

Social responsibility of higher educational institutions: roles of government and private sectors in shaping sustainable societies

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The scientific academic institutions are an essential component of society, performing a dual role of education and research to catalyse changes in society. Establishing a well-formulated social science responsibility (SSR) framework is crucial for effective academic-society collaboration. The present study investigates the existing SSR ecosystem in India through a cross-sectional survey of scientific institutes. To gain a comprehensive understanding of ecosystem secondary data on global practices across was also analysed. The findings of studies have clearly indicated that, driven by a desire to give back to society, positive intentions, rather than mere checkbox exercisers, were observed among researchers at different levels. However, the lack of financial access and methodology poses the greatest hindrance to the effective implementation of SSR guidelines. The study has also examined the existing practices of corporate social responsibility in India and their connection with academic institutions. The study proposes a collaborative framework design for holistic societal progress through a collaborative approach with educational institutions and the industrial sector.

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ACADEMIC institutions and society have a symbiotic relationship, where mutual benefits result in innovative solutions to pressing global problems. Academia shapes society through intellectual progress, scientific contributions and technological advancements¹. Society provides natural resources and human capital for establishing and working in academic institutions. Thus, beyond the pursuit of knowledge, institutions of higher learning are responsible for the welfare of society. This commitment to social responsibility extends to pioneering groundbreaking research that addresses pressing global issues, such as climate change and healthcare. As social organisations and knowledge centres, universities must actively improve the quality of life for individuals and communities. Acting as

agents of social change and stimulating social improvement, universities can enhance their reputation, foster student satisfaction, and strengthen their impact on society². By fostering equitable access to education, addressing public health challenges, and promoting technological inclusivity, universities can make a significant contribution to long-term societal well-being³.

Higher educational institutes (HEIs) can contribute to solving societal problems while upholding ethical standards, ensuring a fair distribution of resources, risks, and opportunities, and maintaining social relevance. They can thus lead by example through their social science responsibilities (SSR). Research and educational institutes must take such actions that have positive social outcomes⁴.

The rules for including the social relevance of research vary across different nations. There is no denying that innovation, curiosity, and basic scientific research are essential for the advancement of science. However, the significance of science and technology in addressing societal needs and challenges cannot be underscored. Aligned with the same, some funding organisations, such as the National Science Foundation (NSF) and the National Institute of Health (NIH), in the United States, evaluate the funding potential of any organisation using 'significance' and the broader impacts criterion (BIC), and assess the critical need of a research proposal concerning the needs of society. Additionally, the American Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) and the COMPETES Act emphasise the importance of research that benefits society⁵.

As discussed in Table 1, UNESCO's Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human Rights (2005) mentions that the essential component of responsible science is to consider societal goods-based research. It states, "Considering the desirability of developing new approaches to social responsibility to ensure that progress in science and technology contributes to justice, equity and the interest of humanity". The Responsible Research Innovation (RRI) framework, developed by the European Union (EU), identifies prominent societal actors, including researchers, citizens, policymakers, and industry, and emphasises their capacity to drive society toward a better future⁶. Likewise, the SSR Policy Guidelines, by the Government of India (GoI), apply to all the Department of Science and

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