

ASIA ENGAGE

CONFERENCE REPORT 2012

University
Community &
Industry
Engagement
across
ASEAN & Asia

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The Talloires Network



An alliance to benefit the community

Regional Conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement, and official launch of AsiaEngage



Prof Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin
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Assalamualaikum and Salam Sejahtera

The Regional Conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement: Forging Meaningful Partnerships across ASEAN & Asia took place at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (The National University of Malaysia) on 7-9 May 2012. In the spirit of partnership, this conference brought together practitioners from academia, industries, non-governmental organisations, government agencies, foundations and communities who are passionate about university-community-industry engagement for regional development.

The conference was organised by AsiaEngage, a regional platform established to leverage on the strengths of the Asia-Talioires Network of Industry and Community Engaged Universities (ATNEU); the ASEAN University Network (AUN) Thematic Network on University Social Responsibility and

Sustainability (AUN-USR&S); and the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme, supported by the ASEAN Secretariat. AsiaEngage will create opportunities for working synergistically across all three alliances while maintaining the independence of each entity. These three entities are rich in knowledge, expertise and experience in community and industry engagement that benefit communities across ASEAN and Asia. Initiated and driven by UKM through its Office of Industry and Community Partnerships (Hal Ehwal Jaringan Industri dan Masyarakat or HEJIM) and supported by Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education and the Ministry of Youth and Sports, AsiaEngage aims to be the regional community-industry engagement platform of ATNEU, AUN-USR&S and its member universities.

Universities play a pivotal role in bringing together different stakeholders to collaboratively solve community problems through education, research and service. This was evident during the UKM-ASEAN University Network Regional Forum on University Social Responsibility and Sustainability held on 9-11 May 2011 which highlighted best practices in community engagement that were shared by academicians, civil society activists and representatives from industry and community organisations.

Building on the 2011 Forum, this Regional Conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement: Forging Meaningful Partnerships across ASEAN & Asia 2012 provides a dedicated platform for a wider range of stakeholders to forge meaningful partnerships through thematic paper presentations and sharing of innovative industry and community engagement practices. Conferences and workshops conducted by community engagement experts helped to develop competencies in areas such as social participatory research, the integration of community engagement into the curriculum and needs assessment for productive and sustainable community engagement. Forums were also held to inspire youth volunteerism for regional community development.

We welcome all who are committed and passionate in collaborating with multi-sector stakeholders to jointly contribute towards community development based on mutually respectful partnerships at the national and regional levels.

This publication is based on expanded coverage by *University World News* of the Regional Conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement: Forging Meaningful Partnerships Across ASEAN and Asia 2012, organised by AsiaEngage at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

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Forging university-led community partnerships

Community engagement is important to sustain and could become as vital for universities as teaching and research

As the top representatives of the main partners of a new Asian network stood with their hands on a darkened glass ball, the word AsiaEngage lit up in red and blue, and swirled around the sphere.

It represented the official moment of birth of the new AsiaEngage umbrella organisation for community-engaged universities. But it did not require much crystal ball-gazing to see the commitment and enthusiasm – it was already evident at the conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement held from 7-9 May in Malaysia, where the launch took place.

Much work had already been put into building AsiaEngage, which comprises the Asia-Taliores Network of Industry and Community Engaged Universities, the ASEAN University Network Thematic Network for University Social Responsibility and Sustainability and the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme.

But by the close of the conference on 9 May it was clear that universities and non-governmental organisations were beginning to think of community engagement not as an *ad hoc* activity, but one that was important to sustain and which could become as vital to universities in the region as teaching and research.

Numerous examples of how community engagement is already embedded in university work in

Saifuddin Abdullah
Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Malaysia



Asian countries were described at the conference.

In Indonesia, community service is required for academic promotion. A community's endorsement of a university research project can open doors to resources from Thailand's research fund. The Philippines has

endowed some of its public universities with a public service mandate to carry out work in the community, to cite just a few examples. But as Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin, the Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), which acts as the AsiaEngage secretariat, said during the opening plenary, like-minded institutions want to collaborate "for greater impact."

"This is a platform that is not just for universities but for NGOs, foundations and industry to also collaborate with us," said Saran Kaur Gill, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships at UKM and Executive Director of AsiaEngage.

Shared problems

It was clear from the conference that there is much for universities in the region to share, even if that

"In the face of all these disasters, it is the community who have the knowledge, wisdom and learning. It is for the rest of us to catch up with that and to discover why they are so resilient"

region, like ASEAN, is economically, socially and culturally diverse. Challenges such as poverty, disasters and the environment, lend themselves to university-community engagement on a regional scale.

That was illustrated graphically by John Gwynn of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies who pointed out that during natural disasters in Asia, the ratio of men to women who lose their lives is of the order of 14 women to every man. But during the 2004 Asian Tsunami, 100 women lost their lives to every man.

It was a statistic that elicited gasps from around the conference hall. The need to investigate that statistic was clear to all. "It's the community who have the knowledge, wisdom and learning. It is for the rest of us to catch up with that and to discover why they are so resilient in the face of all these disasters. And how, through research and understanding, we can help them share their own knowledge with other communities affected by the same issue," said Gwynn.

Building long-term relationships with communities around them was essential for universities, delegate after delegate said. But the tyranny of university rankings, which rely heavily on research output, requires university faculty to 'publish or perish' and scepticism about the benefits of community engagement can also undermine the projects.

It was clear that community engagement had to be integrated into research, for university-community engagement to be sustainable. And this, too, is the value of universities to the community, many of whom, as an international expert on participatory research Rajesh Tandon told the conference, have never entered the "sacred domes" of the university, yet have knowledge that is relevant and important.

"There is a need to relate more practical knowledge with the more theoretical," Tandon said.

Many delegates also pointed out that it was important to respect communities and learn from them, rather than to simply tap them for research purposes.

"Partnerships are not sustainable



River Foo
WWF-Malaysia and
Prof Sharifah Mastura
Director, UKM
Institute of
Climate Change

unless all parties benefit," said Tandon, joint holder of a newly established UNESCO chair on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

"Applied knowledge is going to be increasingly valued as part of an academic qualification. More and more it is in the application that innovation happens.

The most important skill in community-based research is to be able to facilitate reflection in the community."

There needs to be a balance between community needs and institutional research said Nat Vorayos, Vice-President for Research and Academic Services at Chiang Mai University, Thailand. In community-based research, the research questions have to come from the community, he said.

Building relationships with communities

Yet the relationship must be nurtured to be beneficial. Some communities feel imposed upon, warned Sukhij Ysothonsreekul, Vice-President for Research and External Relations at Naresuan University in Thailand. And this was echoed by the OECD's Jaana Puukka, who said, "universities in many countries have been accused by the community of using them as their research targets."

"You may have huge tensions between the university and some of the communities. We have to mediate and have to bring people to the table," Puukka said.

But the benefit of a regional grouping such as AsiaEngage is that organisations can share experiences to overcome some of these obstacles.

For example, Tandon advised, "Once you share the (research) findings you (must) share in both locations: in the community and in the university."

Ethical safeguards may also need to be built into the relationship, the conference heard. Scientists cannot go into communities without their informed consent said Prospero de Vera, Vice-President for Public Affairs at the University of the Philippines.

There may be reasons for this, and building trust is crucial. "There have been cases where they have

'Challenges such as poverty, disasters and the environment, lend themselves to university-community engagement on a regional scale'



From left to right: **Kamal Mamat** ASEAN Secretariat; **Saran Kaur Gill** AsiaEngage Executive Director **Wan Mohd Zahid** Sime Darby Foundation; **Janice Reid** Vice-Chair Talloires Network; **Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan** **Shahabudin** Vice-Chancellor UKM; **Saifuddin Abdullah** Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Malaysia **Nantana Gajasen** Executive Director AUN

had their traditional knowledge stolen from them and used to make products for commercial profit,” de Vera said.

