University and Community Partnerships in South Sulawesi, Indonesia

Enhancing community capacity and promoting democratic governance

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Higher education plays various roles in society. From the perspective of liberal theory, higher education leads to self-realisation and social transformation, including latterly elements of social mobility and meritocracy. From professional formation theory, universities and colleges are identified as providers of expertise and vocational education, both in old ('traditional') and new areas or fields. In economic theory, higher education is seen as a research engine, allied to regional and national ambitions for economic growth. Variations on this theme include higher education as a source of business services and of national pride (Watson 2011, p. 13).

Higher education has three functions: teaching, research, and community service/engagement. According to Schuetze (2010, pp. 20–25), there are three main types of university engagement and partnership with the community: (1) academic knowledge transfer; (2) university continuing education; and (3) community-based research and service learning.

The role of Alauddin State Islamic University, as stated in its vision, is not only to promote social transformation but also to contribute to developing a 'modern' Islamic civilisation. To implement this role, the university carries out the typical three functions mentioned above. Ideally, the three functions should form an integrated system linking each to the others, but in reality there are deviations from this ideal and much dynamism in practice. This is related to the structures and values of Indonesian higher education institutions and whether an institution is a university or an institute.

The small number of State Islamic universities in Indonesia, such as Alauddin, is unusual in that they not only adhere to the regulations of the Indonesian higher education system (and thus are regulated by the Ministry of Education and Culture in certain areas such as non-religious subjects) but also come under the umbrella of the Ministry of Religious Affairs. As an Islamic university, Alauddin can teach secular science, but as an institute it could only teach religious subjects and one specific science subject.

This article discusses the importance of this change in status and more recent project initiatives designed to significantly raise the profile and effectiveness of the third function of the university: community engagement. We begin with a review of the existing model for implementing community services and then discuss the new model that has been adopted in tandem with the original model. Based on the Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development approach to promote democratic governance and Results Based Management, the new model is a partnership between the university and civil society organisations (CSOs).

THE SETTING

Indonesia has 33 provinces, of which South Sulawesi is one. Of an Indonesian population of some 250 million, South Sulawesi's population is around 8 million. The average annual population growth rate is 1.17 per cent, slightly lower than the national average of 1.49 per cent. Even though the percentage of the population living below the national poverty line in South Sulawesi is below the national average, the incidence of poverty in South Sulawesi is still high, at roughly 13 per cent. The economy is based mainly on agriculture, fisheries, trade and some manufacturing. The province is ecologically diverse (with coastal zones, irrigated rice plains, mountainous areas, offshore islands, etc.)

The population is mainly Muslim, with a large Christian population in the northern highlands (Tana Toraja). Islam came to South Sulawesi in a peaceful manner, mainly through trading networks. There is some variation in interpretation of Islam in South Sulawesi: besides the two big nation-wide Islamic sociocultural organisations, Muhammadiyah and Nahdatul Ulama in South Sulawesi, there are also local Islamic organisations like Darul Dakwah Wal Irshad (DDI), Al Nadhir and Jama'ah Tabligh. Muhammadiyah, Nahdatul Ulama, Jama'ah Tabligh, and DDI have structures and networks stretching from the national or provincial level right down to the village level. Among the different streams of Qur'anic interpretation represented by these organisations, Alauddin State Islamic University plays an important role as an institution that is accepted by all. Thus the lecturers and students are welcomed everywhere as preachers and are also very active in community service in both urban and rural areas.

HISTORY OF ALAUDDIN STATE ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY

As a State Islamic Institute, Alauddin Islamic State University mainly focused on Islamic learning, turning out graduates who mostly became religious teachers in various parts of the education system. In 1965, it became an independent Islamic State Institute in its own right. At that time, there were only three faculties: Syari'ah (Islamic jurisprudence), Tarbiyah (Islamic education) and Ushuluddin (Islamic philosophy/theology). Subsequently, in 2005, to respond to the needs of Islamic society and to some changes

in the national education system, it converted to a State Islamic University. As a university, the fundamental change was that it not only covered Islamic learning but also general/secular sciences. Today, the university has eight faculties, with postgraduate programs. Current faculties are Syari'ah and Law; Tarbiyah and Teacher Training; Ushuluddin, Philosophy and Political Science; Adab (Letters) and Humanities; Dakwah (Islamic Preaching) and Communications; Health Sciences; Science and Technology; and Business and Economics.

