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Higher Education Institutions' Roles in Strengthening Local Capacity for Community Development: An Analytical Framework

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Abstract

Responding to an ongoing disconnect between higher education institutions (HEIs) and contemporary challenges communities face worldwide, universities can become a driving force to strengthen communities' capacity toward innovative solutions to the challenges they face. This article introduces an analytical framework that provides a roadmap to design, examine, and measure the potential contributions of community-engaged university education in strengthening local capacity for community development (LCCD). The framework proposes three pillars of analysis: community assets, functioning capacity, and transformational capacity. Better understanding the contribution of community-engaged university programs in strengthening LCCD can create the conditions for local communities to leverage their power to foster positive social change while universities reexamine the way they engage communities. Finally, the article discusses implications for social development actors involved in promoting local capacity development to strengthen democracy and civic engagement and the benefits of involving HEIs as key stakeholders for social development.

Keywords: community-engaged education, community capacity development, campus–community partnerships, analytical framework, local capacity for community development

As democracy is challenged and local communities experience heightened socioeconomic and political divisions with increased alienation from community life, higher education institutions (HEIs) must continually reexamine their roles and responsibilities across teaching, research, and service. For the past two decades, universities and local communities have created stronger ties through community engagement. Mutually beneficial exchanges are central to promoting "community-engaged universities" (EOSLHE, 2019). This commitment is evidenced, in part, by the number of regional networks (e.g., Asia, Australia, Canada, Latin America, Middle East, South Africa) and associations (e.g., Campus Compact, Europe Engage, Talloires Network) across the globe that now support community engagement in higher education. Additionally, the Carnegie Elective Classification for Community Engagement (2022) validates excellence in campus–community partnerships in the United States, and this framework for classification is currently being adapted by HEIs in Europe, Canada, and Australia. Much of this work is enacted through HEIs' community-engaged educational programs that involve students in direct service with local community organizations, institutions, social networks, or alike social structures. These educational platforms can be transformative for all participants, including students, faculty, and host communities.

However, scholarship on community-engaged education has primarily centered on measuring the impact of such initiatives

on students' learning (Colby et al., 2007; Longo, 2007; Thomas, 2011) and on faculty's research and engagement (Boyte, 2004; Calleson et al., 2005; Neumann & Terosky, 2007). There has been only modest examination of the impact of HEIs on local community development (Hatcher & Bringle, 2012; Hodges & Dubb, 2012). Evidence indicates that when communities engage in educational partnerships with HEIs, the communities also gain from such partnerships. The literature, which remains sparse (Koekkoek et al., 2021; Shiel et al., 2016), points to types of outcomes that support local capacity for development (LCD). These include outcomes such as incorporating new project ideas for community organizations, implementing interorganizational strategies, developing solutions to local problems (Bushouse, 2005), and creating new community structures such as advisory boards or research committees to engage in partnerships with universities (Brugge & Missaghian, 2006; Freeman et al., 2006; Heaney et al., 2007). Even more specific, as in the case of Brazilian universities, outcomes include developing sustainable regional tourism and supporting biodiesel with used oil (Shiel et al., 2016).

Despite the growth in these educational partnerships, the voice of the community organization often remains unheard, and the relationship between the community and university is often imbalanced. This imbalance makes it difficult to demand accountability of such partnerships and to identify clear contributions for all involved in these learning platforms. Paying attention to the relationships formed between participants involved in community–university partnerships (Muse, 2018) is proposed as a step forward in rebalancing power, as both sides reap the benefits of the partnership (Bacon, 2002; Gelmon, 2003). Whether through relationship building or programmatic approaches developed to address local challenges, community–university engaged programs have the potential to develop social capital and increase civic engagement, both of which are important in fostering local capacity for development (Luca Sugawara et al., 2017).