Bagus Aryo, Advisor on Research and Community Services to Universitas Indonesia, explained that countries like Indonesia and Cambodia need government permission to go into the community.

“If you have a new relationship it’s a problem. You have to build your relationship first.”

Relationships with NGOs

And it is not just the relationship with the community that must be managed but with NGOs as well. As Francesco Volpini, Director of the Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service (CCIVS) headquartered at UNESCO in Paris, pointed out: both universities and NGOs tend to be self-sufficient, so a new mindset is needed to manage the partnership. “Things will be a bit more complicated when we try to work together,” he acknowledged. “We need to learn to change before we can actually go ahead.”

NGOs have had many bilateral collaborations with universities. But “are we ready to accept an identity that goes well beyond the territories and boundaries that we built for ourselves? And because we built them, we can also demolish

them and change it to build other things,” Volpini said.

As Nithi Nesadurai, President of the Environment Protection Society of Malaysia said. “We cannot live by ourselves and solve problems by ourselves. It’s a really big task.”

Industry and governments

While the conference was called Higher Education-Community-Industry engagement, and included representatives from industry, the main focus was on university-led community engagement and how industry could support that as it looks towards stepping up its own corporate social responsibility.

And government was represented by Malaysia’s Deputy Minister for Higher Education Saifuddin Abdullah, who emphasised that in building partnerships universities must not put their own objectives second to either industry or government needs.

“Don’t worry so much about the objectives of the government of the day, or whoever wants to be the

government. Because if [university-community engagement] is not done for the sake of the noble values and objectives of the university then you may end up becoming a government contractor, unfortunately, or a contractor of the industry.”

He stressed that academic freedom and university autonomy were important in forging university-community-industry engagement.

“From the government, what I can say is tell us the truth, do the research as it is. If we are wrong, tell us we are wrong. If we are good, tell us we are good,” he said because “unless universities do that we will all be wrong in the long term”.

Delegates were eager to grasp the challenges and put community on a sound and sustainable footing, and in particular to ensure university-led community engagement is of quality. As Albert Tan of Hong Kong Baptist University put it, “the elephant in the room is quality assurance.” This is one of the major tasks ahead for AsiaEngage and one that organisations such as AUN have already begun working on, to find relevant measures and indicators.

Looking into the crystal ball once more, this is perhaps the greatest challenge for AsiaEngage for the future. As Gill said: “we need to be good at doing good.”

‘Partnerships are not sustainable unless all parties benefit’

Malaysia hosts official launch of new regional partnership

Being involved with communities is a universal mission of universities that brings them out of their ivory tower, while working with like-minded institutions can have a greater impact

AsiaEngage, a new regional umbrella organisation to promote social and community engagement by universities in the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia, was officially launched in Malaysia on 7 May 2012.

It will work in collaboration with voluntary and non-governmental organisations, philanthropic foundations and industry.

The AsiaEngage network, with a secretariat at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) in lush, green surroundings on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, will support development in the ASEAN and Asia region by strengthening the civic role of universities. Coming out of the ivory tower and being involved with communities “is not something new. It is one of our universal missions. This is because of the social contract we have with our societies, which fund us,” said UKM Vice-Chancellor Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin.

“What is new is the efforts of like-minded institutions that want to work together for greater impact.”

AsiaEngage will be “an inclusive umbrella for engaging communities and mutually transferring our knowledge and expertise for community development.

“As much as our knowledge will empower and develop communities to their optimal potential, universities will also be enriched by knowledge from communities. It’s



Media representative and **Mohd Arabbe'** postgraduate student UKM

a two-way process,” she said at the launch attended by 200 delegates from a dozen countries.

AsiaEngage, which already has 68 members in 16 countries, brings together the rapidly growing Asia-Talloires Network of Industry and Community Engaged Universities; the ASEAN University Network’s thematic network on University Social Responsibility and Sustainability (USR&S) set up in October 2010; and the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme.

The aim is to better facilitate partnerships.

“This is a platform that is not just for universities. It is for NGOs, foundations and industries to collaborate with us,” said Saran Kaur Gill, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships at UKM and Executive Director of AsiaEngage.

In the past, partnerships between universities and industry, and with community organisations, have been *ad hoc*. The aim of the new network is to consolidate these.

“With our intellectual capital and knowledge-generation capacities, universities are suitably positioned to take the lead,” said Gill. “There is a real buzz about being involved. People want to learn so that they can move forward.”

The idea of the network is to identify social, environmental and economic challenges that universities can help tackle in alliance with organisations on the ground.

It will enable universities to be directly involved in improving the quality of life of people in the

“With our intellectual capital and knowledge-generation capacities, universities are suitably positioned to take the lead”



region, including helping to meet millennium development goals, and post-disaster development, and creating links between research, education and volunteerism.

“In our globalised world we are increasingly faced with complex issues – problems that extend beyond disciplinary, sectoral or geographic boundaries,” Gill said. These include climate change and the environment and their impact on communities, and inequity and human rights.

“These problems seem largely beyond the capacity of any one agency to solve.

They require collaboration, and diverse people working together across boundaries to ensure that our communities are socially just, economically stable, environmentally sustainable, and literate and educated,” said Gill.

“While governments are often

Nantana Gajaseni
Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network

seen as key facilitators of these collaborations, universities play an increasingly important role in this agenda.”

NGOs on the ground have a lot of applied knowledge and skill but partnering with universities can help them professionalise this area,

‘These complex issues seem largely beyond the capacity of any one agency to solve. They require collaboration and diverse people working together across boundaries’

she said. University involvement can also help to produce evidence-based data from NGO fieldwork. “NGOs are a critical partner. They have depth and reach out to communities.”

Universities are already becoming involved in such projects in the region but the AsiaEngage platform will help support a more sustained involvement and the development of a model for universities to engage in the community that can be replicated in other countries.

“In the field of community engagement there is a great deal of difference in the level of universities; some are teaching universities, some are big research universities. But as long as they show an interest in community engagement, we will bring them on board to help them with building capacity to engage with communities,” Gill said.

Nantana Gajaseni, Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network, said: “Universities in this region claim they are part of the community. Many of them do provide services to the community but not in a systematic way.

“AsiaEngage will provide a clear avenue to connect them, to show them how to do it, get together the results and [assess] the impact on the community.”

Janice Reid, Vice-Chair of the international Talloires Network set up to promote universities civic engagement, said the launch of AsiaEngage was “an important stride forward in the international higher education civic engagement movement.”

“We believe that higher education institutions exist to serve and strengthen the societies of which they are part.”

AsiaEngage members automatically become members of the Talloires Network, which has grown to 240 institutions in 65 countries.

The ASEAN countries are: Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.

The tussle between rankings and community engagement

Delegates want international rankings to take account of the diverse missions of public universities and called for a more appropriate rankings system for the ASEAN region

Universities that want to engage in regional development, community outreach or even philanthropic support say they first have to overcome the ‘tyranny’ of international university rankings, which mainly value research output and give little credit for helping to transform society, including reducing poverty and inequity.

Although the issue of rankings was not on the official agenda of the conference, university leaders and academics said the advent of rankings was damaging their wider public purpose and civic engagement.

“The argument is that, unless a particular activity involves intellectual work, it cannot be among the core business of universities,” said Jose M Cruz, Vice-President of Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines.

“The counter argument is that unless universities engage society directly, they run the risk of forgetting for whom they exist and of mistaking the generation of knowledge for their ultimate mandate, which is in fact the transformation of society.”

According to Cruz, some of humanity’s greatest advances are not in its discoveries – but, for example, in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequity.

Prospero de Vera

Vice-President of the University of the Philippines



A number of delegates called for the ASEAN region to have its own system of rankings.

