Chapter 14

“Bottom of the Pyramid” Community Outreach Programs: The Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) Experience 2008 – 2014

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ABSTRACT

Public universities in Malaysia have recently established additional administrative divisions called the Industry and Community Network (ICN). In its various forms as manifested through different higher learning institutions, ICN seeks to engage with the industry and community towards achieving sustainable development and transformation of the economy, culture, education, health and environment of the society and nation. Diverse approaches are henceforth being promoted in developing communities surrounding the ivory towers. Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), as the second oldest university in Malaysia which was accorded the APEX (Accelerated Program of Excellence) status by the government in 2008, has launched Community Outreach Programs (COPs) towards realizing goals of its ICN. Employing primary data from in-house publications of the ICN Division of USM, this chapter seeks to shed some light on the role and impact of COPs conducted under the auspices of USM’s ICN, covering the years 2008-2014. In line with its quest towards the accomplishing the ideal of a humanized university or ‘humaniversity’ that not only focuses on academic excellence but also contributes to the development and well-being of its surrounding community, USM’s ICN has embarked on a series of ambitious COP projects.

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Community and Industry engagement describes the collaboration between higher education institutions and community as well as industry for mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources that are symbiotically catalyzed to effect societal transformation. -See Ching Mey, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Industrial and Community Network, USM Bulletin for Industry and Community Network, 2012 (ICN, 2012a)

INTRODUCTION

Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Malaysia’s second oldest university founded in 1969, has since 2008 been spearheading a quest to humanized tertiary education through its espousal and implementation of the concept of ‘humaniversity’ - as in ‘humanized university’ (Abd Razak, 2011, Ahmad et al., 2014, Syed Kechik et al., 2014). A humanized university not only strives for academic excellence but also actively partakes in the development and well-being of its surroundings. For such purposes, USM’s university-community engagement (UCE) entails the united identification of problems, the joint planning of strategies, and the combined mobilization of resources to transform the socio-economic well-being of target communities in tandem with the University’s APEX (Accelerated Program of Excellence) agenda to transform and empower the “Bottom Billion” (Syed Kechik et al., 2014). Key factors in building and strengthening effective community partnership include time investment, appropriate listening skills, equitable treatment of community and research skills sets, engagement goals, task identification, task assignment, and project monitoring (Farish, 2014).

Towards accomplishing its UCE mission, USM has established an additional administrative division called the Industry and Community Network (ICN). The purpose of ICN is to engage with the industry and community towards the sustainable development and transformation of the economy, society, culture, education, health and environment of the nation. ICN also serves as the secretariat for Knowledge Transfer Program, Asia-Pacific University Community Engagement Network (APUCEN) and Right Livelihood College (RLC) @ USM initiative. Moreover, ICN marshals USM’s various Community Outreach Programs (COPs), the practice of whom USM hopes will result in multi-faceted expertise and knowledge spillover in the manner of the economic multiplier effect.

Since its inception, USM’s ICN has conducted COPs covering such diverse themes as:

- Community-based medical curriculum (medical),
- Approaches and methods to tackle the problems of inhalant abuse (health),
- Bringing the world of science to primary schools (education),
- Ensuring access of water supply to underprivileged communities (basic infrastructure),
- Empowering the youth in drug prevention programs (youth),
- Connecting libraries with grassroots communities (learning),
- Collaborative training for housing entrepreneurs (training),
- Conducting educational events on Penang rivers (natural resource management),
- Home care nursing for needy patients (nursing),
- Nurturing entrepreneurial skills of disabled members of society (entrepreneurship),
- Promoting crime prevention (security), and
- Restoring hopes of underprivileged single mothers and families through philanthropy (single parenting).
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