Building the capacity of community structures, individuals, and organizations is the main focus of international development, a field that identifies LCD as a central tenet of its work in all sectors (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Morgan, 1998). Historically, international development agencies have partnered with local universities and program evaluators to develop and monitor best practices. However, universities have not been seen as critical partnering institutions in strengthening local capacity for development. LCD projects often focus on strengthening civil society organizations, increasing citizen participation, or enacting public policy reform. To date, the field of international development, and the funding, have given only modest attention to the potential roles of universities in this vital work, with the main focus on engaging U.S.-based universities (Office of Global Partnerships, n.d.; USAID, 2021a). Perhaps as a result of this neglect, a general disconnect exists between HEIs and community development (Luca Sugawara et al., 2013; Muse, 2018; Shiel et al., 2016), especially in countries where social development projects take place. Like other social institutions, local universities can become a driving force to strengthen community capacity toward innovative solutions to address community challenges (Dewey, 1916; McNight & Kretzman, 1990).

Responding to this disconnect between HEIs and LCD, as well as to the potential for innovative and meaningful collaboration, this article proposes an analytical framework that establishes conceptual connections between community-engaged universities and local capacity for community development (LCCD). The framework identifies and describes the characteristics of three pillars (i.e., community assets, functioning capacity, transformational capacity) that support LCCD. In addition, the article offers guidance for practice and a pathway for empirically measuring LCCD at the micro-, mezzo-, and exosystem. In moving forward with this inquiry, the article begins with the theoretical underpinnings of this analytical framework and its relevance to the field of community engagement.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Popular education (Dewey, 1938;1944; Freire, 1970) and social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990) are key theoretical pillars for this framework. Although these two theories occupy distinct academic spheres, they share a common origin that few acknowledge. In bringing these two theories together, this article recognizes that social capital, as a term and a concept, was coined by Dewey (1907, as cited in Farr,

2004) and later adapted by Putnam (1995). Dewey's (1907) fundamental assertion in his democratic philosophy of education is that educational purposes should be intimately interconnected with the community and help students build knowledge and competencies to address "social necessities" (p. 24). Dewey (1907) also viewed higher education institutions as a central hub in shaping democracy and democratic capacity for the larger society.

The theory of popular education indicates that community-engaged education is a complex educational process that anchors students in local communities while shaping their understanding of the world, social connections with local groups, and ability to influence change and leverage collective power. Individual experiences and realities of the context are central in moving learners toward taking action and becoming change-makers in their communities. As founding fathers of community-engaged education, Dewey and Freire (Hyman, 2002) both recognized that among many benefits, this educational approach helps students get closer to the community and develop social networks and opportunities to collaborate with local groups and residents. Such engagement increases students' sense of civic duty and belonging and helps to build their confidence in their abilities to effect change (Zaff et al., 2010, as cited in Jemal, 2017).

Additionally, the theory of popular education also describes the social function of HEIs in supporting local communities in a democracy. Education in a democracy must navigate and respond to the tensions of meeting social aims while promoting individual development (Hatcher & Erasmus, 2008). A significant number of leading community-engaged campuses in the United States align their educational resources with local community development goals (Hodges & Dubb, 2012). It would be an oversight to disregard the learning and structural changes that happen at the community level, but existing literature does not often consider them (Koekkoek et al., 2021). We have yet to identify and gain consensus on specific community outcomes that result from community-engaged university partnerships. Only in doing so can the field of community engagement critically examine the impact on and responsibilities in working with local communities. The framework proposes such perspectives.

The second theoretical underpinning for this analytical framework is social capital. As a precursor of community engagement social processes (Hyman, 2002), social capital helps to explain how the social connections between faculty, students, and local communities create a "flow of goods and services to individuals and groups" (Edwards & Foley, 2001, p.12). This flow creates pathways for deep learning processes, resource mobilization, and leveraging power. Social capital is defined mainly by its elements: social networks, relations, affinities, responsibilities, and resources that enable people to act toward a collective purpose (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1990). Putnam (1995) described the central thesis of social capital as strong associational life that generates networks, trust, and norms of reciprocity essential for a functioning democracy. However, the concept was first introduced by Alexis de Tocqueville in his 19th-century statement that active civic life is the basis of American democracy, and Dewey first coined the term in 1900 (Farr, 2004).