Several university representatives from the ASEAN region discussed how rankings could be influenced in future to take account of the more diverse missions of public universities.

Some representatives of universities in Asia with strong commitments to regional development and community engagement have been “flying to Europe” to try to convince private organisations that publish international rankings, and the European Union, which has also developed an international university rankings system, to revisit

their criteria to better reflect this kind of work. Prospero de Vera, Vice-President of the University of the Philippines, said his institution was under tremendous pressure from government to improve its international rank, although “as a national university we have a very clear mandate in public service. We do far more than what the rankings ask.”

For example, the university hospital treats millions of poor indigenous people for free each year. “But community engagement is not a factor at all in the assessment of universities internationally.”

He added that it was important for people to understand that the core functions of a university were more than just research.

Jaana Puukka, an analyst in the OECD’s Education Directorate, said that “to get into the top 100 is an immense task and requires huge investments”, and it was far from evident that the necessary level of public funding would be forthcoming in many developing countries in the region.

But regional dynamism, assisted

‘We have a clear mandate for public service and do far more than the rankings ask’

How to be a world-cla

by local universities, could also help them improve rankings. “It is in the interests of universities to ensure their locations are booming so that they can attract better quality staff”, which in turn could improve rankings. “Not every institution can be world-class according to the narrow rankings criteria but they can be best in their region,” she said.

This was echoed by Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin, Vice-Chancellor of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), which hosted the 7-9 May conference and is the secretariat of AsiaEngage, a new regional platform for university-community-industry engagement in the ASEAN region.

“To pour money into having world-class universities would be short-sighted,” she said.

UKM sets its own targets for academic staff. Overall, 50% of academic time should be spent on research, 30% on teaching and 20% on community outreach, although research staff can spend up to 70% of their time on research as long as the overall faculty targets are met.

“If you really want to be a research university you must make sure publications and citations targets are met,” Sharifah said. These are a major component of international rankings.

However, she added: “When you do community engagement, research must be at the back of your mind: communicating the impacts and outcomes of your research, so that it can be applied to other communities.”

“It’s up to us to tell them [rankings organisations] how you bring these things like community into the rankings. We do this work, we are recognised for it, but maybe we need to see how we bring this to global prominence.”

For example, international community projects could count as a rankings indicator under the internationalisation criteria, if submitted in the right way, she said.

Within the ASEAN University Network, work is already in progress to build a system to measure the impact of community engagement in universities, said Nantana Gajaseni, the network’s Executive Director.

AsiaEngage was launched with a secretariat at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia. UKM Vice-Chancellor **Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin** describes what it means to be part of the network

The AsiaEngage network was launched this month with a secretariat at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, or UKM. *University World News* spoke to Vice-Chancellor Sharifah Hapsah Syed Hasan Shahabudin on what it means to be part of the network and how UKM incorporates community engagement without jeopardising its aspirations of becoming a world-class university.

UWN What does it mean for your institution to be part of the regional structure? What changes will you have to make institutionally?

Sharifah When I first came in as Vice-Chancellor it was about transforming UKM and we had so much to do internally. But we also know that internationalisation is important so we have a plan to have a presence and to be recognised abroad.

UWN How do you actually do this?

Sharifah AsiaEngage is one way. Community engagement is one of our strengths at UKM and we are confident of leading on it regionally or even internationally. So having the secretariat here means we can lead, be part of the region, ASEAN [Association of South East Asian Nations] and Asia.

UWN AsiaEngage is part of the Talloires Network of community engaged institutions, but how will it be different and how will it reflect the situation in ASEAN?

Sharifah We’ve always said the Asian way is different. The Arab network Ma’an has a very strong

Arab Spring focus. Unlike the Arab world, Asia has had benevolent dictators.

Our leaders were elected, but they were elected again and again, and they used the opportunity to do something for the country.

I don’t think the Arab dictators did that. So when the Arab Spring came along I was not surprised. They really needed to be overthrown, some of them. But in Asia, our leaders went off gracefully or they lost in elections. In the meantime they did their responsibility to the people. That’s the Asian way.

However, in the Asian region there is a lot of poverty and marginalisation of groups of people. There are rich countries in Asia, but even in the rich countries there are poor people. And there are countries with lots of resources but coming up, like the Communist states. So we do have a mission.

In ASEAN we are talking about the ASEAN community by 2015. If we look at the three pillars that ASEAN is trying to put in place – socio-cultural community, economic community and political-security community – AsiaEngage can leverage on what ASEAN is trying to do.

If we in the region work on community engagement in terms of political security, in terms of economic development and in terms of socio-cultural issues, I think we should be alright with this sort of vision.

UWN Why is it important to have a Deputy Vice-Chancellor for community engagement?

Sharifah When I was previously Deputy Director in the ministry [of education], Department of Higher

ss, community-engaged university



Education, we were already talking about university-industry partnerships and how we can operationalise this idea.

In the ministry we had an idea that one of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors at public universities should take on this responsibility. So we wrote a paper for the approval of cabinet, and by the time it was approved, I was already at this university as Vice-Chancellor, so I could implement it here.

Once I had a Deputy Vice-Chancellor of Industry and Community Partnerships established, I had to make sure it trickled down to the faculties and institutes. Now they have their own sections on industry and community partnerships. You have to reinforce anything you are going to do with proper structures. And with that comes funding – these people are paid allowances to do community work.

UWN But you also broke ground in other ways with this appointment, as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor is not from an ethnic Malay background, and is also a woman...

Sharifah It is important to tell you a little bit about Malaysia. In our public universities, the leadership appears to be held by people from the Malay race. I don't think it's to do with race, it's just that a lot of us

are in public universities, so you rise to the professorial level and in administration and so on, and then you are selected and appointed as Vice-Chancellor.

But we are also aware that we need to appear to be very multiracial. So when we made this proposal we also thought it's a good idea to make sure it is not a Malay. I am race-blind. It just so happened in UKM we had a good candidate. I knew Professor Saran [Kaur Gill] was very capable so I recommended her for the position. It's a kind of affirmative action, but it was also a candidate with good background.

UWN Going back to setting up the relevant structures for community and industry engagement, how do you marry that with the research culture in the university?

Sharifah It has to be a package. You have the Deputy Vice-Chancellor

'Community engagement is one of our strengths and we are confident of leading on it regionally or even internationally'

INTERVIEW

[for Industry and Community Partnerships]. Then you have the Heads of Industry–Community Partnerships in the faculties, so there is a structure. The governance must include policies, procedures, plans, goals and so on. You have to develop all this.

How do you integrate this with the other two missions that we have: research and teaching? Because we are a research university we look at publications. But it does not mean only scientific publications. As long as you do research, even if it's in the community area, you can do research and publish.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor gets some funding from the research grant we have as a research university, for her to encourage people in the units to submit proposals on research that is community oriented.

In addition, we ask her to secure funding from elsewhere. So she works with industry and so on. So some of it will be scientific research, as with Sime Darby, which is very industry focused. But she can also work with NGOs and other funding agencies, to work on community projects. Research is important for us. I don't think you should only be doing community service. As a university we should be providing models of service rather than becoming a service organisation. People should come and see how we do it and then they should replicate.

We should be the place to generate ideas, to show how, and that is done through research. I don't see how, by doing this, you deprive people of becoming good researchers or deprive people of contributing to the research university.

UWN As a research university, how do you balance this with the demands of research?

Sharifah In our evaluations and staff appraisal, we set minimum targets. We say as a research university 50% [of academics' time] must be for research, 30% must be teaching, and 20% must be service.

Research institutes will have a lot of research, so they do 70% research and maybe reduce their service and teaching. That will be compensated by faculties that have more teaching.



Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia campus

But at the end of the day, they must together meet the university's target.

