

Community Engagement Setting Pathway to Synergistic Partnership

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Abstract

In Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), community engagement uses transdisciplinary faculties and individuals to nurture symbiotic relationships shaped by a collaborative mission to benefit target communities. Basically, university-community engagement (UCE) involves the united identification of problems, the joint planning of strategies, and the combined mobilisation of resources to transform the socio-economic well-being of target communities in tandem with the University's APEX (Accelerated Program of Excellence) agenda to transform and empower the "Bottom Billion". UCE synergises community indigenous knowledge and human resource coupled with the expertise, facilities and knowledge database of the University to achieve positive social transformation and economic development of the community. Subsequently, the University obtains a repository of valuable data that will eventually serve as input in the design of more effective transformational collaborative projects/programmes in the future. The aim of this paper is to share the USM's UCE experience in terms of synergistic partnership, altruistic commitment, and project sustainability allied to the tenets of engagement in true sense; successively to enhance the much anticipated ideals of humanity and sustainable tomorrow. These efforts are part of our testimony to ascertain the noble quest of reshaping tertiary education as an Insaniversiti (humaniversity). Our quest is to set the standards for orchestration and mobilisation of USM staff and student corps to collaborate in a synergistic partnership and symphonious harmony to transmute lives, remould society and transform the future for a better tomorrow.

Keywords: *bottom billion, community engagement, humaniversity, transdisciplinary, synergistic partnership*

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[Reaching Out]

“Community engagement refers to the process by which organisations and individuals build ongoing, permanent relationships; and apply a collaborative vision to benefit the community. It encompasses participation from the beginning by identifying issues and mobilising relevant resources and strategies in improving the community towards change. The elements of engagement, partnership, coalitions and sustainability are essential in ensuring the community's social functioning and well-being. Community engagement requires voluntary participation of all parties which results in mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources”.

(Source: Division of Industry and Community, Universiti Sains Malaysia)

Introduction

Establishing closer, effective, meaningful and sustainable linkages and partnerships with the world outside are the goals of USM's humanistic values and the nurturing of sustainability agenda since 2007. Consequently, the inception of the Division of Industry and Community Network (DICN) came into reality and acted as the nerve-centre tasked with the responsibility of planning, coordinating resources and implementing projects that function as harbingers of socio-economic transformation in community as well as catalysts for technological innovation in industry. Headed by a Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Industry and Community Network), this new division is better known by its Malay acronym, BJIM (*Bahagian Jaringan Industri dan Masyarakat*).

Since its formation, BJIM has been active in engaging community in its quest to effect meaningful change by reshaping lives and remoulding technology through collaborative partnerships, and effective and sustainable linkages. These endeavours are in tandem with USM's manifestation of the humaniversity concept – a sobriquet coined to describe the symbiotic marriage of Man's innate humanity with his pursuit of knowledge in the quest to orientate society towards the attainment and actualisation of the higher ideals in life. It is the quest of realising this mission that BJIM has dedicated itself via the harnessing of knowledge, resources and expertise to effect socio-economic transformation through community empowerment, knowledge transfer and expertise sharing.

Philosophy, Vision and Mission

The heart of BJIM's philosophy throbs to the rhythmic pulse of humanitarianism. BJIM USM is fully committed to working towards establishing USM as a university where staff and students dedicate themselves towards service-to and interaction-with community, and work hand in hand in a harmonious symphony to orchestrate projects that meet the needs, expectations and aspirations of communities within and beyond its idyllic surrounds. While the vision of BJIM is dedicated to lead in the sustainability of the economy, social, culture, education, health and environment towards national development and transformation. Thus, the mission of BJIM is to engage closely with industry and community in different areas to achieve a shared vision.