Even with the field's current emphasis on associational life, social capital scholars reference Dewey's placement of schools as a central hub in shaping democracy and democratic capacity for the larger society. Dewey linked the two, recognizing that promoting action-oriented education produces spillover benefits to social capital formation. Dewey (1907) challenged educational institutions to rethink how they can become "centers of community life" (p. 11) He pointed to the importance of connecting with local communities and promoting social processes that facilitate learning, "bind people together" (1915 in *The Middle Works, 1899–1924*, 8:362, as cited in Farr, 2004), help those involved access resources, and generate the power of civic activism. This type of power is capital in itself, reshaping social structures to give otherwise unconnected individuals and groups access to the combined resources of the broader social network.

Unlike Putnam's (1995) normative approach to social capital, the social structural perspective places social capital in the relationships among individuals, not in the individuals per se, generating resources and leveraging power for only those involved in the social linkages (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Foley & Edwards, 1998). For example, Coleman (1990) argued that social capital becomes an "asset for individuals

and facilitates a certain action or outcome for those who occupy a given structure" (p. 302). This structural approach reminds us that people come together and form webs of social relations and support one another by leveraging power, exercising greater control and power over the flow of capital, and accessing resources to form new structures to help achieve individual or collective aims. For higher education representatives or community development actors, this approach to social capital theory highlights the importance of fostering university–community partnerships for the social capital inherent within the relationships developed, not just for the resources accessed.

Social capital helps explain how individuals access resources within specific social structures (Foley & Edwards, 1997, 1998). For example, knowing that a leading community organization serving refugees exists in the community does not help a HEI social work program train the next generation of social work practitioners to work with refugees. What does help is for the faculty of the local university and the staff of the community organization to establish an educational partnership. Still, another equally important element that gives social capital value in this context is the timing of its accessibility. Social capital is not valuable unless it is accessible. Resources must be available now—not next spring or the year after. Resources and their immediate accessibility are the necessary elements in strengthening the social capital needed for collaborative learning platforms (Foley & Edwards, 1998). To understand the value of such community–university partnerships, many questions are worth asking. Examples include who benefits from community-engaged education initiatives? How do we design program interventions so all stakeholders—universities, faculty members, students, communities, citizens involved—achieve their respective goals?

Understanding the types of resources brought into the partnership is equally essential to sustainable development initiatives. Therefore, mapping community assets (McKnight & Kretzmann, 1990) is another critical step in community-engaged university partnerships. Inviting community members representing diverse groups and holding local wisdom to help craft joint commitments can lead to meaningful educational partnerships for all involved. In doing so, community–university engagement initiatives can also become robust platforms for strengthening local community capacities while shaping new generations of engaged citizens committed to local communities.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework (see Figure 1) supports understanding and analyzing the inherent effects of university–community partnerships on LCCD. In this framework, communities are defined as a group of people or organizations linked by social ties and collective goals; communities may share a physical location or be virtual. The framework identifies community well-being as the main social development goal. Such focus helps to unpack the complexity of social processes that facilitate synergetic relationships among institutions, community groups organized for collective purposes, and community members. Expanding upon Morgan's (1998) definition of LCD, which aims at building on existing assets to improve social structures and institutional performances for local benefits, as well as the United Nations Development Programme's (2009) capacity development depiction, LCCD is defined as *the social processes through which individuals, community groups, and organizations maintain, strengthen, and develop local capabilities to function and to improve community well-being for the long term*.

The heart of the framework rests on the interdependence among three essential community capacities, their supportive community capabilities, and how community–university engagement programs enact these capacities. This is because developing local capacity requires more than strong institutions or highly skilled community members. It involves community members working with one another for a collective purpose. Within this context, universities are important foci of change for promoting local capacity for community development. This line of thinking is echoed by the United States Agency for International Development's most recent LCD strategy, in which universities are clearly highlighted as "local systems" (USAID, 2021b, p. 4) essential for local development.