I don't think other universities do this but this is how we do it. We want people to understand that if I am doing more research, then my colleague will have to do more teaching. So you have to compensate.

The faculties have to monitor and make sure individual members achieve their targets. But it's up to them to juggle it around. For those doing research we expect more publications compared to those doing teaching, who might have the minimum requirements for publication. But everyone understands it's their responsibility to meet their targets.

UWN How does this fit in with your aspirations to rise in international rankings?

Sharifah You must know what the indicators are. The rankings we are looking at are QS and *THE [Times Higher Education]*. If you are a research university you must understand that publications, citations, are important in the scientific world so we make sure that those targets are met. And we set

indicators. If the amount of time you're spending on research is 50%, how many publications would that be? And that changes from year to year, because when we start we're going to start low. Then as we progress, the targets become higher for publications.

And we are meeting them. We can see our graph going up. When this game of rankings started we were hardly above the nought-point-whatever line. But now we have gone higher.

In fact in South East Asia, Malaysia has overtaken Singapore in the rate of change. Malaysia has made tremendous strides in the publications and citations area. And the graph is still going up.

UWN And community service does not detract from that?

Sharifah No, it doesn't. And I believe that when you do community engagement, research must be at the back of your mind – you must do it in a scientific way.

Apart from the impact on that community you are working with, you must see it as a way of communicating, from your research, the results and the outcomes, so that it can be applied to other communities.

If you are talking about community engagement without having research in mind, I think you are on the wrong track. That's why we say integration is very important. But it's not only about research; it's also about teaching. You must use community engagement for your students to learn.

The community is the classroom – a very important classroom.

'Integration is very important. But it is not only about research, it's also about teaching. The community is a very important classroom'

Benefits of sharing knowledge

Universities must not only extend wisdom to the community but also learn from those communities, in what **Rajesh Tandon** calls the 'knowledge democracy'

In an interlinked world, it is as important to create a 'knowledge society' – where the benefits of knowledge are shared for the good of society – as it is to create a knowledge economy, said Rajesh Tandon, an international expert on participatory research and development.

"The future of humanity requires knowledge to be created and mobilised at an unprecedented scale, and higher education institutions are expected to create and contribute to this knowledge," said Tandon, Chair of the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research.

Ignoring communities and only focusing on the high-tech 'knowledge economy' may not be sustainable in an era of global economic crisis and growing social inequality, added Tandon, who is also joint holder of a new UNESCO chair on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education.

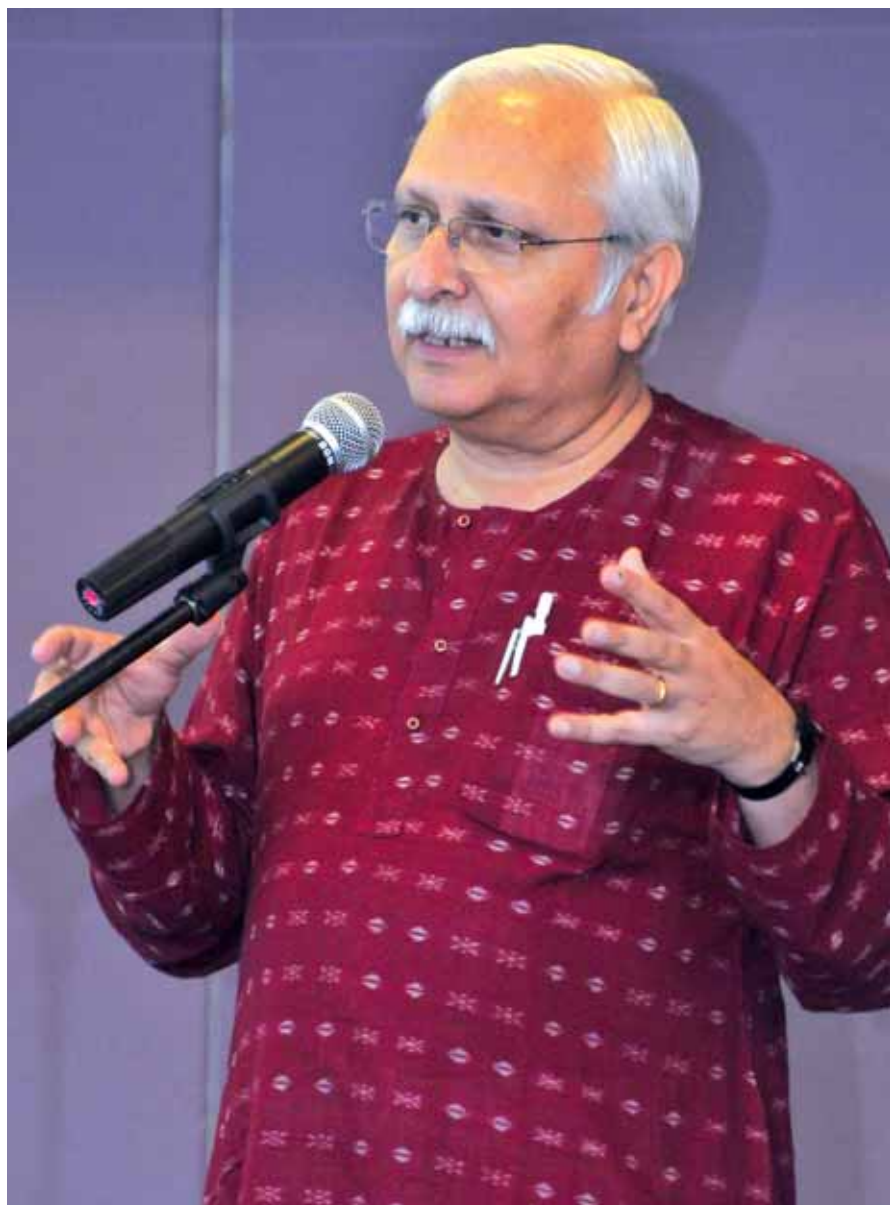
Learn from communities

He said that in an interconnected world, universities not only needed to reach out to communities to resolve intractable problems – often with knowledge that already exists but that has been pushed aside or marginalised by a high-technology approach – but also to learn from communities.

'Holistic' universities that can reach out to communities can help to tackle such problems.

"We have to take into account that knowledge is being produced outside these institutions as well," Tandon said.

Rajesh Tandon
Co-Chair of UNESCO Chair on Community-based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education



"To a large extent the price we pay [for] ecological imbalance, the problems of social and economic inequality, the problems of disconnect in the way our institutions function, are rooted in a narrow understanding and practice of knowledge.

"Therefore, the challenge of universities and higher education institutions engaging in the community... is not merely

outreach to the community, it is not merely extending the wisdom that resides in universities to those in the community who never made it to university, but it is also a challenge of learning from those communities," said Tandon.

He has dubbed this two-way exchange 'knowledge democracy'.

Tandon said universities needed to rethink their role in the context of many countries – especially developed and emerging nations – pushing to strengthen their knowledge economies based on higher education, research and innovation, and with the change of knowledge as something of intrinsic value to its use as a 'private good' for personal gain and profits.

Many universities were not designed for the knowledge economy and not all could produce world-class knowledge and research. Instead the solutions may be around them – if only they

'Ignoring communities and only focusing on the high-tech 'knowledge economy' may not be sustainable in an era of global economic crisis'

would engage with their communities in an equal and respectful way.

Knowledge society

“The knowledge economy may drive the global economy but ‘knowledge society’ is needed for sustainable cohabitation. Universities and other institutions must therefore find ways of working together with communities, industry, civil society, media and others.”

Tandon noted that the global economy is fragile.

“We are living in a world where not only economies and technologies are interconnected but, in a somewhat unpredictable way, our futures are also interconnected.