Objectives

Primarily, BJIM is geared towards achieving the following objectives:

- ❖ To act as a one stop referral centre for community engagement processes.
- ❖ To raise and enhance linkages and engagement at state, national, regional and international levels.
- ❖ To embed the culture of volunteerism within the national and international framework.
- ❖ To function as a global secretariat that supports transnational and multinational community engagement initiatives.
- ❖ To collaborate in university-community engagement endeavours with institutions of higher education of the Asia-Pacific region and beyond

Figure 1 illustrates BJIM's organisational structure which was conceptualised after an extensive review, reengineering, and rebranding of BJIM in 2011 which eventuated in a more streamlined and flexible organisational framework capable of strategising, planning, implementing and monitoring community-engagement projects accordingly.

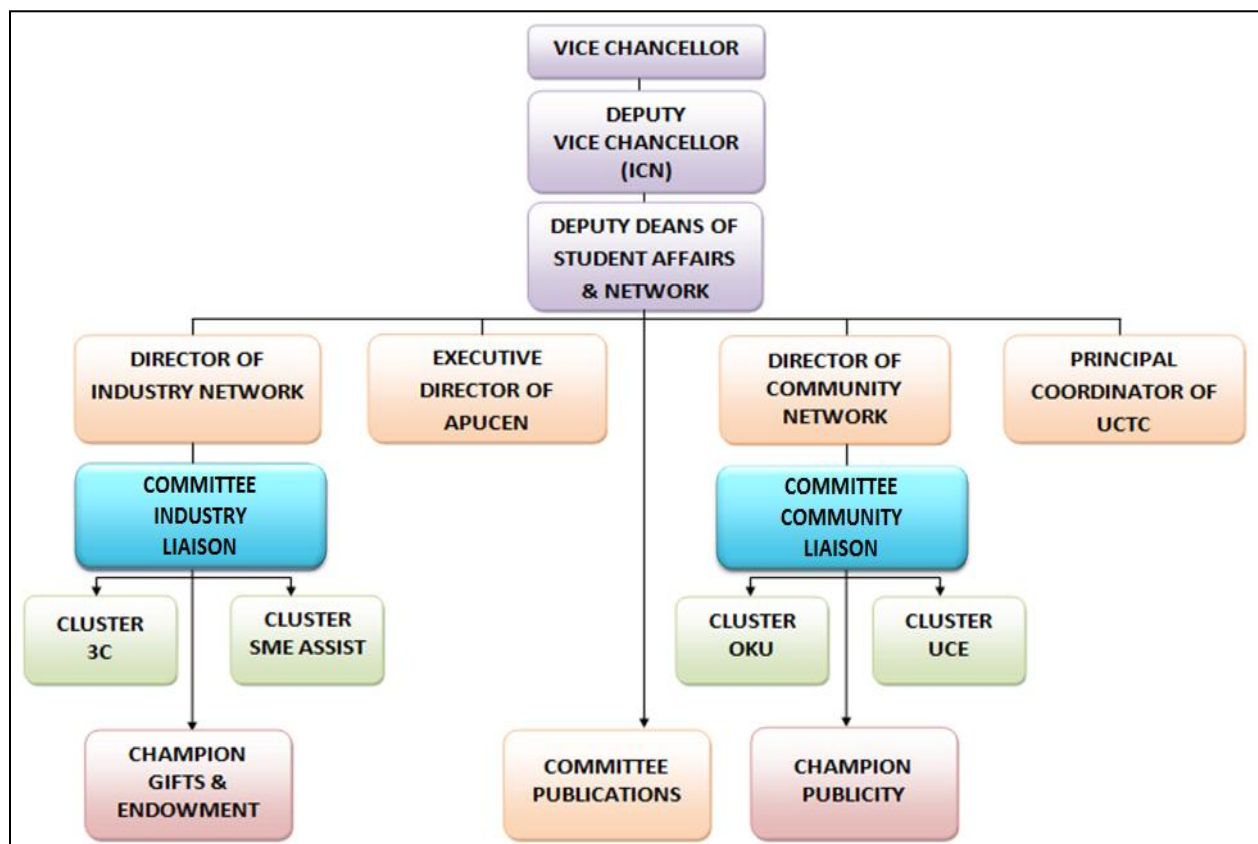


Figure 1: BJIM's organisational structure (clusters, champions and committees)

