

Q&A

“KNOWLEDGE MOBILISATION IS A HUMAN RIGHT”

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By CAMILLA MEHLSSEN

* *What is the need for knowledge mobilisation today?*

“If I were to ask you: You invest billions of dollars in something and you are not sure of getting back billions plus, would you keep doing that? One of the core things about knowledge mobilisation is: Are we getting the maximum value from the investments of time, resources, etc. to be able to better understand our world as well as to create innovations? The first part of knowledge mobilisation is about having better value statements of what comes out of research.

The other part regards better relationships between the various sectors. There is always this talk about the ivory tower. My question is: Is the ivory tower locked from the inside or from the outside? It does not need to be locked. If you turn a tower sideways, it turns into a hallway with lots of potential connections. I think in many ways knowledge mobilisation is about creating connections between research, practice, governance and innovation.”

Have the need or the demand for knowledge mobilisation grown in recent years?

“There are different demands depending on the sector. Education is still in its early days. In sectors where the value statements are very easy, there is a great demand. In healthcare there is a great demand for knowledge mobilisation because people are sick or dying. The more research we can move into practice to lower morbidity and mortality, the greater it is used. In areas of business there is a lot of work in knowledge management because you can make a profit. You can create new products, processes and services.

The challenge with education is that it is somewhat isolated. But education is so critical. Teachers in the class-

room are trying to teach skills and aptitudes to students who are going to be in jobs that do not exist yet but will do 20 years down the road.”

What do you hope will be the next big step for knowledge mobilisation?

“One reason that I engage in this practice is that Article 27 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights says that every human should participate in the cultural life of the community, enjoy the arts and benefit from the results of science. In many ways knowledge mobilisation is a human right, except that it does not always end in practice. I think that increasingly what will happen is that knowledge mobilisation will become a normal practice. There will be more funding for it and more programmes for it. Eventually it will become a normal thing and in 20 years we will say ‘what was all that fuss about knowledge mobilisation back in 2010 or 2011?’”

Which sector is the first mover?

“The field itself emerged out of areas where knowledge is needed really quickly: health, business, the military, the software industry. Education has such an important role because of its scale – everybody is exposed to the education system – and the length of time that people go through the education process. I am 45 and spent almost half of it in some sort of educational institution – from kindergarten to Ph.D. I don’t know if we will have the luxury of spending that much time, as we move into the future and our problems become increasingly intense. Our need to take what we know and put it into practice is accelerating. Education has to be at the forefront of that.”

Is knowledge mobilisation always a good thing?

“Of course not. The social capital that allows community organisations to come together and help each other is also what led the Nazi Party to rise. Not all knowledge needs to be mobilised. The knowledge about how to better torture each other does not need to be mobilised

It comes down to: What is the knowledge for?, What is the purpose?, What is the value?, How is it shared? But if we don’t engage in knowledge mobilisation, the full potential of who we are as human beings – and how that is represented by research – is not going to be fully realised.”