The Ministry of Religious Affairs determines the university's organisational structure and management system. In addition to the various faculties and support services, the university has a Research Center and a Community Service Center. In 2013, these two Centers, plus the Center for Women's and Children's Studies and several new interdisciplinary centres, have been combined into a new unit called the Institute for Research and Community Service and have been given a higher position within the university, reporting directly to a Vice-Rector. In addition, there are a number of 'non-structural' or locally created centres, such as the Center for Islamic and Social Studies (PPIM).

MOMENTUM FOR REFORM, AND THE ROLE OF THE SILE PROJECT

The change in status from Islamic Institute to Islamic University provided great momentum to reform the organisation. Besides a new structure, new units and a new vision marrying Islamic sciences with 'secular' sciences, there has been a new spirit in carrying out the functions of the university. In this new spirit, the SILE Project, a program funded by the former Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), now absorbed into the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development – DFATD) and the Government of Indonesia was established to improve the capacity of government and civil society to develop and implement policies and projects that were consistent with democratic governance principles and also supported decentralised service delivery. SILE supported the university to develop a model of university-community engagement and community empowerment to promote democratic governance. In particular, it supported the university in enhancing the community engagement function but also in integrating it with the other two functions of the university, teaching and research. It also worked with the Ministry of Religious Affairs, which regulates Islamic higher education, to reformulate and strengthen its policies supporting the community service function of its universities.

In 2011, SILE supported the university to carry out an evaluation of how it implemented the three university functions. Some of the key findings included an overwhelming focus on teaching compared to the other two functions, with little integration between the three. Outreach had a heavy emphasis on religious education, conducted mainly through service learning

in a few programs, student 'work experience' in communities and 'routine' religious lectures/sermons, for example, during Friday prayers at the mosque. On campus, the outreach function was relatively marginalised, while in communities it was still relatively top–down, based on what was determined by the university. It reached only a tiny number of communities directly, and was generally unsustainable. Communities often viewed the university as a source of gifts/charity. Research had generally not been used in the service of communities to help them respond to the challenges they faced and make good use of their potential, nor were research results commonly integrated back into university teaching.

In reflecting on its current approach to university-community engagement, Alauddin, together with the SILE Project, came to a number of conclusions:

1   Current outreach approaches had made communities dependent on the university, overburdening the university with an increasing number of requests for support in the form of capital goods or other material assistance.

2   There was a lack of interest or motivation among lecturers and students in performing community service. Community service was regarded more as simply a prerequisite for graduation, and lecturers were not well rewarded by the university for community work.

3   Activities did not touch on the empowerment of the community to promote democratic governance.

4   The potential that existed in the university to contribute to the empowerment of the community had not been managed optimally because it was still split between teaching, research and service.

5   The university had not cooperated formally with CSOs (though many lecturers were very involved in CSOs in a personal capacity).

THE NEW APPROACH TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The review of university-community engagement showed there were three main types of engagement. First, there was community service directly from the university to the university's partner communities. Second, there was community service conducted by the university, but involving a third party. And third, community service was conducted by involving the communities around the university to proactively engage with the university and work together on community service activities. Before 2011, the main approach had been the first type. Based on the reflection exercise discussed above, and with significant input from recent graduates of overseas training programs (initially through diploma programs and short courses at the Coady International Institute, St. Francis Xavier University in Canada), the university developed a new