Following Baser and Morgan's (2008) work on LCD, the analysis looks at all three

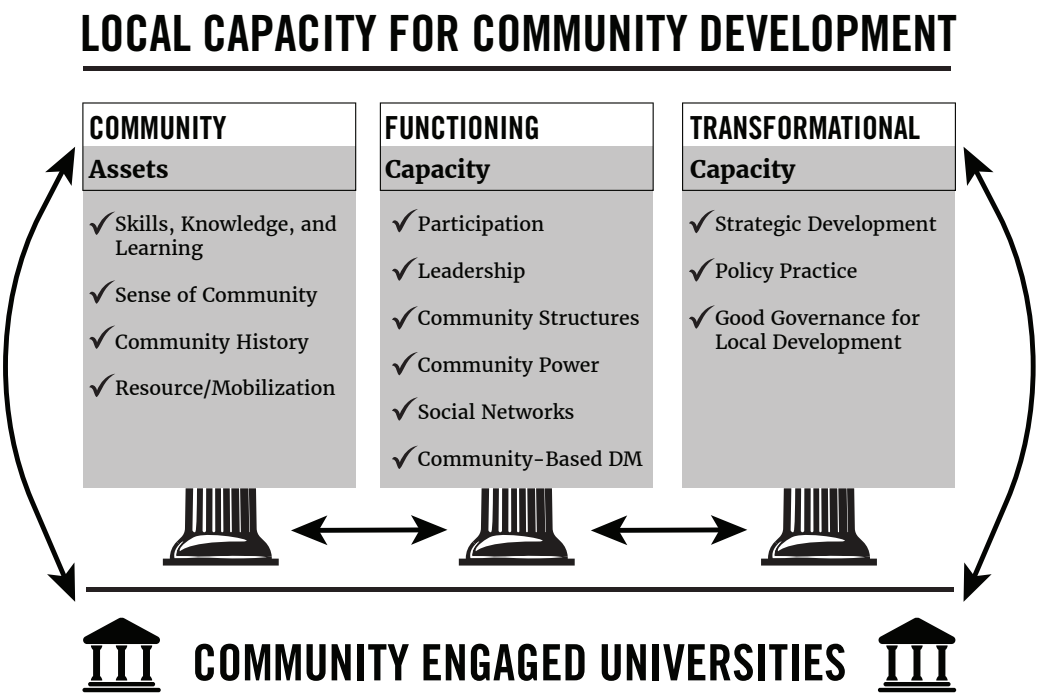

Figure 1 . Framework for Strengthening Local Capacity for Community Development through Community-Engaged Universities.

levels—micro-, mezzo-, and exosystem—focusing on the capacity of academic communities to support local organizations' and community members' responses and abilities to address local challenges. Unlike the traditional LCD approach embraced by foreign development agencies, which focuses on concrete outputs, macro practice research, and a technocratic strategy for development (Baser & Morgan, 2008; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010), this LCCD framework points to the importance of capturing social processes and individual transformations that strengthen community members' ability to engage with one another and respond to community needs. Capacity development is not a linear process, nor can it be reduced to the transferability of skills and knowledge through training materials, workshops, or grants (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Dichter, 2014). Therefore, the framework embraces complexity and a multidimensional phenomenon that emphasizes measuring the community's strengths by leveraging existing resources, shaping community capacities and capabilities, strengthening social networks, and defining collective aims, all to address systemic and long-lasting change. Fundamental principles that guide LCCD include promoting participation, inclusiveness, decentralization, and sustainability, and practicing mutuality and cultural humility, while appreciating and building on local wisdom and capacities for all involved (Luca Sugawara et al., 2013; USAID, 2021b).

Through community members' participation, local citizens experience increased community identity to respond collaboratively and comprehensively to new contexts over time (Danish International Development Agency, 2014; European Commission, 2011; UNDP, 2009). USAID's (2021b) most recent Local Capacity Development Strategy also highlights the importance of increasing local ownership, sustainability, and partnerships with local organizations, donors, social structures, and other stakeholders. Its motto, "nothing about us, without us" (USAID, 2021b, p. 14), encompasses the critical message of promoting positive social change with the community and for the community. Thus, sustainability is a backbone in LCCD, pointing to the importance of fostering capacity and social processes that could facilitate systemic and positive lasting change.