Initiatives and Achievements

BJIM has established a flexible yet transparent framework through which community engagement (CE) initiatives can be energised via shared resources, expertise and, knowledge. Essentially, this framework involves the division of its core tasks into two platforms that can be leveraged upon to enhance project synergy. Known as “Cluster”, these frameworks operate independently targeting specific groups that are struggling to make headway in society due to economic marginalisation, social discrimination, civil disempowerment or other forms of socially, politically or economically imposed inequalities. In adopting an eclectic fusion of trans-disciplinary and multidisciplinary frames, BJIM is emplaced to effect the desired transformation via the implementation of solutions to a variety of issues derived from a cross-fertilisation of ideas, insights and inputs.

Clusters

BJIM has set up two “clusters” that work towards the various goals of sustainable community development. The two clusters are the:

- (i) OKU (Working with People with Disability or Orang Kurang Upaya) Cluster
- (ii) UCE (University Community Engagement) Cluster

OKU Cluster

This cluster was set up in 2009 as part of BJIM’s empowerment efforts on the equalisation of opportunities for all, including those with special needs. The main aims of this cluster are to provide OKUs with equal opportunities academically and professionally and; to rectify the negative perceptions that society erroneously harbour towards the OKU community.

The objectives of the cluster are and not limited to:

- Transform USM into an OKU-friendly institution and expanding it to the community.
- Designate USM as a hub for Universal Design resources and reference.
- Prepare and disseminate accurate information, reading materials and references regarding OKU.
- Strengthen research on OKU related issues.
- Formulate and implement OKU policy.
- Champion rights of the OKU through cooperation with government agencies, industry, NGOs and organisations.
- Engage OKU participations in events, community activities, and sports, nationally and internationally.
- Enhance OKU talents and their employment.

UCE Cluster

This cluster consists of university staff who are tasked with the responsibility of facilitating initiatives, harnessing resources and organising activities that focus on establishing the university as a responsible, relevant and active partner of the community involved in addressing the needs of the society through engagement processes that valourise humanitarian ideals as enshrined in BJIM’s core philosophy.

The objectives of the cluster are and not limited to:

- Plan and strategise university-community engagement in line with the APEX agenda, MoE's strategic planning, New Economic Model (NEM), and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)
- Organise capacity building programmes on university-community engagement at national level.
- Recognise, promote and embed scholarship in the university-community engagement sphere.
- Disseminate and share experiences of best practices in community engagement.
- Collaborate with local, national and international communities for mutual benefit in CE.
- Collaborate with similar institutions in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond in university-community engagement endeavours.
- Promote and inculcate the culture of volunteerism within the university and community at large.

Apart from the cluster platform, APUCEN has been specifically created to energise community engagement initiatives both locally and abroad.

Asia-Pacific University Community Engagement Network (APUCEN)

APUCEN was formed in 2010 with the aim of embedding the concept of Community Engagement (CE) across political, physical, economic and geographical boundaries. Since its inception, membership of the network has expanded exponentially, particularly from 2011 when the re-strategising and repositioning of APUCEN witnessed a significant increase in applications for membership from both First and Third World nations. As of December 2014, APUCEN has 73 institution members comprising of universities and IHLs from 18 countries with its secretariat based in USM, Malaysia.

University-Community Engagement Conference (UCEC)

UCEC provides a scholarly platform to enhance networking and the sharing of experiences among educators, communities as well as social development practitioners on the best practices of university-community engagement activities. UCEC is designed to provide a framework through which the mechanics of community engagement which includes reciprocal or symbiotic relationships between university and community; the need for participatory action; working towards community empowerment; and sustainability can be better understood. In addition, UCEC contributes towards the advancement of knowledge via the sharing of experiences, interactional exchanges, and the intellectual dissection of issues related to CE.

