UNIVERSITY SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE JOURNEY SO FAR AND AHEAD

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the concept of "University Social Responsibility" (USR) which is an extension of CSR in context of Indian universities vis-à-vis the universities around the globe. University Social Responsibility (USR) is becoming increasingly important in today's world, and there are several reasons why universities should focus on social responsibility. The concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) refers to the responsibility of universities to contribute to the betterment of society and the environment through their research, teaching, and community engagement activities. This article explores the importance of USR and its growing recognition among higher education institutions around the world. USR is connected to the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) but focuses specifically on universities. USR activities include providing access to education, conducting research that addresses societal challenges, supporting community outreach programs, promoting sustainable practices, and fostering entrepreneurship and innovation. The article also discusses the importance of collaboration between USR and CSR in today's rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world. Lastly, the article examines the ways in which American universities have demonstrated social responsibility through sustainability initiatives, community engagement, diversity and inclusion, and research and innovation.

INTRODUCTION

"University Social Responsibility" (USR) is a concept that refers to the social responsibility of universities or higher education institutions. It is an extension of the concept of "Corporate Social Responsibility" (CSR) that is applied to businesses and corporations. USR involves universities taking responsibility for their impact on society and the environment, and actively seeking to address societal challenges through their research, teaching, and community engagement activities. This includes promoting social justice and equity, sustainable development, and the development of knowledge and skills that contribute to the well-being of society. The exact origin of this term is not entirely clear. However, it is generally attributed to Dr. M. Beena, who is a professor at the Mahatma Gandhi University in India. Dr. Beena first used the term in an article published in 2011, where she argued that universities have a responsibility to contribute to social and economic development in their local communities. Since then, the concept has gained traction and has been discussed by scholars and practitioners around the world. The Concept of University social responsibility (USR) has been defined by Chen et al. as follows:

University social responsibility (USR), is a philosophy or principle for social movement, which can be perceived as a philosophy of a university to use an ethical approach to develop and engage with the local and global community in order to sustain the social, ecological, environmental, technical, and economic development. USR acts as a key player for social changes, as USR implies having a policy of ethical quality, governing the performance of the university community. (Chen et al.)

University Social Responsibility (USR) is becoming increasingly important in today's world, and there are several reasons why universities should focus on social responsibility. Here are a few reasons:

(i) **Addressing societal challenges:** Universities have an important role to play in addressing the challenges faced by society, such as poverty, inequality, climate change, and other social and environmental issues. By engaging in socially responsible activities, universities can contribute towards creating a more sustainable and equitable world.

(ii) **Building social capital:** Universities can build social capital by working with communities, NGOs, and government agencies. This can help in establishing long-term partnerships and collaborations, which can lead to better outcomes in addressing societal challenges.

(iii) **Enhancing the reputation of the university:** Social responsibility initiatives can enhance the reputation of the university, both locally and globally. This

can attract students, faculty, and research partners who share similar values and are interested in working towards social and environmental sustainability.

(iv) **Fostering student engagement:** USR activities can provide students with valuable learning opportunities outside the classroom, such as community service, volunteering, and social entrepreneurship. These experiences can help in developing a sense of social responsibility and can prepare students for leadership roles in the future.

(v) **Meeting stakeholder expectations:** Universities have a responsibility towards their stakeholders, including students, faculty, staff, alumni, and the wider community. By engaging in socially responsible activities, universities can meet the expectations of these stakeholders and demonstrate their commitment towards creating a better society.

Discussing the importance of the concept of University Social Responsibility (USR) in an article entitled "University Social Responsibility (USR): Identifying an Ethical Foundation within Higher Education Institutions" Chen et al. write, "UNSECO believes that education is a key to social, economic, and environment development, and is also a key in the creation of learning societies and achieving a sustainable future (UNESCO, 2007). Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been perceived as a root that connects local setting to a larger international field of knowledge." (Chen et al.)

There is a growing recognition that universities have a role to play in addressing societal challenges, and that social responsibility is an important aspect of their mission. By engaging in socially responsible activities, universities can contribute towards creating a more sustainable and equitable world, while also enhancing their reputation and meeting stakeholder expectations. Some examples of USR activities include:

1. Providing access to education and training opportunities for marginalized communities and individuals.

2. Conducting research that addresses social and environmental challenges, such as poverty, and inequality.

3. Supporting community engagement and outreach programs that promote social inclusion, cultural diversity, and civic engagement.

