

## **Advocating for Social Accountability in Accreditation and Community Engagement at the Faculdade Pernambucana De Saúde in Recife, Brazil**

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### **Abstract**

The Faculdade Pernambucana de Saúde (FPS) emphasizes social accountability through university outreach, aligning with national guidelines, and addressing community needs. Since its inception in 2005, the FPS has aimed to unite social accountability with humanistic professional training, particularly in the context of public health. The institution conducted a diagnosis of local community needs, identifying issues like the lack of community leadership, gender parity challenges, prevalence of chronic diseases, insufficient recreational spaces, limited access to higher education for disadvantaged youth, and income disparities. FPS's commitment to addressing these issues is reflected in their extension activities, such as forming discussion groups on gender issues, conducting periodic community meetings, supporting chronic disease control through health education, organizing activities for children, offering professional qualification courses for youth, and fostering local entrepreneurship. These actions aim to promote the social, economic, and cultural development of surrounding communities, and they include celebrating community events, offering professional courses, enhancing visibility, and incorporating social accountability into FPS curricula. FPS's initiatives aim to train professionals who are clinically proficient and committed to community health needs, ensuring the continuous improvement of Brazil's health and education systems. This document describes an action policy at the regional level. This multifaceted, participatory approach requires regular assessment and feedback to remain effective and socially accountable.

### **Problem Statement**

The Faculdade Pernambucana de Saúde (FPS) is known for its commitment to social accountability, which has been present in its actions since its inception in 2005. Considering actions that provide a return to society based on the constructions and learnings during the students' education and carrying them out through university extension (outreach) is mandatory and must account for at least 10% of the total course hours. These requirements are meant to unite social accountability with the humanistic training of professionals who meet the needs arising from the public health system (SUS). With this in mind, FPS established initial contacts with the surrounding community, conducting a diagnosis to identify their main needs, ranging from health education needs (which could be directly addressed) to needs such as professional qualification and the enhancement of local

enterprises (which could be addressed through partnerships and collaborations). These needs include:

- The lack of consolidated community leadership directly interferes with the communities' demands, which often cannot be heard in political and social decision-making spheres, weakening the articulation of public policies that truly meet local needs.
- Gender parity issues are exacerbated by the absence of a safe space for discussions and learning about issues that directly affect women, such as gender violence, wage inequality, and reproductive rights.
- Chronic diseases like diabetes, hypertension, and respiratory problems are prevalent among the communities FPS serves, which often lack access to adequate information and quality healthcare services.
- The lack of recreational spaces in the surrounding areas, with the absence of spaces that lead to physical and mental well-being in urbanized environments for both adults and children.
- The low presence of young people in higher education highlights the disproportionality between black and poor youth and those who have continuous access to higher education. This disparity reflects a series of structural and social barriers that limit educational opportunities for those young people.
- The community's income, up to minimum wage, is disproportionate to the cost of living, even though the community has small enterprises that are often their working capital.

The collected data on the needs outlined above generated descriptive reports,<sup>i, ii</sup> which were then made available in the FPS institutional repository. The report recommended that it is necessary to think about actions in the courses for the surrounding communities, being presented at the beginning of academic activities each semester and bringing the academic body closer to community engagement.

### **Current Policy And Law**

In Brazil, social accountability is not mandatory for accreditation. However, some entities seek accreditation through other means, such as the *Certificação de Entidades Benéficas de Assistência Social* (CEBAS), which recognizes institutions that provide services in social assistance, health, or education, receiving tax incentives to expand their reach and social impact. FPS has been pursuing this certification to expand and recognize the social actions it brings to the community.

On the other hand, we have some guidelines that direct and guide Brazilian education, such as the *Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional* (LDBEN), which establishes the guidelines and framework for national education in Brazil. It is fundamental to ensuring a coherent and inclusive educational system, defining principles, rights, and duties that guide basic and higher education in the country.

In the health field, we have the *Sistema Unificado de Saúde* (SUS), which regulates and establishes guidelines for the organization and operation of the health system in Brazil. SUS is an important milestone in Brazilian public health, ensuring that all citizens have universal and equal access to health services. In addition to providing medical care, SUS is also

concerned with health promotion, disease prevention, and patient rehabilitation, strengthening the State's commitment to health as a right for all.

Combining education, training, and health, there is also the *Política Nacional de Educação Permanente em Saúde* (PNEPS), which promotes the ongoing education of health professionals, encompassing both initial and continuous training. This policy recognizes the need for constant updating of professionals to keep up with changes in health practices and technological innovations. PNEPS encourages the training of professionals capable of facing the challenges of the health system, ensuring the quality of care and patient safety.

The Extension Accreditation Resolution at FPS consists of adjusting the Pedagogical Projects of Courses to guarantee a minimum percentage of hours dedicated to extension activities - which tend to promote social accountability. This measure aims to integrate teaching, research, and extension by strengthening the relationship between the university and the community. University outreach allows students to apply the knowledge they have acquired in the classroom to real-life situations, promoting more meaningful learning and contributing to the social and economic development of the community.

Therefore, LDBEN, SUS, PNEPS, CEBAS, and the Extension Accreditation Resolution are essential instruments for promoting quality education and health in Brazil. These mechanisms not only structure and regulate the education and health systems but also encourage continuous training, social inclusion, and integration between teaching and the community. Through them, it is possible to build a fairer, more equitable country committed to the well-being of all its citizens.

### **Policy Solution**

From our contact with the surrounding community, we have established some potential areas for action in social accountability policy and advocacy. Among them are initiatives that FPS can fully take accountability for implementing and others that will require the institution to coordinate with other entities, whether linked to the public or private sectors.