The operationalization of LCCD in this analytical framework uses three key pillars: (1) community assets, (2) functioning capacity,

and (3) transformational capacity. These three pillars are synergistically dependent upon one another, for community well-being results from multidimensional, nonlinear, and ongoing social processes among assets, stakeholders, existing resources, and local capabilities. For example, one cannot examine local capacity for community development by evaluating how strong local community organizations are, or by mapping the individual skills and knowledge that exist in the community. Rather, the collaborative social processes among individuals, local groups, and community agencies themselves are important. The types of engagement they employ with one another to fulfill collective needs, and the support systems developed to strengthen local responses for greater community actions, are all necessary. We might ask these questions: Are local communities reshaping their identities as they take on new roles in leading students' experiential learning in their communities or interacting with university experts? Are students strengthening their ability to be a voice for long-term change? What are some of the concrete capabilities developed as a result of community-engaged educational partnerships' programs? The three pillars proposed in this analytical framework aim to identify such changes.

To bring further clarity to the concepts used to build this analytical framework, *community capacity* refers to an aggregate of community resources, local organizations, collective capabilities, and synergies that enable a community to address collective issues and expand on community opportunities (Chaskin, 2001; Tonon, 2018). Capacity is not about reaching specific ends but developing those social processes that focus on social means, which can be used in different contexts for other community or individual gains. However, capabilities are the collective abilities, counting as skills or aptitudes to carry out a particular function or community aim (Baser & Morgan, 2008; George et al., 2016). Community capabilities result from social interactions or individuals' involvement in collective action (Ibrahim, 2006). Collective capabilities are complex social dynamics that require collective decision-making processes, united goals, and social trust at a minimum.

The first pillar of the framework is *community assets*. Understanding that regardless of existing challenges, every human community has its local assets is the starting point in capacity-building initiatives. It promotes a bottom-up approach to local capacity building. In addition, working with local resources requires understanding the history of social structures. Therefore, the framework proposes to examine how a community interprets its history in moving forward with one strategy over another.

In examining the community assets, careful consideration of the following four dimensions is proposed, along with some illustrative examples of how community-engaged university programs can contribute to the development of each dimension.

- *Skills, knowledge, and learning*—these represent assets present in a given community at individual and organizational levels. Maclellan-Wright et al. (2007) proposed including new sets of skills and knowledge or accessing skills and expertise needed for a project's success or to address community needs. Knowing that learning is dialogical (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970) and that they—the students, faculty, and community members—enter a transformative learning process poses straightforward questions on the impact of community assets. What type of knowledge, skills, and learning generated from these exchanges can benefit local communities? Are community members or host organizations gaining new knowledge and sets of competencies to lead them into the future? These questions can be examined through the application of the proposed framework.

- *Sense of community* references a collective sense of connection with the place and people, who ultimately aid in fulfilling needs through group membership (Goodman et al., 1998; Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007). We know that for students to become civically engaged and committed social agents of change, they must develop a sense of belonging and a responsibility to serve. Can such exchanges between students/faculty and various community members/groups strengthen a sense of community? For example, during a community forum event organized at the end of an international study

abroad in the host community, local community members reported new ways of looking at community participants joining the event. Some reported that by learning what the participating organizations were doing in working with our students, they began to define new roles and responsibilities with one another at the local, regional, or global levels (Luca Sugawara et al., 2017).

- *Community history* is key to understanding how a community interprets its history in moving forward with one strategy over another (Goodman et al., 1998). It also helps to understand and propose various social processes over others. Who would work with whom? Who is being included speaks to the community values that define norms and guide community-engaged programs. Highlighting community history through readings or guest speaker presentations by a community member allows students to learn from lived experiences and local wisdom, adding new meaning not only to the students' understanding of local context but for the narrator as they reflect on their past.
- *Resources/resource mobilization*—knowing that existing assets reside in a given community is not sufficient to support LCCD initiatives. However, mobilizing those resources through partnership development, goal setting, and clear expectations can be essential to fostering positive development (Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007). Resources such as physical capital (e.g., tractors, laboratory, technology) can become critical assets in a given community initiative if accessed through a collaborative learning/exchange and an increased sense of trust in one another. Universities bring varied resources to community development, yet we do not have a very clear understanding of how community partners build on such opportunities for their collective benefits.