4. Fostering entrepreneurship and innovation that contribute to social and economic development.

5. Promoting sustainable practices and environmental stewardship on campus and in the wider community.

DR. ASHISH PANDEY

Asserting the need for USR along with CSR Tara Panjwani writes:

USR and CSR are intrinsically connected with the common denominator being the people and the community. Despite this connection, more often than not, both USR and CSR tend to operate in silos in a static and disconnected manner. However, in today's rapidly changing and increasingly interdependent world, no organisation (be it an educational institution or a business) can survive or sustain itself over the long term if it is not socially responsible and if it is not collaborating. (Panjwani)

1. **University Social Responsibility and its Impact on Society**

In today's world of global challenges such as climate change, large-scale population movements and new learning spaces and working methods, higher education institutions (HEIs) are under immense strain to remain relevant and provide quality education. Given these shifting conditions, universities are increasingly engaging in USR activities. Yet despite its importance for university strategy and operations, there is a paucity of systematic research on its implementation across different countries.

(a) **Education**: University social responsibility (USR) has become a worldwide issue for higher education institutions. From new learning spaces and working methods, to climate crisis issues, large-scale population movements and diversity within publics, universities are confronted with an array of societal difficulties. One of the greatest societal challenges faced by higher education is realizing its "third mission," which entails contributing to socio-economic and regional development, creating social capital, instilling responsible citizenship, strengthening local/regional/national community cohesion and participation in social and cultural life. USR plays an essential role in this regard - one which needs to be strengthened for it to reach its full potential. Recently, several CSR initiatives have been launched with the goal of encouraging more ethical and responsible living. These include socially responsible advertising, employee volunteer programs and a social impact investment strategy. Many companies, both large and small, are increasingly taking a stand for social responsibility. Companies such as Havells and Tanishq Jewellers have created advertisements that advocate gender equality and respect for women; Mahindra Group has even opened five schools in India offering vocational training to the poor.

Universities must ensure they educate students about CSR and incorporate it into their curriculums. Doing this will prepare them better for professional careers that require them to engage in issues such as climate change and inequality. Furthermore, it will encourage students to become actively involved in addressing local issues, leading to greater awareness of how they can contribute. This is especially pertinent at a time when the most connected generation has grown up with access to an abundance of knowledge and opportunities to

connect with people from around the globe. In addition to teaching these issues at the local level, universities must also conduct research into these areas and integrate study of these topics within their curriculums. Doing so will give students the skills needed to respond effectively to social crises while guaranteeing their university has a strong socially responsible approach at its core.

(b) Health

University social responsibility (USR) is an emerging research field that has gained momentum among academics and practitioners alike. USR strives to extend the traditional mission of universities by developing solutions for economic, social, and environmental problems through dialogue with community members. Furthermore, it strives to produce socially responsible students who are aware of their responsibilities beyond campus boundaries. Many authors have examined the effect of University social responsibility on health and environment. These studies demonstrate that University social responsibility is an essential element in higher educational institutions' success; it enables them to promote a more balanced, sustainable society through activities which go beyond simply raising awareness; they can actually effect positive changes in community development in terms of social, economic, and environmental aspects. n this regard, it is essential to comprehend how universities set their objectives, strategic actions and goals in order to satisfy various stakeholders such as students, institutions, government, companies and local communities. The theory of stakeholder management provides insight into these influential groups and helps us comprehend their interests and needs.

Another factor to consider is the variety of ways USR is implemented in HEIs. There are three approaches: managerial, transformational and normative - each with their own specific features. One major challenge faced by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is a lack of understanding about USR and how it influences students' attitudes toward this concept. To combat this issue, HEIs must ensure students have enough information about USR and how it applies to their lives.

To this end, a survey was conducted by independent agencies on students from India and Croatia with the purpose of analyzing perceptions and attitudes toward USR in both countries through an intercultural framework. A total of 1340 students took part in this research project; results revealed that most were aware of USR but their attitudes differed significantly between both countries studied.

(c) Environment

Universities play a pivotal role in providing educational experiences that promote social responsibility and justice, as well as creating social capital by indoctrinating students with democratic citizenship skill sets. Many students are concerned with environmental

degradation, climate change and other global concerns. That is why it's critical for higher educational institutions to identify ways they can be more socially responsible in the future. Furthermore, companies must know how they can become more efficient when using resources. University Teknologi Brunei, for instance, has successfully reduced its greenhouse gas emissions through initiatives such as green roofs and recycling.