approach to community engagement. In addition to continuing with the existing model, it is now trying to build a more systematic approach to community engagement that integrates the three functions of the university, using partnerships with CSOs, to promote democratic governance (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: The new approach to university-community engagement
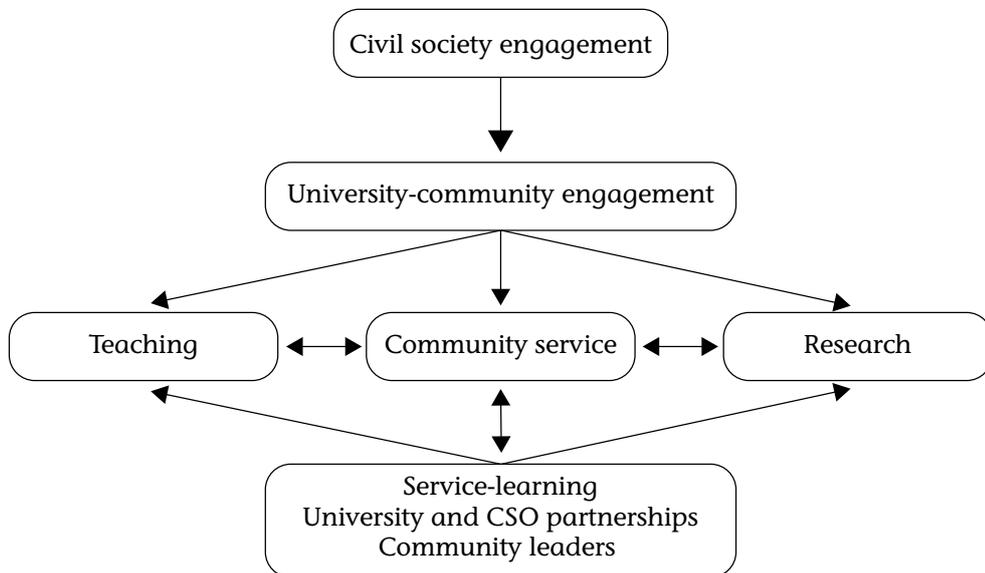
University-community engagement under this approach comprises teaching, community service and research, each contributing to improving the implementation of all three functions. Community service encourages community-based research and uses the products from such research in the community. The experience from community service can also become a resource and influence teaching. In carrying out community service/community engagement, Alauddin builds partnerships with civil society organisations, both large and small, general and specialised, religious and secular. Meanwhile, the existing model is still operating. The university has now begun to use the Mobilizing Assets for Community-Driven Development approach to promote democratic governance and Results Based Management. Democratic governance in this context is both a principle to be applied in community engagement and a set of issues and methods (participatory planning and participatory budgeting, conflict resolution, social accountability/monitoring public service delivery, and civic education) that should be addressed.

UNIVERSITY AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATION PARTNERSHIPS

In developing community service by engaging CSOs in planning and implementing community engagement activities, the university was encouraged to experiment with a new vehicle (*pokja*, or working group) which it had rarely used in the past. There were several reasons, some of them alluded to above, for this approach: to combine the different strengths and knowledge of both parties, and to take advantage of the very extensive networks within communities long developed by the major CSOs.

Sustainability of effort was also a factor, with long-term MOUs being signed by both parties. These formalised partnerships subsequently created working groups whose members consist of lecturers from a particular faculty and representatives of one of the selected CSOs. Each working group assists one or more communities chosen to represent the diversity of the province's ecology, settlement types (urban, rural, accessible, isolated, etc.), ethnicity and other factors.

Today, eight CSOs have been selected to take part in each of the eight working groups. These CSOs were selected after considering various issues of concern to each, such as issues related to women, social and religious issues, education, children, public services, good governance, conflict, etc. This work continues to be supported by the SILE Project through provision of technical assistance/capacity development and funding for particular activities. Figure 2 shows the implementation principles of the working groups.

Figure 2: Implementation principles in working groups (pojka)
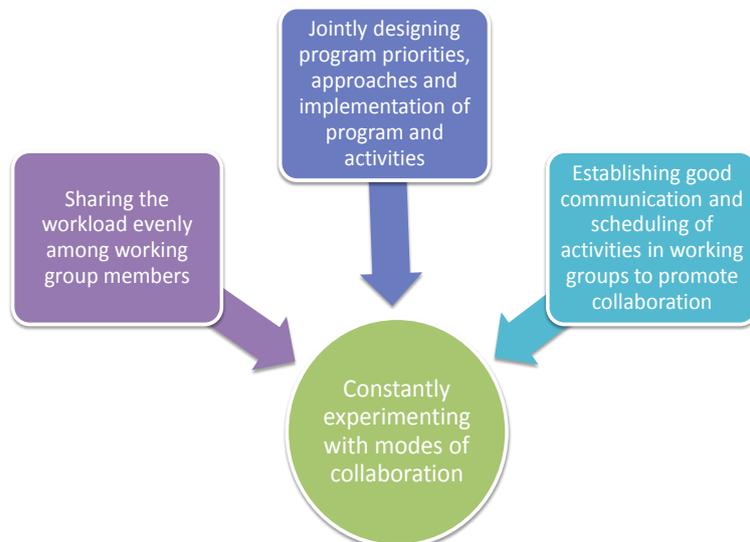
These partnerships between the university and CSOs are mainly focused on a program of community outreach and engagement that encourages democratic governance, in line with the mandate of the project and expressed university interests. In general, the working groups provide:

—technical assistance to civil society organisations in enhancing the capacity of local leaders

—enhancement of the capacity of CSOs to strengthen community participation in planning, budgeting, monitoring and evaluation

—identification and selection, together with partner communities, of priority issues for implementation of programs to drive democratic governance

—capacity assessment and best knowledge management practices related to community engagement through various strategies.

More specifically, in terms of the new model and working group concept, the *pokja* have built a commitment among the members to share the workload evenly, and to jointly identify priorities and issues, approaches and implementation modes

for the program of activities in communities. Members of each working group begin by establishing good communications with the community and exploring carefully how they will work together, given their different backgrounds and experiences. Besides this, the principles of good partnerships are kept in mind: to share resources, to be transparent in all aspects, to seek mutual benefit, and especially to develop clear methods of deliberation and decision-making.

In working with communities, the *pokja* takes into account several mutually reinforcing 'cross-cutting issues', as shown in

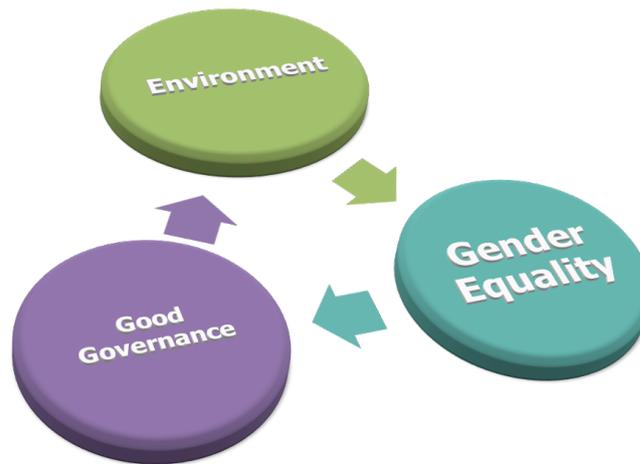**Figure 3: Cross-cutting issues**

Figure 3.

Good environmental management is standard in asset mapping and developing action plans. It is applied when *pokja* and communities conduct asset mapping of the villages. During this task, they describe the topography, the land condition, the farming, plantations, forests, unproductive land, etc. As an outreach program, they preserve the physical assets that are already productive, and try to improve those that are in poor condition. Good governance principles are adhered to in designing, planning and implementing outreach programs, to promote participation, transparency, responsiveness and accountability. This begins when deciding the priority issues of democratic governance to be focused on, as well as the priority activities. Both the organising community and the *pokja* decide the timeframe, know the budget allocation and plan the spending. Asset mapping is done by a core community group, with assistance from the *pokja*. The result of the asset mapping is presented to the community, and based on this, the community develop their priority action plan. The community action plan then forms the basis on which the Pokja develop implementation measures for the outreach program.

In mapping and implementing the planned actions, gender equality is one important consideration; it is not just a matter of women's representation or women's participation, but also about whether gender gaps affect men or women. In every *pokja* and core community group, there are women representatives. In communities where the level of patriarchy is high, *pokja* discuss affirmative action among women's groups and men's groups

separately. It is essential that women feel free to voice their ideas and aspirations. The action plan is designed so that both women and men benefit from the activities.

At the beginning, each group conducted an initial familiarisation field survey, which was followed by a community assessment using focus group discussions and interviews. Results of the assessment were used to create simple asset maps of the different local communities. These described the main potential of the communities, such as the skills of its citizens, its associations and institutions, its land base and economy. Such an approach was a necessary and fruitful way to initiate application of the mobilising assets approach.

The working groups have now begun working together in the planning and implementation of programs and activities.

WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES USING THE ABCD APPROACH

Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) is an approach to community empowerment, led by the community itself, whereby they identify and mobilise their own assets (Cunningham et al. 2012). Commonly, ABCD is used for economic empowerment but at Alauddin State Islamic University, based on technical input from the SILE Project, it is currently being used to promote democratic governance.

According to Green et al. 2006 (pp. 15–17), effective community development has three qualities: it is asset based, internally focused and relationship driven. 'Asset based' means that community development starts from the assets, both tangible and intangible, that people have in the community. It is focused on a community's strengths. 'Internally focused' means the actions begin and take place within the community. 'Relationship driven' refers to the productive connections among five building blocks of community. The five building blocks are individuals' gifts, skills and talents; local voluntary associations such as neighbourhood groups and religious organisations; business and goverment institutions; money, goods and services in the local economy; and the physical world, both natural and man-made, such as rivers, forests, buildings, streets, etc. ABCD analysis uncovers these assets and helps interconnect and mobilise them all in order to fulfil the community's dreams.

ABCD in the context of South Sulawesi province is appropriate, especially in working with communities which have a history of conflict, as it focuses as much on 'social-psychological' issues as on other more concrete needs. In practice, the working groups discussed above have added more diverse assets like religious and cultural assets, and have also identified particular issues of democratic governance on which communities would like to work.

OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The opportunity to unite two institutions, with different organisational, experience and community-focused approaches is very challenging, for both university and CSO. Being committed to work together with the new vision and mindset will provide them both with more spirit and power to make social change. This new opportunity is much to the credit of lecturers who work on the outreach programs. Most of the lecturers who represent the university in the working groups are happy to be involved and engage with the communities. Some village leaders have stated that the programs have changed people's mindset: they now realise they have assets and can mobilise them for village development. Some communities have grown in confidence and have begun to implement their action plans.

However, some challenges face each working group. The first challenge is to comprehend the philosophy of the new vision and mission of the university itself. The *pokja* need to understand the operational instruments of the university's vision, especially integration of the activities of teaching, research and community service or engagement. This takes considerable time and needs frequent reinforcement. To respond to this challenge, besides promoting knowledge sharing, Allauddin Islamic University is now in the process of developing strategic planning for university community engagement.

The second challenge is the ability of all members of the working groups to comprehend the methodology and approach that are the tools of community development, as well as the democratic governance focus of the SILE Project itself. Since Asset Based Community Development and Results Based Management have been agreed on as the basic tools and approaches of the program, it is very important to know the level of competence of all working group members in applying such tools and approaches and in interacting with each local community, and to help increase their competence. From the community point of view, the challenge is that they usually want something really concrete; democratic governance is an abstract notion for them. This is why *pokja* in promoting democratic governance in communities, began with something simple and concrete as an entry point to practising democratic governance principles.

The third challenge is the readiness of each team to manage time and work both in program planning and implementation. This requires flexibility in scheduling work in communities and changes in meeting times as each member also has his or her own daily activities in their home institution or organisation, as well as commitment and a spirit of togetherness in working for social transformation. Providing clear job descriptions for *pokja* members could be one solution to this challenge.

The fourth challenge is to change the mindset of all stakeholders involved (lecturers, CSO activists and communities). Mainly, it is a question of how to change the mindset of lecturers

and CSO activists from acting as 'heroes' – which create high dependency levels in communities – and instead be motivators and facilitators who increase the confidence of communities to act and mobilise their own assets. This is also a challenge for communities, who have often been used to waiting for help and support from the outside. Here, the role of community core groups is to share the vision of community driven development to the rest of the community members, together with small concrete results as helpful evidence of the outcomes of all working together towards a common goal.

CONCLUSION

University-CSO partnership is one model for university-community outreach programs that may be used as a vehicle to implement the three functions of the university in promoting democratic governance. The key elements to ensuring this model works effectively are: (1) strong commitment from the university and the CSO, formalised in a Memorandum of Understanding; (2) participants who are highly motivated and trust each other; (3) start with a small, concrete activity decided by the community; (4) put the community as subject, appreciated for their assets and their capabilities; (5) institutionalise the knowledge and capabilities that actors have within their organisation, both university and CSO; and (6) integrate the model for university-community outreach with the functions of the university and its policies and regulations.

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