UCEC is held every 2 years and its hosting is rotated among the participating member countries with USM as a permanent co-organiser. Thus far, three significantly successful UCECs have been organised by BJIM in collaboration with the Global Alliance for Community Engaged Research (GACER) and UNESCO-APEID in 2009; with the Thammasat University, Thailand for year 2012; and Universitas of Andalas, Indonesia for year 2013. Besides, Australian College of Applied Psychology, Australia and Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, Japan agreed to co-host UCEC in year 2015 and 2017 respectively.

In fact, resolutions tabled in the 2009 inaugural conference led to the setting up of the UCEC Secretariat in early 2010, to coordinate the organisation of future biennial UCECs as well as to initiate, monitor and facilitate community projects.

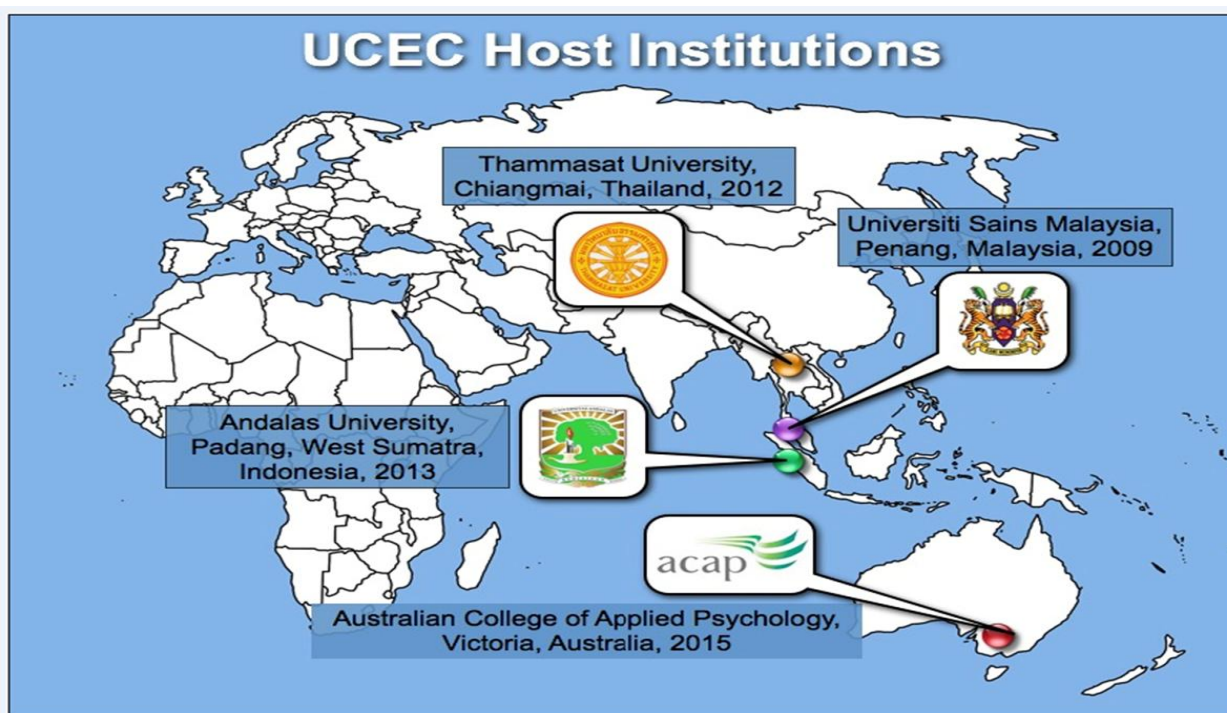


Figure 2: UCEC Hosts Institutions

MoU – MoA

Apart from strategising and monitoring projects and activities conducted under its purview, BJIM has also initialled Memorandums of Agreement (MOA), Memorandums of Understanding (MOU) and NDAs with external agencies and the private sector to pave the way for enhanced networking and sharing of experiences and best practice cases of community/industry engagement. To date, 24 MOUs/MoAs/NDAs have linked USM to external agencies as illustrated in Figure 3 below.