“A small event in one part of the world triggers a chain reaction somewhere else.”

Demonstrating this interconnectedness, he pointed out that the Libyan crisis some months before had resulted in an oil price increase and consequently food riots in Indonesia.

The tsunami in Japan last year “triggered its own tsunami” around the world, as citizens became uncertain about the future of nuclear technology. Fisherfolk in southern India – whose protests against the building of a nuclear plant had previously been ignored – suddenly gained enormous public support.

Recessionary tendencies in Europe and North America are reducing economic growth in economies like China and several thousand Chinese who had migrated to cities are returning to rural areas with adjustment challenges.

Therefore, said Tandon, rather than pouring funds only into high technology it may make sense to rediscover and reorganise knowledge that already exists.

Knowledge is being created and recreated in a vast range of sites outside higher education institutions, but universities can play a role in bringing it all together. “The time has come to look at the knowledge role of higher education in a more integrated fashion,” he said.

Course credits for volunteer work

Earning course credits for volunteering acts as an incentive and can help ensure community work continues beyond a few weeks

Students in some Asian countries – such as Japan, Indonesia, Malaysia and South Korea – now earn credit hours for voluntary work, an incentive that builds volunteering into the university assessment system and promotes community work as an integral part of higher education.

Delegates at the AsiaEngage and regional launch conference at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) heard how volunteering work still goes largely unrecognised, partly because voluntary organisations have few direct links with universities – although informal connections run deep.

But this could be changing as universities and non-governmental organisations, some for student volunteering, collaborate in the AsiaEngage umbrella network of regional bodies that promote social and community engagement by

ASEAN and Asian universities.

The Japan-based Network for Voluntary Development in Asia, or NVDA, is a networking NGO promoting international voluntary service in the Asia and Pacific regions.

NVDA President Dr Kaizawa Shinichiro, who teaches at Kokushikan University in Tokyo, described how student voluntary work is progressing under a specially created course subject, ‘international volunteering’.

International volunteering

Shinichiro has organised special projects for Japanese students in 100 countries, mostly during university breaks.

“After students have completed their volunteering stint, they submit a report to me,” he said. “Input from the host country is important too.” Participating students gain credits based on their reports and host nation feedback, noted Shinichiro.

NVDA also works with the Hong Kong Institute of Education to place its student volunteers in several Asian countries including Mongolia, Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Japan and Nepal.

Shinichiro and NVDA youth volunteers were in Fukushima, Japan, to help rehabilitate an area devastated by the 2011 tsunami. They cleaned up a forest area and

Shaharuddin Mohammed Ismail

Fellow of Forestry and Natural Resources, UKM Institute for Environment and Development (LESTARI)





undergraduate courses. While students volunteer nationally at present, Shaharuddin said it could be extended. “We can help neighbouring countries in our region through AsiaEngage.”

“That way they can acquire the skills and become change makers. That will have a much greater impact in the future.” These include having an influence on governments both nationally and internationally, he said.

Three-way partnerships

Some Asian universities have set up three-way partnerships with both NGOs and industry.

Francesco Volpini, Director of the Paris-based Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service, or CCIVS, which runs an international volunteer programme, told how South Korean engineering giant Hyundai Corporation supports voluntary work by thousands of university students in countries such as India, China and Brazil, where the company manufactures.

South Korean medical students, for example, went to Chennai in India to run health checks on villagers and teach local people how to do this for themselves.

While some South Korean universities give credits for voluntary service, there is no comprehensive system for reporting what is learned, Volpini noted.

He felt that recognition of learning through community service could be achieved by integrating such activities into the curriculum, although this would not necessarily reflect the entire learning experience.

“We would like to see the education value recognised, not just as part of their study programme, [but also] including soft skills that they acquire and that are not taught in the university environment,” he urged.

These softer skills include communication, intercultural learning, self-confidence, initiative, leadership and teamwork.

CCIVS, which operates under the aegis of UNESCO and is the first NGO member of AsiaEngage, wants to work closely with universities in Asia to bring this about.

planted trees. Fukushima saw minimal participation by university students as volunteers, though, mainly because it did not need much external help, Shinichiro said.

Indonesian students volunteer nationally. “They are not only rewarded with credits [from their own universities] but sometimes their voluntary work is also financed by NVDA’s Indonesian team,” Shinichiro said.

Indeed, 85% of students from Japan volunteering for 3,000 projects in 100 countries, and 70% of students from other countries, have so far volunteered for NVDA community projects.

Forestry credits

Undergraduate and graduate students at UKM will soon receive course credits for volunteering in campus forestry projects in partnership with the Malaysian Nature Society. They are lucky to be on the UKM campus, which is unique in that it includes a virgin tropical forest on the land.

“We introduce fundamental skills to student volunteers about the vegetation so that they can identify a few trees and flowering plants,” said Shaharuddin Mohammed Ismail, a Fellow of Forestry and Natural Resources at

Eco-volunteers at UKM

UKM’s Institute for Environment and Development. “These are things that seem very simple and elementary but many undergraduates are unaware of them and how the forest plays an important role in biodiversity and climate change.” The students become facilitators for members of the public who want to explore the rainforest, and for school children to learn to value the natural resource.

Shaharuddin, who oversees some 200 eco-volunteers under the university’s Rainforest Discovery Programme, believes it is important that forestry projects are continuous rather than *ad hoc*, and course credits will enable students to continue volunteering over the entire four years of their

‘Students can acquire the skills and become change makers. That will have a much greater impact in the future’

Universities can be vital for local economic development

In their pursuit of world-class status, universities often neglect their role as a regional hub for research and innovation that could serve the industries and businesses around them, says OECD analyst **Jaana Puukka**

Many large universities conduct research and teaching as if they are isolated from the society and region around them. But even the desire to become world-class can be achieved by better serving their locality.

Jaana Puukka, an analyst for the OECD, said that by better serving their local area, universities can “tackle globalisation at a local level.”

“Governments everywhere are trying to mobilise education to drive their social and economic development,” said Puukka, an expert on regional development in the OECD’s Programme on International Management in Higher Education. But, she added: “This is not functioning very well. In some countries and cities they stay in their ivory towers.”

Particularly in Asia, where many countries are upgrading research universities in a drive for world-class status, institutions neglect their important role as a regional hub for research and innovation that would better serve the industries and businesses around them and fuel economic development. Universities can be both world-class and a regional

hub. “You can use the region as a laboratory,” Puukka said. For example, world-class research can be done on climate issues by tapping into local patterns and their effects on the population.

More collaboration needed

Even at regional level, universities need to collaborate more to tackle global problems.

“International, world-class research is collaborative but there is a lack of understanding that you need to tackle these issues at a local level to make changes. It is quite noticeable that in the big catastrophes, local institutions go their own way,” she said.

Although institutions are reaching for research excellence, the OECD has found in a series of studies on “Higher Education in Regional and City Development” that universities need to build on existing strengths and competitive advantages in their region. “Not every institution can be world-class according to the narrow criteria [of international university rankings] but they can be best in the region,” Puukka said during the conference.

Not another Silicon Valley

There are a lot of efforts to build ‘Silicon Valleys’ around the world, with huge investment in science



Dr Zeeda Fatimah Mohamad
Head of the Environmental Secretariat University of Malaya and
Dr Khadijah Alavi
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities UKM

and technology research.

“But even in Silicon Valley, what is the percentage of the population that have jobs in high tech? In California it is only 12%. In the US it is 6% overall. In Israel, that high-tech wonder, it is just 5%. The rest is public sector or low tech,” she pointed out.

And often it is not in universities where research and development is happening; it is in the region itself.

ICT, nanotechnology and biotechnology are facilitating industry.

“Many regional governments want to focus on that and it also becomes the university focus.” Often if a critical research mass is reached, this can drive the regional economy.