Universities can play a significant role in social responsibility by conducting research into global and local crises that require attention, as well as by supporting students' efforts to solve these problems. Doing so creates an environment of sustainability and wellbeing for all those involved. A university can utilize their expertise and resources to promote socially responsible practices within companies. This could include working on projects that promote sustainable practices or conducting internal research into responsible management and leadership practices. UKIBC's Sector Advocacy Group is championing effective international collaboration in India's Higher Education system and connecting business needs there with UK graduates on a long-term, sustainable basis. This initiative is essential for both sides of the equation as it will allow universities to continue their mission of education and development while allowing businesses to grow.

Taiwan recently initiated a program in 2018 to encourage universities to contribute to local community development. Dubbed "University Social Responsibility Projects," these initiatives encourage schools towards people-centric approaches grounded in local requirements. Finally, universities can become more socially responsible in a variety of ways that are essential for maintaining an efficient ecosystem between industry, academia and individuals. These include practical measures like encouraging staff to recycle more and making healthier food choices that promote ethical values.

(d) Poverty

University Social Responsibility (USR) is the capacity of a university to make an impact on society by fulfilling four essential processes: management, teaching, research and community engagement. It plays a significant role in higher education by contributing to socio-economic development and helping universities meet sustainable development goals. Furthermore, USR serves to enhance universities' public image as well as increase their competitiveness. USR (Universities for Sustainable Resilience) has become a third mission for universities, alongside education and knowledge creation. In an increasingly aware world that faces environmental, social, and economic difficulties, USR is becoming an integral component of universities' missions as they demonstrate their social responsibility.

In India, USR (Universal Student Reward System) is an integral component of higher education and a significant factor in drawing students to universities. For instance, The University of Leicester's "Upskilling for Twenty First Century" initiative addresses social

and environmental concerns within local communities to combat poverty and spur regional economic development. Universities can play an active role in supporting both local community and global social issues, such as fundraising for charity campaigns or disaster relief. This serves to instill social responsibility within students, faculty members and the university community at large.

It can also be employed to address social and environmental concerns that affect the region, such as climate change. Furthermore, it encourages faculty and student social engagement which helps build their connections to their community and prepares them for life after graduation. Although there is a paucity of research on University Social Responsibility (USR), there is some indication that USR can have an effect on its campus' overall social welfare. This is particularly true in developing countries where USR can improve lives of those living in poverty and promote sustainability within the environment.

2. **USR in American Universities**

American universities have increasingly recognized the importance of social responsibility in recent years. Social responsibility involves the actions that universities take to positively impact society, particularly in the areas of environmental sustainability, social justice, and community engagement. Some of the ways that universities in America demonstrate social responsibility include:

(i) **Sustainability initiatives:** Many universities have implemented programs to reduce their carbon footprint, promote renewable energy, and encourage sustainable practices on campus. Community engagement: Universities have formed partnerships with local organizations to address community needs and improve quality of life in surrounding areas.

(ii) **Diversity and inclusion:** Universities are taking steps to create more inclusive environments for underrepresented groups, including increasing access to education and resources for marginalized students.

(iii) **Research and innovation:** Universities are using their resources and expertise to tackle pressing societal issues, such as climate change, healthcare, and poverty.

(iv) **Ethical investment practices:** Some universities have adopted policies to ensure that their investments align with their social responsibility goals, such as avoiding investments in companies with poor environmental or human rights records.

Overall, universities in America are recognizing that they have a responsibility to use their resources and influence to promote positive social change.

DR. ASHISH PANDEY   7 P a g e

VOL 8, ISSUE 4 www.puneresearch.com/scholar **AUG to SEPT 2022**
(IMPACT FACTOR 3.14 IIJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

3. **University Social Responsibility (USR) in European universities:** While University Social Responsibility (USR) is primarily associated with universities in the United States and India, there are many universities in Europe that are also taking up the mantle of social responsibility and promoting sustainability, social justice, and community engagement. There are several programs and initiatives that European universities have implemented under University Social Responsibility (USR). Here are some examples and case studies:

(i) **Sustainable Campus:** Many European universities have implemented programs to make their campuses more sustainable. For example, the University of Groningen in the Netherlands has implemented a sustainability program that includes energy-efficient buildings, green roofs, and sustainable transportation options. The University of Nottingham in the UK has implemented a Green Academy program to promote sustainability in teaching and research.