Functioning capacity is the second pillar identified to operationalize the concept of local capacity for community development. Functioning capacity streams from the interaction between various collective capabilities, actors, existing social structures, and local interests. It is the ability of groups of people or organizations to come together, leveraging specific community characteristics and assets, and form or transform social structures through different levels of social agency to perform specialized functions (Chaskin, 2001). Community functioning grows and becomes more visible when engaged in local social processes. Thus, functioning capacity is understood as the ongoing synergies and dialogical exchanges between actors and their social structures. Functioning capacity enables local community members to participate in community life, develop leadership, form or solidify community structures, strengthen community power, develop partnerships/social linkages/networks, and engage in community-based decision-making processes.

For example, youth disengagement in a community cannot be addressed only by recognizing the issue. It requires providing opportunities for young people to become involved in sociopolitical community events. High participation of youth in community life results from collective community capabilities to participate in community events, the availability of support structures to facilitate such engagements, and the creation of social networks, among others. Therefore, recognizing the importance of collective agency (Pelenc et al., 2015) in fostering collective capabilities to increase the functioning capacity of a community, this pillar is operationalized by the following six dimensions: participation, leadership development, community structures, community power, partnerships/social linkages/networks, and community-based decision-making.

- *Participation* is the active involvement of people in collective actions to achieve individual or collective goals. Community members' capabilities to engage in collective action are fundamental in recognizing and mobilizing local resources, expertise, and increasing commitment to others while creating a collective identity and boosting personal responsibilities vis-à-vis community life. Community-engaged university programs give an opportunity not only to students to participate in local events or action plans but

allow local community members to attend new social structures and local events.

- *Leadership development* includes developing and nurturing both formal and informal local members who could influence and lead change within a community and a desire to be transformational. Another essential measure of effective leadership is the accountability of leaders and their ability to nurture informal relationships (Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007).
- *Community structures* are social processes allowing community members to leverage preexisting social networks or improve existing ones, smaller or less formal ones, and committees that foster belonging and give the community a chance to express views and exchange information (e.g., youth groups, self-help groups, grant-writing groups; Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007).
- *Community power* refers to the ability of a group to create or resist change regarding community turf, interests, or experiences (Goodman et al., 1998). It is the ability of the community to decide what to do, when, and how to proceed in response to local community changes or existing opportunities.
- *Partnerships/social linkages/networks* support the ability of the community organizations/individuals to network with diverse sectors, sharing information resources, and working with various individuals, groups, and organizations to take collective action on addressing local issues or reaching a common goal (Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007).
- *Community-based decision-making* is a social process by which community members collectively decide what is good for the community (e.g., engaging various representatives in local decisions). We know that when various groups are involved in collaborative processes, both individuals and social agencies begin a solidification process through which meaningful adaptation takes place, transforming social systems to become a driving force for community decision-making with the community and for the community (Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010).

Finally, *transformational capacity* rests in the community's collective capabilities to envision its long-term goals; influence policy practice and social change through its ability to approve, disapprove, or recommend long-term solutions; and tackle structural changes to improve the community's well-being. At this level, the three dimensions proposed for analysis include strategic development, policy practice, and good governance for local development.

- *Strategic development* takes into account the community's ability to intentionally plan, build, and engage collectively for long-term positive change within a community. Key to this dimension is the importance of developing collective aims that respond to community interests (not external goals).
- *Policy practice* represents efforts to change policies in the legislative, agency, and community settings aiming at contributing to the well-being of communities and those in need of services and support (Jansson, 2008; Weiss-Gal & Gal, 2014). Policy practice may involve moving specific issues to higher visibility in the community, lobbying for policy change, monitoring oppressive or progressive policies, or making efforts to change policies through captaining or deliberative democracy practices that engage various stakeholders in research and policy practice formation (Weil et al., 2015).
- *Good governance for local development* explores the levels of community representation, participation, accountability, transparency, effectiveness, security, and equity (UNDP,2015). For community participation to occur, increased visibility of organizations' or local groups' commitments to the community's well-being is necessary. Equally important is to hold accountable the leading organizations in fulfilling their promises to the community, partnering organizations, or its member participants.