However, Puukka said, patents based on university research are usually commercialised elsewhere, so innovation “does not feed into the local economy – it goes outside the region.”

Penang state example

She cited the example of Penang state in Malaysia, the subject of a 2011 OECD study in the “Higher Education in Regional and

‘Not every institution can be world class according to the narrow rankings criteria but they can be best in the region’



Keeping up enthusiasm for community projects

Delegates shared experiences on how to reward and motivate those involved in community projects to ensure they continue beyond the initial phase

Sustaining university-community-industry initiatives beyond the first flush of enthusiasm is a core challenge for all partners involved, according to delegates.

Related issues of passing on know-how, gaining and keeping community support, and funding were common sustainability themes.

Students and researchers can learn from others' experience through sharing, said Nat Vorayos, Associate Professor in the Department of Mechanical Engineering at Chiang Mai University in Thailand, who felt this was lacking in some Asian universities.

"There are many good examples of community engagement, and they should be documented, published and disseminated," he urged.

"A network should be created and information along with good examples of implementation should be communicated." He hoped AsiaEngage itself would be able to do that.

AsiaEngage is a platform by means of which a group of Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) universities, regional networks and programmes share expertise, knowledge and experience in community engagement. The aim is to replicate the best models and practices across the region. Vorayos recommended

that communities be involved in university research from the outset. "Community engagement is about cooperation between scholars and communities."

Dr Sukkid Yasothornsrikul, Vice-President for Research and External Relations at Naresuan University in Phitsanulok, Thailand, said his institution achieves that by involving the community at all levels of management.

"There are community representations on our university council, management board and committees. Integration of teaching, research and community service is encouraged and implemented in many subjects. We even have a journal to publish work done in communities."

Vorayos and Yasothornsrikul said a reward system recognising achievement in community projects would help sustainability.

Yasothornsrikul cited as a model a project where Naresuan students designed disability-friendly structures for a village with many physically impaired inhabitants.

"As part of their coursework they [the students] had to use their knowledge and apply it in unconventional situations. The community formed a group, helped to gather materials, and offered time and labour."

On finance, Professor María Nieves Tapia, Director of the Latin American Centre for Service-learning in Buenos Aires, Argentina, a member of the Talloires Network, said her experience was that a very good project that was valued by a community would find funding easy – or easier – to find.

"Communities are a stakeholder too, so they help in getting funding and support."

City Development" series.

Penang is "threatened and pushed in two directions" to compete against both high-income Asian countries with more research and development investment and low-cost countries that can manufacture cheaply. It also suffers from a skills gap and a brain drain to Singapore."

"It has to move up the value chain," said Puukka, citing the OECD's recommendations from the study. The region needs to invest in human capital and skills, particularly in underserved populations.

Rather than pouring money into science and technology research, which in some cases is favouring postgraduate education to the detriment of undergraduate education needed to upgrade the region's skills, universities "need to ensure study programmes are aligned to the needs of the region" and respond more to key challenges and regional assets.

This could include the social sciences, the arts and teaching education, some of which would help to reverse the brain drain out of Penang state.

University's key role during a major disaster

CASE STUDY

Prospero de Vera describes how the University of the Philippines coordinated the disaster response and continues to play a role in disaster preparedness in the country

University researchers and scientists are increasingly playing a role in disaster research, analysis and data collection. But the University of the Philippines has gone much further, taking on a central role in planning and response in Asia's most disaster-prone country.

The Philippines island populations are on the frontline of typhoons, floods, mudslides, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions and other natural disasters. While some universities are content to provide solid data on disaster events, others such as the University of the Philippines have set up a command centre to coordinate response efforts.

University of the Philippines Vice-President for Public Affairs Prospero de Vera described how, just days after the impact of typhoon Sendong in December 2011, he was charged with coordinating just such a response.

As the typhoon hit the eastern island of Mindanao on 15 December, rainfall increased from 20 millimetres to 200 millimetres an hour in a part of the Philippines that had not previously encountered typhoons, pouring water into the river system.

"What is normally a 50 metre-wide river became a one kilometre-wide river. Water was cascading down with tremendous force, wiping out the areas on both sides, causing utter destruction," de Vera



University of the Philippines' doctors with survivors of typhoon Sendong

said, adding that in the urban areas of Iligan and Cagayan de Oro City, "whole communities were obliterated." More than 1,000 lives were lost and 700,000 people were affected by the cascades. Yet because typhoons are normally measured in terms of wind speeds, rather than water volumes, existing typhoon data were of little use. A local situation analysis had to be done swiftly by experts from the bottom up, he said.

Mobilising university expertise

"By 18 December reports started trickling in of the devastation. I was asked to put together a task force. The University of the Philippines is

the only public university with a public service mandate. We have campuses across the whole country so we could mobilise experts on other campuses," de Vera said.

This included calling on some of the top forensic experts from the campus in Manila and geophysicists from other campuses.

From the command centre situated at Mindanao State University's Iligan Institute of Technology, four university-led teams were mobilised – a health team for immediate medical care; a water and sanitation team to help assess water evacuation centres; a forensic team with university experts training local health officials to identify victims' bodies; and a geohazard team to gather data from devastated areas and assist in post-disaster reconstruction and planning such as resettlement or permanent relocation.

"Universities have a lot of expertise and sophisticated scientific equipment that even government agencies do not have. For example, our medical faculty was able to train people to recover

'Water was cascading down with tremendous force, wiping out the areas on both sides, causing utter destruction'

bodies swiftly so that DNA samples could be taken from soft tissue for identification.”

“These DNA samples could be tested in university laboratories. Without swift recovery, human tissue decomposes in water, and DNA samples then have to be taken from bones, which is much more difficult to analyse and increases the cost tenfold,” he said.

Disaster preparedness

In the aftermath, the university drew up a major report on the disaster and also held regular disaster management summits, most recently in April 2012. These included the politicians who spearheaded relief efforts and national agencies.

When disaster strikes, it is not just academic staff and students who are mobilised but also the university’s alumni in all walks of life. The university made good use of having a direct line to alumni politicians, to cut through bureaucracy during a severe emergency.

De Vera recommends that universities keep their alumni databases up to date, so that they can be tapped immediately during disasters, particularly those in national and local positions and professional groups like doctors and civil society organisations. “You need people at the highest level to intervene and make decisions.”

No one has time during a catastrophe to deal with swathes of bureaucracy. “So many organisations have to be prepared and among them are the national public universities, which have a mandate to serve their communities. If disaster still strikes you have to be able to get involved,” de Vera said.

“What we found was that universities’ civic engagement has the most impact if it is well targeted, focused, strategic and includes services that have not been done by other institutions so that we do not duplicate.”

For example, the university did not get involved in food and medicine donation because this was already being done by others, particularly non-governmental organisations. But it could play a coordinating role, based on both



Riverbank of Mandulog after the floods, showing what remained of the houses that stood there

excellent local knowledge and an analytical overview of the situation.

“What we did was point them to other groups that could help them bring donations to the affected areas.”

De Vera believes universities are more effective when bringing in expertise rather than manpower (such as student volunteers).

“With manpower, the logistical requirements are tremendous. But if you bring in the experts and work with alumni on the ground and work with local government, the cost is managed and the university involvement can be short but fruitful.

“We could put together an assessment in a very short time – just a few days – because of the experts we brought in,” he said.

Some of that information was collated by professionals on the ground. Alumni are already linked up via social media, which can be vital for providing fast, accurate information on affected areas in real time, through SMS text messaging and Facebook, communicating with alumni,

partner NGOs and the media.

Disseminating information in real time helps dispel rumours and fast-tracks assistance to affected communities, de Vera said.

It was the university that uploaded photographs of the affected areas onto the worldwide web, because university experts knew how to explain and analyse them. Before-and-after pictures and video shown on national television “all came from us”, he said.

Post-disaster work continues

Months after the destruction, the task of the university has not ended.

Post-disaster, it is part of a US\$1.5 million project funded by the UN and Australian development agency AusAid to assist Iligan and Cagayan de Oro cities to revise their land use maps by inputting geohazard data collected by the university such as typhoon maps and earthquake and tsunami data, so that local governments can be better prepared.

And in April 2012 the university’s governing body created a public service office at the institution to coordinate the activities of the various campuses and facilitate a swift response in future.

According to the UN Environment Programme, the Philippines is the world’s third most disaster-afflicted after two Pacific island states, and the most prone in Asia. “We treat disaster preparedness and disaster management equally. You can do preparedness but there are times in a country so prone to natural disaster, when you just cannot avoid disasters,” de Vera said.

‘No one has time during a catastrophe to deal with swathes of bureaucracy. So many organisations have to be prepared, among them are the national public universities’

Scaling up industry links in the ASEAN region

CASE STUDY

The university provides the research on zero emissions and the company provides the funds, in a partnership that can serve as a model for the region



University partnerships with industry can be scaled up across national boundaries in a wider region to benefit communities, the conference heard. Corporations “do not seem to serve society at large”, Dr Wan Mohd Zahid Wan Noordin conceded.

“But there is a way for the two to work together to fulfil the corporate social responsibility objective,” said Wan Zahid, a Member of the Governing Council of the Sime Darby Foundation, the philanthropic arm of the Sime Darby Group – a major, government-linked corporation focused mainly on the palm oil business.

“Universities are also enthusiastic to reach out to communities,” he said, citing his foundation and UKM as an example of a fruitful university-industry partnership.

Innovative technology

They are working together on innovative palm oil milling technology whose goal is zero emission of greenhouse gases and, ultimately, more sustainable practices in the industry.

“Palm oil is under attack for causing environmental damage,” Dr Wan said. “What we need is some research which will help us respond to this criticism.” It would also help bring the palm oil sector more in line with government policies and world concerns, he said.

In this respect, UKM provides research capacity for this sector. The

foundation is providing MYR15 million (US\$4.91 million) funding in line with its preferred policy of backing studies based around the parent company’s core business strands. Although companies responsible to shareholders were driven by profit motives, some aspects of industry required a great deal of research, and universities have an army of researchers to do that, Wan Zahid noted.

The Sime Darby Group commits at least 3% of its profits to the foundation’s corporate social responsibility initiatives and has already pledged 99.2 million Malaysian ringgit (US\$31.5 million) this year, he said.

Going international

The Zero Waste Technology project for palm oil milling has transcended regional boundaries by working in collaboration with a scientist from the University of Wageningen in the Netherlands.

Dr Wan Mohd Zahid Noordin
Member of the Governing Council of the Sime Darby Foundation

The project was “a wonderful example of a respectful and mutually beneficial university-industry partnership, said Professor Saran Kaur Gill, UKM’s Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Industry and Community Partnerships and Executive Director of AsiaEngage.

“Within AsiaEngage, groups share expertise, knowledge and experience in community engagement across the ASEAN region and in Asia in general.” AsiaEngage is driven by UKM through its Office of Industry and Community Partnerships and is supported by Malaysia’s Ministry of Higher Education.

“AsiaEngage aspires to use the same working model [as Sime Darby and UKM], but with industry players who have regional presence,” said Gill.

“We want to jointly develop a model that can be replicated in the region.”

A global computer firm with a strong regional presence might be one example, she suggested. “They have the capacity to provide computers to regional communities but they can also forge a more meaningful and productive relationship with these communities. And I believe that this can stretch out to many areas.

“Given that they have a regional presence, they can then also work with different universities to jointly develop a workable public-private partnership model.”

‘The Sime Darby Group commits at least 3% of its profits to the foundation’s corporate social responsibility initiative’

Groundbreaking energy and transport projects

CASE STUDIES

Researchers, academics and students are collaborating with industry on renewable energy projects in Malaysia and electric vehicles in the Philippines

Asian universities are engaged in groundbreaking projects to counter waste, boost the use of alternative fuels and reduce emission of greenhouse gases.

Researchers at Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia (UTHM) and Azhar Food Industries – both in the Malaysian state of Johor – have collaborated to install a mini biodiesel plant in the latter’s factory.

Azhar Food Industries makes potato chips and crisps for the local market. The company previously had problems disposing of excess cooking oil, waste material that can be damaging if released into the environment.

Professor Dr Sulaiman Bin Haji Hassan, Dean of the Faculty of Mechanical and Manufacturing Engineering at UTHM, said the project would contribute to the efficient use of a sustainable, renewable energy source in line with Malaysia’s development policy of promoting renewable energy as an alternative to traditional fuels.

“Biodiesel is an environmentally friendly, alternative fuel prepared from domestic resources such as palm oil that can be used in normal diesel engine cars and buses without any engine modification,” he explained.

“It can be used either in the pure form (B100) or as blends in conventional diesel engines, and it



is biodegradable. Johor, being a state abundant with palm oil plantations, is the perfect place for us to test and manufacture this kind of energy,” Sulaiman explained.

The mini biodiesel plant at Azhar’s factory is already producing fuel that can run the company’s truck fleet, which is used for daily transportation of food products.

Meanwhile, De La Salle University – Dasmariñas in the Philippines is setting its own carbon footprint in order through using electric vehicles.

eJeepneys, supplied by national manufacturer PhUV (Philippine Utility Vehicle) Inc, are used to transport students within its 27-hectare site as part of a drive to achieve a carbon-neutral campus.

Two eJeepneys were purchased by a parent-lecturer body called

Biodiesel eJeepneys transport students within the De La Salle University campus

The Parents’ Organisation of Lasalle Cavite. It owns and operates the vehicles, charging six pesos (US\$0.14) for each passenger, from which one peso is paid to the driver while another peso is channelled into the university scholarship fund.

Each eJeepney runs on a battery that needs charging for eight hours. “At the battery station, an eJeepney goes into a loading bay where the used battery is taken and replaced with a charged one – the entire [changeover] process takes about 10 minutes,” said Dr Carmelyn Cortez-Antig, a lecturer at the university. Replacing a used battery with a fully charged unit costs 220 pesos (about US\$5) and provides for some 115 kilometres of travel, she said. Each eJeepney avoids the discharge of more than 62 kilograms of carbon dioxide exhaust emission per day.

PROFILE

AsiaEngage Executive Director **Saran Kaur Gill** talks about her unique role, responsible for the university's community and industry engagement activities

Never in my wildest dreams did I expect to be a Deputy Vice-Chancellor," said Saran Kaur Gill, who fulfils just that elevated role at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, where she runs industry and community partnerships. She is also Executive Director of the regional university network AsiaEngage, which was launched at the conference.

Gill, a professor in the school of Language Studies and Linguistics at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), started out some 30 years ago as a language instructor, and reflected modestly on her impressive career progression: "If I can do this, then anyone can," she said.

Her role is unique, though. UKM, sited on the outskirts of Kuala Lumpur, is one of five universities in Malaysia with a Deputy Vice-Chancellor in charge of civic engagement. The post was created by the Ministry of Higher Education in September 2007 to link the university with industries and communities.

The wider Asia region is the beneficiary of this and of Gill's strong belief in what she is doing.

Among other high-powered international roles, she has been the originator and driving force behind AsiaEngage.

The aim is to replicate successful models and best practices existing in universities in order to strengthen the civic role of universities across the region.

AsiaEngage's first "Regional Conference on Higher Education-Community-Industry Engagement in Asia: Forging Meaningful Partnerships", held from 7-9 May, was hosted at UKM.