(ii) **Community Engagement:** European universities have established partnerships with local communities to address social and economic challenges. For example, the University of Lisbon in Portugal has implemented a program called Social Responsibility and Development, which aims to promote community engagement and social innovation. The University of Sheffield in the UK has implemented a Civic University Agreement, which outlines its commitment to working with the local community to address challenges such as poverty, health, and education.

(iii) **Diversity and Inclusion:** Many European universities have implemented programs to promote diversity and inclusion on campus. For example, the University of Vienna in Austria has implemented an Inclusion Strategy, which aims to promote equal opportunities and remove barriers for underrepresented groups. The University of Helsinki in Finland has implemented an Equality and Diversity Plan, which aims to promote gender equality and diversity in all areas of the university.

(iv) **Research for Societal Impact:** European universities are increasingly focusing their research on addressing societal challenges. For example, the University of Amsterdam in the Netherlands has established the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research, which aims to promote interdisciplinary research on societal challenges such as migration, inequality, and sustainability. The University of Edinburgh in the UK has established the Edinburgh Futures Institute, which aims to promote interdisciplinary research

on societal challenges such as climate change, inequality, and digital innovation.

(v) **Ethical Investment and Procurement:** Some European universities have adopted ethical investment and procurement policies to ensure that their investments and purchasing practices align with their social responsibility goals. For example, the University of Oslo in Norway has implemented a responsible investment policy that includes environmental, social, and governance criteria. The University of Sussex in the UK has implemented a responsible procurement policy that includes ethical and sustainable sourcing criteria.

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4. **USR in African Universities:** University Social Responsibility (USR) is an important aspect of promoting sustainability, social justice, and community engagement in Africa. Here are some examples of USR initiatives from African universities and their impact on society:

(i) **University of Cape Town, South Africa**: The University of Cape Town has a strong focus on social responsibility, particularly in the areas of poverty alleviation, education, and combating racism and apartheid. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as the Students' Health and Welfare Centres Organisation (SHAWCO), which provides health and education services to underserved communities. Additionally, the university has implemented programs to support disadvantaged students, such as the Financial Aid and Scholarship Office, which provides financial support to students from low-income households.

(ii) **Makerere University, Uganda:** Makerere University has a strong focus on saving the environment and combating climate change. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as establishing the Makerere University Centre for Climate Change Research and Innovations, which conducts research on climate change and provides education on sustainable development. Additionally, the university has implemented programs to promote sustainable practices, such as the Makerere University Tree Planting Campaign, which aims to mitigate the effects of deforestation.

(iii) **University of Nairobi, Kenya:** The University of Nairobi has a strong commitment to education and poverty alleviation. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as establishing the School of Education, which provides teacher training and education programs to underserved communities. Additionally, the university has implemented programs to support disadvantaged students, such as the University of Nairobi Scholarships and Bursaries Program, which provides financial support to students from low-income households.

(iv) **Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Ghana:** Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology has a strong focus on promoting sustainability and environmental conservation. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as establishing the Energy Centre, which conducts research on renewable energy and provides education on sustainable practices. Additionally, the university has implemented programs to promote environmental conservation, such as the Green Campus Initiative, which aims to promote sustainable practices on campus.

5. University Social Responsibility (USR) in Indian Universities

University Social Responsibility (USR) is an emerging concept in India, and many universities and higher education institutions are beginning to adopt this framework as a way to contribute to societal and environmental well-being.In India, some universities have taken initiatives to promote social responsibility by integrating community engagement, research, and teaching activities. Some case studies that exemplify the impact of University Social Responsibility (USR) in India are:

(i) **The Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Delhi:** IIT Delhi is a premier engineering institute in India, with a strong focus on research and innovation has launched several initiatives to address societal challenges, such as providing clean water and sanitation facilities to rural communities, and promoting sustainable energy sources.The institute has a dedicated center for rural development, which works with farmers and rural communities to promote sustainable agriculture and livelihoods. The center has taken up various initiatives, such as developing low-cost technologies for agriculture and providing training to farmers on sustainable farming practices. The center has also partnered with government agencies to implement development projects in rural areas.

