

OPEN SOCIAL FORUM

“The purpose of education is to turn mirrors into windows.”—Sydney J. Harris

Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Open University is celebrating its forty years of existence and service to the society. To commemorate the occasion the faculty of Social Sciences proposes to launch a new social outreach initiative by name “The Open Forum” in the faculty of Social Sciences. The main idea of the proposed forum is to build a social interface for community engagement and social awareness. The primary objective of ‘Open Forum’ is to contribute for better informed society through spread of knowledge and information to larger audience.

The functions of any university in general hold the transmitting, discovering and distributing knowledge to society through its academic programmes and courses. University Outreach programs involve instructional and professional activities by faculty and students with people and organizations who are not enrolled in the institution. Universities, as educational institutions, play a vital role in promoting social good, sustainability through its activities for the improvement of the society. The Open forum will be an interface with the University and society where faculty will organize sensitization programmes as social responsibility.

The declaration from the second UNESCO Conference on Higher Education held in Paris in July 2009 stated explicitly that, ‘Higher education has the social responsibility to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues...and our ability to respond to them... Through its core missions of teaching, research and service, it should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges...’

In response to the UNESCO call, the University Grants Commission (UGC) in its policy paper issued in January 2020 stressed the need of community engagement by the Higher Educational institutions, UGC set up a Subject Expert Group on educational institutions’ social responsibility in 2018 under Unnat Bharat Abhiyan (UBA), a flagship programme of Gol, which worked to develop the report on “Fostering Social Responsibility & Community Engagement in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in India”.

The document developed a framework and issued certain mandatory operational guidelines under “trans-Disciplinary Research for India’s Developing economy” scheme to all the HEIs in the country.

UGC's ambitious Quality Mandate launched in 2018 has focused on improving societal linkages of HEIs and enabling faculty as well as students to become socially productive.

On the other hand, the UN recognized education as a human right and a force for sustainable development and peace. Every aspect framed in Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) in its 2030 Agenda requires education to empower people with the knowledge, skills and values to live in dignity, build their lives and contribute to their societies. Universities can be engines of societal transformation. They nurture the future leaders, professionals, and citizens and can navigate them towards sustainability through their educational programmes. The role of HE in the realization of the SDGs is therefore its contribution to the transformational transition to sustainability. Among the many contributions Universities can make to sustainability, community education has the greatest potential, and this is reflected in Sustainable Development Goal 4, Quality Education. Higher Education is mentioned in target 4.3, which aims to "by 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education, including university". Higher Education forms an important part of other goals related to poverty (SDG1), health and wellbeing (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5) governance, decent work and economic growth (SDG8), responsible consumption and production (SDG12), climate change (SDG13), and peace, justice, and strong institutions (SDG16).

The Education 2030 Framework for Action (EFA) Further gave a road map to achieve the sustainable development through inclusive education. This roadmap intends to leverage the power of digital tools, open educational resources, and online learning to promote access, equity, quality, and relevance. Target 4.7 explicitly mentions education for sustainable development (ESD) as the kind of education that can empower learners with important knowledge, skills, and attitudes to pursue sustainability.

Universities can be engines of societal transformation. They nurture the future leaders, professionals, and citizens and can navigate them towards sustainability through their educational programmes. The role of HE in the realisation of the SDGs is therefore its contribution to the transformational transition to sustainability. Sustainability is envisioned as a system state that our society is constantly trying to define and reach, guided by the SDGs, and the contribution of education is thus to create the enabling conditions for this vision to emerge.

To meet the goals and policy guidelines the forum will design activities to engage faculty, counselors, research scholars and students on voluntary basis. The forum will work to achieve following desired objectives.

- (i) To promote access, equity, quality, and relevance as envisioned in the SDG

- (ii) To engage and interact with people, communities and society at large, with a special focus on socially deprived and marginalized communities.
- (iii) To create awareness among the people on issues of contemporary relevance at global, national and local level.
- (iv) To organize extension activities to create awareness among deprived sections including women, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, minorities and OBC sections on literacy, education, legal issues, policies and programmes of the governments, environment and health etc.
- (v) To promote aspirations of higher education among the youth of disadvantaged and guide them to pursue higher education through Open and Distance Learning institutions and Dr. BRAOU.
- (vi) To encourage scientific temper and academic engagement among the faculty and research scholars it also strives to promote highest level of ethical, professional standards among the teaching and research community.

Lecture Series: To mark the 40 years occasion, the forum will organize lecture series from September 2021 to August 2022. Every month at least one lecture on a topic of public interest will be organized by inviting an expert/resource person is working in that particular area. The lecture topics will be identified from contemporary relevant issues time to time from different disciplines of social sciences. All the lectures in the series will be organised virtually from faculty of Social Sciences and the same will be telecasted through Zoom and streamed through social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

Extension Activities: The forum proposes to organize at least three extension camps in this year to create awareness on higher education opportunities among rural and tribal areas with the support of government agencies, civil society groups and community organizations. These camps will be conducted in most backward districts of Telangana, a group of faculty members will visit the places for at least two days and organize interactive sessions with the local leaders, community associations and civil society organizations. Tentatively KumurambheemAsifabad ,Mulugu and BhadradriKotthagudem districts are identified to proposed camps.

Apart from the rural community education the faculty is proposed to take up community education programme in Hyderabad city where a larger segment of Telangana population is located. Again, in this segment the forum would like to organize three programmes on education, health and environment focusing on slums, women and migrant workers in the city.

Dean, Faculty will be the Chairman and Dr. V. Srinivasa Rao Dr. Gunti Ravinder, will be the convenors of Extension Activities and Dr. G. Saroja, Dr. Pallavi Kabde will be convenors for Urban Activities. Dr. K. Krishna Reddy and Dr. G. Laxmi will coordinate the programmes of Forum. All the academic staff will constitute coordination committee which helps the Dean in planning and implementation of the activities.