Thus, the main objective is promoting the social, economic, and cultural development of communities, prioritizing three surrounding communities through the implementation of extension activities and social accountability initiatives, and fostering education in its broadest sense across our courses. Specifically, these include:

- **Forming groups to discuss various themes:** Groups with women discussing gender issues, female empowerment, and other topics.
- **Periodic meetings with the surrounding community:** These will help identify current needs, maintain engagement, and evaluate actions already taken.
- **Actions to support the control of chronic diseases:** Health education actions to guide the population on care for high blood pressure, diabetes, and respiratory problems.
- **Working with children:** Although most residents in the communities are elderly, there is a population of children with whom we conduct activities involving art, education, sports, and mental health.
- **Working with youth through professional qualification courses:** In Brazil, there is the National High School Exam (ENEM). Organizing meetings to prepare young

people for this exam increases their chances of participating in municipal and federal programs linked to FPS and becoming students of the institution.

- **Community co-existence and engagement:** Participation in celebrations and holidays. Our country is very culturally engaged, and we encourage cultural manifestations in the surrounding communities.
- **Local entrepreneurship with support for management, marketing, and other actions:** In the assisted communities, there are a large number of enterprises run by the residents themselves. For this, FPS has established a partnership with the Brazilian Micro and Small Business Support Service (SEBRAE) and brought improvement actions to local enterprises.
- **Implementing Social Accountability into the eight courses and other departments of FPS:** The purpose is to have social accountability as a competency to be developed during the training of students in the healthcare field, whether they are doctors, nurses, dentists, or other professionals trained by the institution. This should be achieved not only through actions carried out in academic activities but also as part of attitudinal competencies.

It is important to emphasize that establishing partnerships with the public network at municipal, state, and federal levels is vital for implementing urban improvements through collaborative projects based on community participation and listening toward the aims of social accountability. These partnerships allow the voices of communities to be heard and considered in urban planning and public policies. Urban improvement projects, such as the creation of green spaces, transport infrastructure, and leisure areas, can be developed based on the needs and desires expressed by the community. The active participation of residents in the decision-making process strengthens their sense of belonging and accountability, resulting in more effective and sustainable solutions.

### **Actions Steps**

To achieve our objectives, we have outlined several steps divided into short-, medium-, and long-term actions based on the possibilities of engagement mentioned earlier. The perspective is that after reaching each step, we will return together with the community to evaluate and outline new steps based on these achievements or expand them - a procedure that follows the standards of social accountability. On the other hand, some actions can be considered "permanent," as they are ongoing, continuously evaluated, and promote community engagement. These are:

- Strengthening community interaction and engagement through participation in celebratory events and regular meetings with residents of the communities served.
- Encouraging entrepreneurship in the Tijolos and Rua da Linha communities through courses, workshops, and other initiatives, whether conducted within the extension program or through partnerships.
- Developing campaigns and actions to promote health, focusing on residents' quality of life.
- Boosting education in its broadest sense for residents of neighboring communities.
- Strengthening and expanding extension activities through social accountability endeavors, including activity with the pharmacy program through integrative practices open to the community; nutrition activity with food entrepreneurs; sports practices

with physical education students; a Mother's Day bazaar organized by psychology students; blood pressure measurement and discussion groups with medical students.

- Establishing inter-institutional partnerships to address the needs of surrounding communities by Sebrae, Unicred, Universidade Federal de Pernambuco, Instituto Shopping Recife, Prefeitura da Cidade do Recife, ONGs (Non-governmental organization) - Saber Viver, Afoxé Omô Nilê Ogunjá, Colônia de Pescadores, Abrigo Cristo Redentor, Schools and health centers.

Other actions that have already been initiated and, once achieved, can be modified or expanded to advance to further steps are:

- **Setting up an action team** and planning actions with course coordinators for scheduled semester activities.
- Increasing visibility of actions within the community.
- **Drafting legal documentation**, including statutes and operating criteria.
- **Enhancing the teaching-research-extension triad.**
- **Participating in celebratory community events.**
- **Revitalizing a square with the government** (a leisure space for the communities).
- **Creating a technological solution** that allows for the geolocation of residents.
- **Offering free professional qualification courses** for the community, periodically held at FPS.
- **Having a percentage of students from the surrounding community.**
- **Hosting periodic discussions** about actions and assessments.
- **Incorporating Social Accountability as a competency** with modules to teach students, collaborators, and the entire FPS community how to put social accountability into practice in education, research, and other activities.

## Conclusion

The effective implementation of FPS initiatives in the surrounding communities is essential for promoting social, economic, and cultural development, aligning with the guidelines established by national policies and resonating with the aims of social accountability. To achieve this, it is necessary to adopt a multifaceted and participatory approach that combines regulatory strengthening, formation of practice communities, capacity building, and joint decision-making. Additionally, it is crucial to establish inter-institutional partnerships beyond the health field, as only in this way can we meet the needs of the surrounding communities. The involvement of stakeholders and adaptive implementation will ensure the effectiveness of these initiatives, aiming to train professionals who are not only clinically proficient but also deeply committed to meeting the health needs of their communities, ultimately improving the overall health and education systems in Brazil. This is a long road towards social accountability, so constant evaluations and feedback from all stakeholders are necessary not only to become socially accountable but to remain so.



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<sup>i</sup>Available at <https://repositorio.fps.edu.br/handle/4861/926>

<sup>ii</sup>Available at <https://repositorio.fps.edu.br/handle/4861/925>