(ii) **Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham:** Amrita Vishwa Vidyapeetham is a private university in Tamil Nadu that has taken several initiatives towards social responsibility. The university has established the Amrita Center for Wireless Networks and Applications, which provides telemedicine services to rural areas. It also runs the Amrita Sanjeevani project, which provides healthcare services to underprivileged communities.

(iii)**Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Bangalore:** IIM Bangalore has established the Centre for Public Policy, which conducts research on public policy issues and provides policy advice to the government. The institute also runs several social

DR. ASHISH PANDEY 11 P a g e

VOL 8, ISSUE 4 www.puneresearch.com/scholar **AUG to SEPT 2022**
(IMPACT FACTOR 3.14 IIJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

initiatives, including the Social Impact Award, which recognizes and supports social entrepreneurs.

(iv) **University of Delhi:** The University of Delhi has taken several initiatives towards social responsibility. The university runs the Community Radio Station, which broadcasts programs on social issues and community development. It also runs the Equal Opportunity Cell, which provides support and assistance to students from marginalized communities.

(v) **Jamia Millia Islamia**: Jamia Millia Islamia is a public university in Delhi, with a strong focus on social justice and diversity. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as providing education and training to women from low-income households and working with refugee communities to provide healthcare and education. The university has also partnered with NGOs and government agencies to implement development projects in urban areas.

(vi) **Azim Premji University:** Azim Premji University is a private university in Bangalore, founded by the Azim Premji Foundation. The university has a strong commitment to social justice and equity, with a focus on education and development. The university has taken up various initiatives, such as providing free education to children from low-income families and offering courses on sustainable development and social entrepreneurship. The university has also partnered with NGOs and government agencies to implement development projects in rural areas.

(vii) **Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS):** TISS is a premier institute for social sciences in India, with a strong focus on social justice and welfare. The institute has a dedicated center for community organization and development practice, which works with marginalized communities across the country. TISS has taken up various initiatives, such as providing vocational training to women from low-income households and working with tribal communities to promote sustainable livelihoods. The institute has also partnered with NGOs and government agencies to implement development projects in remote areas.

5.1 Special Initiatives by The English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) :

EFLU is a central university in India that specializes in teaching languages and communication studies. EFLU has been actively engaged in promoting University Social Responsibility (USR) and has integrated social responsibility into its core values and mission. EFLU has undertaken several initiatives that focus on community engagement, social justice, and sustainable development. Some of the notable USR activities undertaken by EFLU are:

DR. ASHISH PANDEY   12 P a g e

1. **The implementation of the EFLU Green Campus Initiative**: This initiative aims to promote sustainable practices and environmental stewardship on campus, such as rainwater harvesting, solar energy, and waste management. One of the greatest initiatives taken in this direction is "the plantation for developing Miyawaki forests, which was formally launched by EFLU vice chancellor and UGC New Delhi member Prof E Suresh Kumar behind the Basheer Hostel, is a joint initiative of Microsoft and EFLU."(India and India) The advantages and the motive behind growing the Miyawaki forests was stated by the Vice Chancellor Prof E. Suresh Kumar who said, "Miyawaki forests are being grown to increase dense urban forests on small patches of land, adding to the lung space of the campus. Miyawaki forests grow faster and take shape as dense forests in a lesser amount of time compared to conventional forests." (India and India)

2. **Launch of English Pro App**: The English Pro App is an innovative initiative by the English and Foreign Languages University (EFLU) to provide language learning opportunities to a wider audience, beyond the university campus. It has been described as

a free mobile app that offers language learners an opportunity to improve their English pronunciation as part of its University Social Responsibility (USR) initiative. The app is suitable for anyone who has completed at least five years of schooling with English as a curricular subject. It teaches General English pronunciation using a unique *Bharatiya* approach, which aids the smooth transition of beginner-level English users from their mother tongue to English and promotes the use of Standard Indian English. EnglishPro can be used as a skill-enhancement or complementary course to other skill-based courses to enhance employability skills. Moreover, teachers can also use EnglishPro to support classroom teaching of English in Indian schools.

The app was launched by The Union Minister of Education Dr Ramesh Pokhriyal 'Nishank' (The New Indian Express) The app is designed to help learners improve their English language skills through engaging and interactive content that is tailored to their individual needs and learning goals. The English Pro App offers a range of features, including:

(i) Personalized learning: The app uses artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning algorithms to provide personalized learning experiences that are tailored to the needs and goals of individual learners.