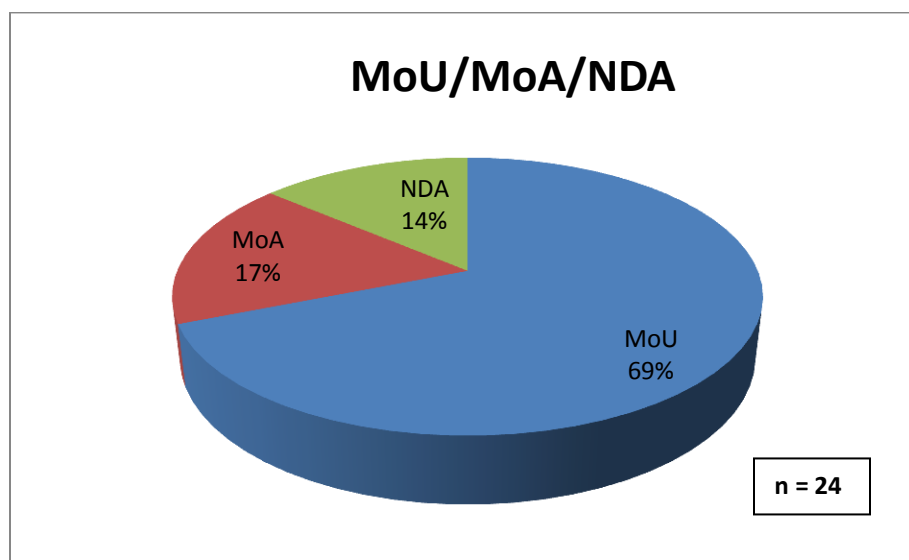


Figure 3: MoU/MoA/NDAs signed between USM and external agencies

Grants

An important feature of engagement between universities and communities is the establishment of mutually beneficial relationships and partnerships with communities to address communities' issues and needs. Such linkages are normally underpinned by a strong commitment to sharing and reciprocity that is guided by mutual respect among the respective partners.

In addition to the above grant facilities, BJIM has also extended funding via the Knowledge Transfer Programme initiative to 61 projects conducted in various communities nationwide. These projects range from imparting knowledge to upgrade the socio-economic status and social well-being of target populations, to creating awareness on the importance of living in a clean environment for a better future.

In total, BJIM has approved allocations for 304 community and 14 flagship projects (refer Table 1) under the following 6 themes:

- Education
- Economic enhancement
- Health
- Environment
- Heritage and culture

Year	Education	Economic	Health	Environment	Heritage and Culture	Social	Total
2010	21	8	15	6	2	14	66
2011	5	7	18	10	2	4	46
2012	23	2	9	10	3	10	57
2013	29	0	17	8	2	19	75
2014	20	4	4	8	6	18	60
Total	98	21	63	42	15	65	304

Table 1: Community Projects funded by BJIM in 2010 – 2014

Source: BJIM, USM

Ad hoc Grants Scheme

The ideational stimulus for this initiative, which commenced in April 2012, was primarily motivated by the objective to broaden the scale and scope of student participation in CE and empower them with responsibility of planning and implementing CE projects. BJIM initialised the scheme in April 2012 with a capital outlay of RM 500,000.00. To date, RM 855,532.79 has been allocated for the implementation of 141 community/industry engagement projects/programmes/activities involving both departmental and student organisations. Table 2 and Figure 4 respectively depict the allocations disbursed under this grant scheme since its initiation and the types of categories.