Discussions and Implications

The proposed framework establishes conceptual connections between community-engaged university programs and LCCD. Community engagement represents the "collaborative processes between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity" (Community Engagement Classification, 2022). To move this work forward, there needs to be a greater focus on LCCD and the close synergies established between community-engaged universities and local host communities. These educational processes not only aim to serve a public purpose but to build the capacity of those involved (e.g., individuals, groups, organizations) to understand and collaborate on addressing issues of public concern (UNC Greensboro, 2022).

This framework is introduced as a generative design for community-engaged research and scholarship to help develop, examine, and assess shared goals between community-engaged university programs and local capacity for community development. When used in empirical research, the framework can help strengthen the argument for reciprocity and clarify how universities can contribute to LCCD. For higher education institutions' representatives, the framework can be used as conceptual pillars for designing and establishing collaborative educational programs with local community partners.

For close to a century, universities have built a robust scholarship with a history of community-engaged education, bringing clear philosophical reasoning in promoting education for democracy (Dewey, 1916; Freire, 1970) and its relevance in supporting civic engagement and participative democracy (Ehrlich, 2000). Despite the attention to reciprocity, community-engaged scholarship comes short in documenting its impact on local and host communities. Conceptually, several scholars point to the importance of reciprocity when designing community-engaged programs through a clear delineation of shared activities and outcomes such that all feel the experience to be equitable (Dostilio et al., 2012). Others (Hodges & Dubb, 2012) use vignettes to capture some social transformations that are potential promoters of local capacity. Still, we have not paid sufficient attention to documenting the contributions, or adverse effects, of community-engaged education upon local communities.

Building on the existing community capacity development literature (Baser & Morgan, 2008; Brinkerhoff & Morgan, 2010; Chaskin, 2001; Goodman et al.,1998; Maclellan-Wright et al., 2007; Merino & Carmenado, 2012), this framework proposes the analysis of three fundamental pillars in measuring LCCD—community assets, functioning capacity, and transformational capacity. By focusing on mapping the community assets and assessing the collective abilities, social networks, and community social structures against their existing synergies, the framework recognizes that community capacity is multidimensional and does not focus on community outcomes per se, but rather on the social processes that sustain and support reaching collective aims.

New to the existing measures of community capacity is the pillar of *transformational capacity* generated by local community groups' collective capabilities to envision their long-term goals, shape progress toward these goals, achieve desired outcomes, and influence policy practice. Should this framework bring empirical evidence to support the argument that community-engaged programs contribute to strengthening local capacity for community development, HEIs can regain relevance and a key role in designing and promoting social development initiatives in countries transitioning to democracy. Whether through the promotion of service-learning education or participative action research centers, this framework provides a roadmap to measure the possible contributions of community-engaged university programs in strengthening LCCD.

Finally, local community representatives can use this framework to clarify possible partnership goals, setting ways to hold universities accountable in choosing local partners to engage in educational exchanges. Especially for social development actors involved in promoting local capacity development (e.g., USAID, the World Bank, foundations), this framework sheds light on the importance of inviting HEIs as key stakeholders in promoting local capacity for community development. It also serves as methodological bridges to measure local processes and positive changes realized through community-engaged universities.

Conclusions

This framework provides a roadmap to design, examine, and measure the potential contributions of community-engaged university programs in strengthening local capacity for community development (LCCD). Understanding the benefits of community-university engagement in strengthening LCCD can create the conditions for local communities to leverage their own power in engaging in partnership programs with HEIs. Such understanding invites universities to reexamine how they engage with communities for more effective community-campus partnerships. Developing educational programs with community groups to address local challenges gives recognition to the reciprocity argument of community-engaged education while empowering communities to become key drivers in their development efforts. Further research needs to empirically explore the application and usefulness of the framework to further strengthen this article's central thesis—that community-university engaged programs are fundamental pathways in strengthening local capacity for community development.

Dedication

I dedicate this article to my mentor Richard Blue, who had an exceptional mind, kind and nurturing spirit, and was always available to unpack complexity and anchor me on what was important in life. The initial conversations I had with him were fundamental in framing my research work on community-university engagement, giving me the courage I needed to move this project forward. His contributions to USAID's impact evaluation office and social development initiatives worldwide are well known, yet his dedication to inspiring others, supporting mentees, and being with local communities in Richard's humble way is what I'll forever be grateful for!

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