(ii) Interactive content: The app includes a range of interactive content, such as videos, audio clips, and quizzes, that make learning engaging and fun.

DR. ASHISH PANDEY 13 P a g e

(iii) Progress tracking: The app tracks learners' progress and provides feedback on their performance, helping them to identify areas for improvement and set achievable goals.

(iv) Community engagement: The app includes a social learning platform where learners can connect with other learners, share their progress, and collaborate on language learning activities.

(v) Accessibility: The app is designed to be accessible to learners with disabilities, and includes features such as closed captioning and voiceover support.

(vi) The English Pro App is available for download on both Android and iOS platforms, and is free for all users. The app has received positive feedback from users, and has been recognized for its innovative approach to language learning.

(vii) The incorporation of social responsibility into the curriculum and teaching methods, which enables students to understand and address societal challenges through their language and communication skills.

Overall, EFLU has demonstrated its commitment to promoting social responsibility through its various initiatives and programs. The university's efforts in USR are aligned with its core values and mission, and reflect its vision of promoting multilingualism, cultural diversity, and social justice.

6. **Conclusion:** University Social Responsibility (USR) is a relatively new concept that has emerged in recent years as universities recognize their role in shaping society and contributing to social welfare. This concept involves universities taking a more active role in social and environmental issues, beyond just their traditional academic pursuits. The impact of USR on India has been significant, particularly in terms of promoting social justice and reducing poverty. Universities have taken up initiatives to provide education and vocational training to marginalized communities, helping them become financially independent and self-sufficient. Additionally, they have focused on providing healthcare services, particularly in rural areas where access to medical facilities is limited. One of the key impacts of USR on society has been the increased awareness and involvement of students in social issues. Universities have created opportunities for students to engage in community service and volunteer work, allowing them to gain practical experience while also making a positive impact on society.

Furthermore, USR has had a particularly positive impact on poor people in India. By providing education and training, universities have helped to uplift these communities and

DR. ASHISH PANDEY 14 P a g e

VOL 8, ISSUE 4 www.puneresearch.com/scholar AUG to SEPT 2022
(IMPACT FACTOR 3.14 IIJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

provide them with opportunities for growth and prosperity. Additionally, the provision of healthcare services has been crucial in improving the health and well-being of those who previously had limited access to medical facilities. The impact of USR on students has also been significant. By providing opportunities for practical learning and engagement with social issues, universities have helped students develop a sense of social responsibility and a commitment to making a positive impact on society. This, in turn, has contributed to the development of well-rounded individuals who are not only academically accomplished but also socially aware and responsible.

Finally, USR has also had a positive impact on the environment. Universities have taken up initiatives to promote sustainability and reduce their carbon footprint. Additionally, they have focused on creating awareness among students and the wider community about environmental issues and the importance of conservation.

However, there is still a long way to go in terms of fully realizing the potential impact of USR. While universities have made significant strides in promoting social welfare and environmental sustainability, more needs to be done to address the challenges facing farmers and other marginalized communities. Additionally, there is a need to increase access to education and vocational training, particularly in remote areas where access to these opportunities is limited. USR has the potential to bring about significant change in India, particularly in terms of promoting social justice, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainability. Through their commitment to social responsibility, universities are playing a key role in shaping society and contributing to its growth and prosperity. As this concept gains momentum, it is hoped that more universities will take up the mantle of social responsibility and work towards creating a better and more equitable society for all.

Though USR is an emerging concept in India, yet many universities have shown keen interest and a lot of initiative in the implementation of USR in its campuses through the active engagement of its students, staff and faculty members. Volunteers from NCC and NSS have also contributed to the programmes under the umbrella of USR. Many central universities and prestigious institutions have actively taken interest in this programme, but state universities and colleges are yet to show deeper involvement in USR.

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DR. ASHISH PANDEY

15 P a g e

VOL 8, ISSUE 4 www.puneresearch.com/scholar AUG to SEPT 2022
(IMPACT FACTOR 3.14 IIJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL

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DR. ASHISH PANDEY   16 P a g e

VOL 8, ISSUE 4 www.puneresearch.com/scholar AUG to SEPT 2022
(IMPACT FACTOR 3.14 IIJIF) INDEXED, PEER-REVIEWED / REFEREED INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL