

### 3\_Case-Based Abstracts

## THE RESPONSIVE AND RESPONSIBLE UNIVERSITY AS A CATALYST FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION: A PARTICIPATORY CASE STUDY OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THE KORAIL INFORMAL SETTLEMENT, DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Farheen Hassan<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1645-9601>

Md. Saef Ullah Miah<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4587-4636>

Nazia Farhana<sup>1</sup> <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9640-340X>

<sup>1</sup>American International University-Bangladesh, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Corresponding author: [saef@aiub.edu](mailto:saef@aiub.edu)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36059/978-966-397-609-9-39>

**Keywords:** community engagement; higher education; sustainable development; experiential learning

#### Background and Rationale

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly expected to move beyond teaching and research toward a third mission of community engagement and social responsibility. Yet across the Global South, empirically grounded models of university–community engagement remain scarce. Most existing operational frameworks, including the Hazelkorn and TEFCE models, have been developed in North American, European, or Australian settings and reflect institutional conditions that cannot be presumed in Bangladesh. Nationally, there is no dedicated policy for university-led community engagement, though the University Grants Commission and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council indirectly support such work through Outcome-Based Education (OBE) and quality assurance mandates. This article addresses that gap through a longitudinal, participatory case study of the American International University-Bangladesh (AIUB) and its engagement with Korail, one of Dhaka’s largest informal settlements, conducted between 2023 and 2025 under the Magna Charta Observatory (MCO) Responsive and Responsible University initiative.

## Context and Setting

Korail covers roughly 100 acres and houses about 18,000 households and 55,000 residents, with a population shaped by successive migration driven by floods, drought, river erosion, and eviction drives in other Dhaka settlements between 2000 and 2008. Residents face overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and limited access to healthcare and education, yet demonstrate resilience through informal work and community organization. AIUB, established in 1994, is a private, self-financed university with approximately 14,000 students across five faculties. Its Academic Strategic Plan 2023–2033 identifies Sustainable Development as a core pillar, and the institution became a signatory to the Magna Charta Universitatum in 2020.

## Methodology

The study adopted mixed methods, participatory case study design, integrating Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) with Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Four interdisciplinary, student-led interventions addressed women’s empowerment (Bachelor of Business Administration students), sustainable low-cost housing (Architecture students), adolescent health and hygiene (Master of Public Health students), and moral education for children (Shomoy Social Welfare Club students). Instruments included a structured baseline questionnaire (adapted from a 2014 Sutrapur study, pilot-tested with 40 respondents) administered to 397 women and adolescents across Korail’s four zones; focus group discussions; pre- and post-intervention questionnaires for adolescents and children; an OBE-aligned rubric for student empathy and ethics; and architectural field observation. Quantitative data were analyzed descriptively, qualitative data thematically coded, and findings triangulated across sources.

## Key Findings

The baseline documented pervasive deprivation: 67.3 percent of women reported no formal education, 26.39 percent were unemployed, and 59.31 percent earned no more than BDT 2,000 per month. Focus groups identified restrictive gender norms, job scarcity, and inadequate infrastructure as principal barriers,

while revealing aspirations for vocational skills, microcredit, and improved educational opportunity. The housing intervention in four households prioritized natural ventilation and daylight using exhaust fans, eucalyptus wood, and fiberglass roofing, producing measurable indoor improvements. The adolescent health intervention deployed Communication for Development (C4D) strategies, including culturally adapted posters, community miking blending health messages with popular songs, and the Bengali-language Facebook page “Torun Alo,” yielding post-intervention gains in reproductive health awareness, the domain with the largest baseline gap. The children’s moral education intervention, delivered through five sessions combining storytelling, puppet-making, value-based games, and a Bengali video, produced clear shifts across nine ethical domains including sharing, honesty, respect, fairness, and responsibility. Participating students showed measurable growth in empathy and ethics as assessed through the rubric.

### **Challenges and Adaptive Responses**

The case surfaces structural constraints. Community hesitance, particularly among women reluctant to disclose sensitive information, delayed data collection. Immediate economic needs often eclipse participation in longer-term skill-building. Political interference, law-enforcement issues, and a fire outbreak disrupted fieldwork, and the 2024 political transition following a student-led revolution stalled post-survey follow-up. The transience of slum populations complicated longitudinal tracking, and the exclusion of non-school-going children and adolescents left out the most vulnerable segment. In response, the management model has been progressively decentralized, with local participants engaged as peer educators, activities linked to academic courses for sustained student involvement, and reliance on one-off interventions reduced through shared ownership.

### **Theoretical Contribution**

The central contribution is an inductively derived Community Engagement Framework for Higher Education Institutions, calibrated to Global South conditions. The framework specifies three institutional preconditions, Values (integrity, creativity, responsibility, equity), Readiness (infrastructure, dedicated centers,

partnerships, policy, curriculum), and Practice (student clubs, projects, collaboration), followed by a four-stage implementation cycle: Input (self-evaluation, community perspective, needs assessment); Process (Care, Connect, Coach, Contribute); Outcome (multi-actor impact and dissemination); and Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning anchored in Continuous Quality Improvement. The framework extends Farner’s (2019) “adaptive braid” model by specifying concrete mechanisms for institutionalization and complements existing Western frameworks by centering preconditions that cannot be presumed in Global South settings.

### **Implications and Conclusion**

The study demonstrates that culturally grounded, interdisciplinary, student-led engagement can deliver measurable community outcomes under significant resource constraints while simultaneously advancing student graduate attributes in empathy, ethics, and civic responsibility. Two transferable operational tools emerge: a self-assessment questionnaire supporting universities in evaluating engagement capacity, and an OBE-aligned empathy rubric that operationalizes otherwise abstract graduate attributes. For policy, the case illustrates the potential of embedding community engagement within national quality assurance and OBE criteria; a subsequent dialogue between the MCO General Secretary and the Bangladesh Accreditation Council represents one concrete policy-engagement outcome. For practice, the modular structure of the four interventions supports adaptation to other informal settlements. The study affirms that universities in the Global South can occupy a distinctive position in social transformation when engagement is grounded in institutional values, driven through distributed leadership, delivered by interdisciplinary student teams, and structured by a context-sensitive framework.