Speaking to *University World News* at the conference, Gill said:



Leading light of university engagement

"As long as a university shows an interest in community engagement, we will bring it on board AsiaEngage so we can help with capacity building and the development of its community engagement initiatives."

Working with industries, challenges academics to come up with original and attractive ideas and proposals, she added. "You have to talk to industries about ideas that will really excite them."

UKM strives to ensure that the

'An opportunity can only be translated into reality if the leader is flexible, adaptable and develops a relationship that encourages knowledge sharing'

knowledge of its academics is applicable to and benefits communities, and is also aligned with the university's overall mission to contribute to nation-building.

Gill talks enthusiastically about case studies, including the Green ROSE programme, a university collaboration with the PINTAR foundation to communicate the impacts of climate change to primary-school children. PINTAR is the philanthropic arm of Khazanah Nasional Berhad, Malaysia's national investment holding arm. She cites leadership as key to successful partnerships. "An opportunity can only be translated into concrete reality if the leader is flexible, adaptable, able to meet tight deadlines, take instruction and develop a relationship that encourages knowledge sharing."

Leaders must also be able to express knowledge with technical accuracy and in ways that have an impact. "It is essential to be sincere and giving, and to be able to develop trust and forge relationships with confidence," Gill added.

"After all, as pointed out by the ministry, my role is to integrate engagement with communities and industries, to enrich and support the research, education and service missions of the university. And it is extremely valuable that we do this by giving with our hearts, hands and minds, back to society."

Speaking of the management challenges, she said: "When you are given a new portfolio at the highest management levels, and the other portfolios have been in existence for over 20 years, you have to work collaboratively." But she defines her role as being a supportive one in which the industry and community engagement side of the university supports and engages education, research and service. However, "walls and territories need to be swept away and multidisciplinary and multiresponsibility initiatives bridges built", she said.

"I had to convince and persuade academics of the value of this field. I had to show them what we could do for them. It was not a situation of 'Do as I say'. Instead it was 'Work with us and we will be able to add value and strength to what we can do for you and society.'"

Bringing partners together to boost community engagement

AsiaEngage unites several higher education networks across Asia and the World, committed to replacing the ivory tower with the engaged university. Working together they will achieve much more than the sum of their parts

Uniting a number of organisations under the AsiaEngage umbrella will increase the effectiveness of community engagement in ASEAN and Asia. It will help bring together youth from around the region and promote mobility, according to Misran Karmain, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN responsible for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community.

In particular AsiaEngage will boost volunteering in the region through the ASEAN Youth Volunteer Programme (AYVP), which is being developed collaboratively by both Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta. It will be a comprehensive programme eventually recognised in Jakarta by all ASEAN member states, he said.

The important thing is that it will “serve a common regional purpose and benefit the peoples of ASEAN”, Misran said after the conference.

“My hope is that all the youth and young citizens recognise the value of community engagement as a means to improve the lives of ASEAN peoples, and that it will serve to connect our youth together towards a common altruistic purpose.”

“AsiaEngage will be able to



Dr Vilma Ann D'Rozario
National Institute of Education Singapore

streamline volunteerism opportunities across the different sectors and will also be able to link volunteers to its network of corporate and industry sectors, non-governmental organisations and civil society organisations.”

Volunteering can be useful and effective in many areas such as environment and health, Misran said. But some sectors could emerge as more important than others in

attracting volunteers. “ASEAN recognises the exigencies of certain sectors that provide for volunteerism including disaster response, rural development and environment.”

According to Nantana Gajasen, Executive Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) – another major partner in the AsiaEngage alliance – the launch conference had ministerial-level support and the backing of university leaders, so that AsiaEngage is assured resources.

But that will not be enough, she said. The organisation “will still have to work very hard to really engage academics, students, industry and community to work effectively together”.

“Without passion and real hands-on action, we will not see the impact of engagement and its benefit for the people.”

Working in tandem

AUN's University Social Responsibility and Sustainability Network aligns with AsiaEngage's emphasis on community engagement and volunteerism to include research, teaching and learning, governance and administration.

The two can work in tandem “for the benefit of people not only in ASEAN but also beyond”, said Nantana.

In particular, AUN will be important in providing a quality assurance mechanism. AUN's academic experts have a great deal of experience in quality assurance at the national and regional levels.

UKM acts as the secretariat for AsiaEngage as well as the Asia-Talioires Network of Industry and Community Engaged Universities (ATNEU). AsiaEngage members have the option of seamlessly becoming a member of the Talioires Network through ATNEU.

“This will expand the membership of both AsiaEngage and Talioires Network and enable

‘Without passion and real hands-on action, we will not see the impact of engagement and its benefit for the people’

both to better support the work of universities in Asia and reinforce the leadership of Asian universities in global forums,” said Janice Reid, Vice-Chair of Talloires Network – named after the French town where it was launched in 2005.

The Talloires Network, including ATNEU, now has some 240 member institutions in 65 countries with a combined enrolment of six million students.

Reid said regional groups would find support internationally through the global network. “We are supporting each other’s efforts because we are indeed natural allies,” she told the conference.

Exchanging regional practice

Maria Nieves Tapia, Director of the Latin American Centre for Service Learning in Buenos Aires, which is part of the Talloires Network, sees Talloires “as a space where everyone can work on issues of importance in their region and also as an international space to exchange the fruits of what we have learned in the regions.”

Important issues of sustainable development – such as the environment, food security, water shortages and the need to create micro-businesses – are practically the same in Asia and Latin America, despite the different cultural contexts, she said.

Reid, who is also Vice-Chancellor of the University of Western Sydney, said at the conference: “Brick by brick, around the world the engaged university is replacing the ivory tower.”

“Universities are mobilising their human and intellectual resources, and increasing numbers of university teachers and their students are directly tackling community problems – combating poverty, improving public health, promoting environmental sustainability and enhancing the quality of life.

“Imagine what the impact will be when a decisive majority of the 100 million university students in the world – a number that will grow to 200 million by the year 2030 – are educated to be not only competent in their chosen profession but also to become effective agents of change.”

Voices of the delegates

Universities are continually being evaluated in a way that does not reflect their community engagement, a source of frustration for many in universities. “We need to take the lead and work on this, in collaboration with NGOs and industry – sectors which would also benefit,” said Prof Saran Kaur Gill. Delegates backed several of the recommendations for future action on this.

Quality assurance

The majority called for a Quality Assurance for Community Engagement mechanism to be set up, with relevant indicators and criteria for productive and sustainable initiatives. This could be achieved through the development of:

- Criteria and indicators for meaningful, productive and sustainable community engagement with multi-sectoral partners
- Instruments and mechanisms to evaluate social impact assessment and return on investment of community engaged projects
- Criteria and indicators for impactful and sustainable volunteerism programmes

Capacity building

There was a call for capacity-building initiatives to enhance community and industry engagement, and contribute to lifelong learning, and acquisition of qualifications for practitioners in

NGOs, industry and higher education. This could be achieved through:

- Educating multi-sectoral practitioners on the scholarship and application of community engagements
- Adapting the Malaysian model – “Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning”
- Developing Community and Industry Research based Masters and PhD degrees
- Workshops in the areas of “Protocol for Multi-sector Interaction for Industry and Community Engagement, Evaluating the Social Impact of Industry and Community Engagement, Industry and Community Engagement Research Methodologies” and others.

Community-engaged champions

There was a call to develop champions as role models to create impact and help this field gain wider recognition. Community-engaged champions and practices will be developed by:

- Identifying experts from the various sectors in the ASEAN and Asian region and creating a database
- Supporting community-engaged champions and role models at all levels of institutions through seed grants, promotional criteria etc.
- Establishing a portal for good practices
- Developing regional awards for social responsibility

‘AsiaEngage is not a distortion of the identity of universities; it can be an occasion for its rediscovery’

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