of 'Communities' under this Policy shall range from the University's internal community, such as its staff and students, to an array of external communities, including but not limited to communities of interest such as the street kids etc, or communities of practice, the public and private sectors within the environs of the University.

In the context of this Policy, the term 'community' shall denote a social grouping involved in an interaction at any given moment with VU. Community therefore, shall refer to groups of people united by a common location, or groups of people who are linked intellectually, professionally

and/or socially. These could be geographic communities, communities of interest and/or communities of practice. This broad definition shall allow the University to focus on marginalized groupings in society without having to exclude other community formations with their attendant activities. Although VU is a 'for profit' entity, its integration of community engagement, shall form part of its core business and shall involve all types of engagement whether for 'not-for-profit' or not. The agenda is to ensure the University's compliance with the Uganda's National Development Plans and her Vision.

6.3 Teaching & Learning

Victoria University shall ensure that teaching and learning with its attributes, are impactful in its community engagement activities. These shall include professional community services and outreach as well as developmental activities with a reciprocal aim. For example, the University currently offers a number of health programmes such as Nursing and Midwifery. In its quest for ensuring community engagement, the teaching of such programmes shall benefit communities who may attend to the University's facilities for diagnosis at no cost.

6.3.1 Professionalism

Victoria University shall observe and underscore community outreach in a professional and ethical manner. This shall include advise offering and sharing of expertise as well as similar but voluntary and uncompensated activities provided under the auspices of the University in teaching, experiments, practicum and internship. Examples shall include discipline-based general advisory services, where members serving on advisory boards and editorial committees, consultation services offer professional guidance such as the agricultural extension advise on a probono basis.

Furthermore, the University shall ensure that it promotes a developmental recruitment drive to include learners within the community and make emphasis in their academic progression, thereby articulating the idea of role modelling. Indeed, this strategy is aimed at attracting community based learners to the University who would pride themselves as being the constituent of VU.

6.3.2 Community Engagement

The University shall foster the spirit of citizenship engagement among its learners as a way of building manpower with not only the required skills, but the necessary attributes such as the duty of care, solidarity, nationalism and ethical behaviors among others. Students shall be afforded the opportunity of knowledge acquisition and transfer of knowledge, in order to enhance their learning experiences. In this regard, processes that encourage civil responsibility amongst students by exposing them to the realities of society in preparation for their participation in societal transformation are important. Subsidized developmental community engagement aims, therefore, to add value to the development of students' critical thinking skills and other soft skills in synergy with teaching and research, thus contributing to their preparation for active participation as Ugandan citizens in their future careers.

6.3.3 Voluntary Skills Transfer

This is where a skill is shared or transferred without any instruction from the University but where this transfer takes place in the name of the University – for example students or staff who volunteer to train learners in after-school mathematics classes or at their place of worship. The University shall encourage the practice of voluntary skills transfer among its students and staff, provided the activities and practices are carried out in a consensual manner that would not

precipitate any reputational or litigious damage to the University. All such activities shall be reported as part of the VU Community Outreach/engagement.

Another example would be the extra classes that are run by "the University's students or staff". If there is no academic oversight, it is volunteerism. If it is regulated by academic oversight and students are evaluated for curricular purposes, it is service learning.

6.4 Research & Innovation

Research, innovation and knowledge transfer are fundamental pillars of the core function of Victoria University. The University shall ensure that all its research interest and activities, when commencing, would be done with the focus of relevance and benefits to the local community as a priority. In such instances, the research inputs of the community shall be regarded as participatory in nature and must be negotiated and valued – a methodology which is supported by an array of techniques aimed at ensuring reciprocity and partnerships. This is because, the generation of new knowledge is treated as being collaboratively shared widely in the public domains, therefore, there is the potential to get feedback into the curriculum as well as to be linked directly to aspects of a student's training.

The community engagement/outreach policy shall encourage the practice of research/innovation with the indigenous focus. This is significant since in some instances, engaged research could be on phenomena found within communities and is then termed community-based research. Here, too, the principle of respectful and ethical access to and inclusion of communities with feedback is essential. Before communities can be included in any type of research, though, access to such communities must be negotiated in line with validated ethical principles. These principles will be governed by the rules and regulations under Section 7. Moreover, it shall be required that provisions are made to ensure feedback to broader society of the knowledge generated, not only

through formal scientific channels but also through professional community service and popular (public) communication.

6.5 Volunteerism

Additional services by staff and students to, especially, the local communities in which the university is based are also forms of engagement. This includes voluntary-based 'enablement /empowerment /development/non-discipline based outreach' activities such as services that are short-term, repetitive and mostly philanthropic in nature and that are not regulated by the University. Any formal linkage with the University will require adherence to the rules of engagement.

7.0. RULES & REGULATIONS

There shall be rules and regulations set by the University to govern its community engagement policy as outlined below.

7.1 Research/Innovations

All research/innovation, teaching and learning activities shall be conducted under the observance of the ethical conduct. In all cases, ethical clearance from the respective faculties or departments based on prescribed risk-assessment criteria to be determined, shall be issued as a prerequisite prior to commencement of any such research/innovation process.

7.2 University Engagement Activities

All University engagement activities must be registered on the University database for community engagement in Academic Registrar's Office. In all cases, the said activities must be clearly demonstrating the projects objectives, expected outcomes and the sustainability or exit strategies.

7.3 Engagement Activities Regulations

i. All Engagement activities must preferably be set up as a formal partnership in order to regulate expectations, manage risks and ensure role clarification. Informed consent forms are to be used to cover some of these regulatory steps and understanding on an individual level; however, such forms must be signed off via the scientific and ethical committees at faculty level.

ii. Furthermore, formal partnerships must be cleared by and submitted to the Vice Chancellor's Office and must be signed by the unit/ department/ faculty/ school responsible for implementation, University Secretary, and Vice Chancellor.

iii. Evidence of shared planning and ensuring that the partnership is mutually beneficial is essential.

iv. Regular feedback must be provided to all stakeholders involved to ensure that recognition is given to participants and that the principles of reciprocity are adhered to.

7.4 Engagement/Outreach Evaluations

Engagement activities must be evaluated by community partners and feedback must be availed to the University. The University shall therefore conduct evaluative assessment on all the project and or activities under its community engagement policy.

7.5 Quality Assessment, Risk Management and Impact Assessment

Quality assessment, risk management and impact assessment shall be conducted by the relevant management structures, in all the projects and activities that every member of the University engage.

7.6 Fundraising for Community Engagement

Fundraising for community engagement will be done in compliance with all rules, regulations and policies of the University in accordance with the provisions of the Statues.

8.0 PROCEDURES

Victoria University shall ensure the provision of effective, efficient and equitable support for community engagement through existing and approved structures.

9.0 REVIEW OF THE POLICY

This policy may be reviewed and amended from time to time as and when need arises.

This Policy was Approved by the University Council at its 12th Meeting held on 19th December 2018 under Minute 8.3 c)

Chairman

Ag. University Secretary/Secretary