YEAR	NO. OF PROJECTS	ALLOCATION	DISBURSAL
2012	35	RM 500,000.00	RM 232,970.00
2013	60	RM 660,000.00	RM 442,004.54
2014	46	RM 200,000.00	RM 180,558.25
TOTAL	141	RM 1,360,000.00	RM 855,532.79

Table 2: Ad-hoc Grant Scheme: Allocation and Disbursal

YEAR	SHORT TERM	LONG TERM	FLAGSHIP
2010	61	5	0
2011	18	24	4
2012	12	10	5
2013	8	6	4
2014	12	2	1

Table 3: Community Projects/Flagship in 2010 – 2014

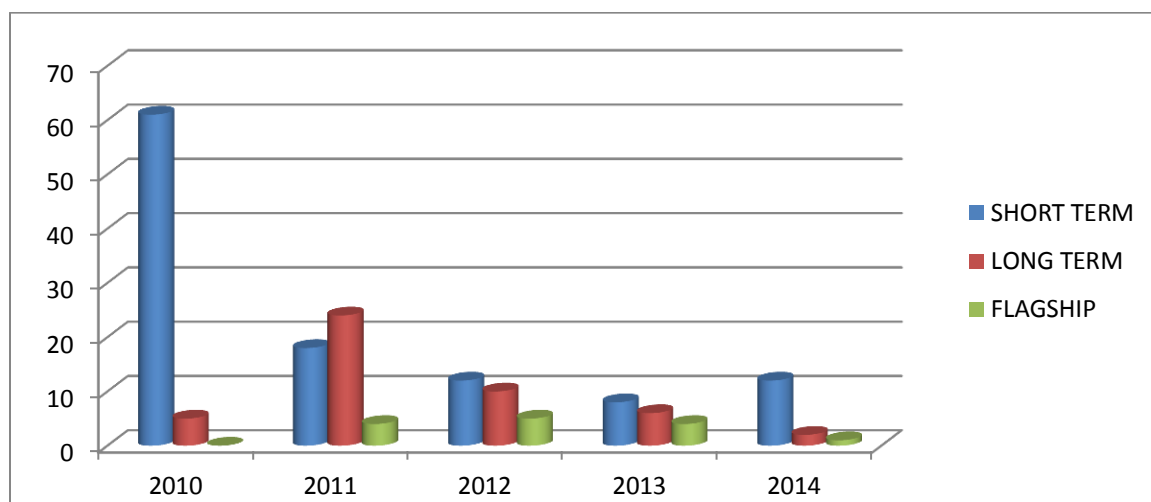


Figure 4: Categories of BJIM grant

Source: BJIM, USM

USM APEX KPI Achievement and Challenges 2008–2014

Despite its impressive track record in promoting and supporting CE as an efficacious, viable and sustainable tool of psycho-socio-economic transformation, BJIM is nevertheless confronted by a variety of challenges as outlined in Table 4.

CHALLENGES	PROPOSED SOLUTION
Lack of individuals (staff & student) who are willing to work on the voluntary basis.	Promote volunteerism and provide appropriate recognition.
Absence of a centralised entity that houses diverse agencies involved in community engagement activities in order to coordinate, monitor and evaluate as well as review the impact and sustainability of community engagement.	Establish one stop centre.
Absence of comprehensive and holistic sustainability index that contains indicators which empirically measures and codifies the sustainability of all forms of tangible and intangible outcomes/transformations.	Development of a Sustainable University Society Indicator Evaluation (SUSIE) index to measure sustainability.
No recognition by higher authority on CE programme/project/activities	Embed CE as a crucial aspect of job promotion.

Table 4: Challenges and Proposed Solutions

Concurrently, BJIM now focused on the reconfiguration of its institutional and operational framework setting up a comprehensive and interlinked database, the emplacement of stringent quality control and project evaluation procedures, the benchmarking of outputs to national and international standards, the rigorous monitoring of expenditure and the adherence to the requisite protocols related community engagement. In addition to adequately prepare itself to confront the challenges ahead, BJIM has reengineered its internal structure by realigning both community and industry engagement within specific frameworks that will witness the organisation reinventing itself as a proponent of not only community oriented CE but also as a prominent stakeholder in conceptualising, shaping, and implementing innovative solutions for industries especially for SMEs. The revised structural framework of BJIM is featured in Figure 5.

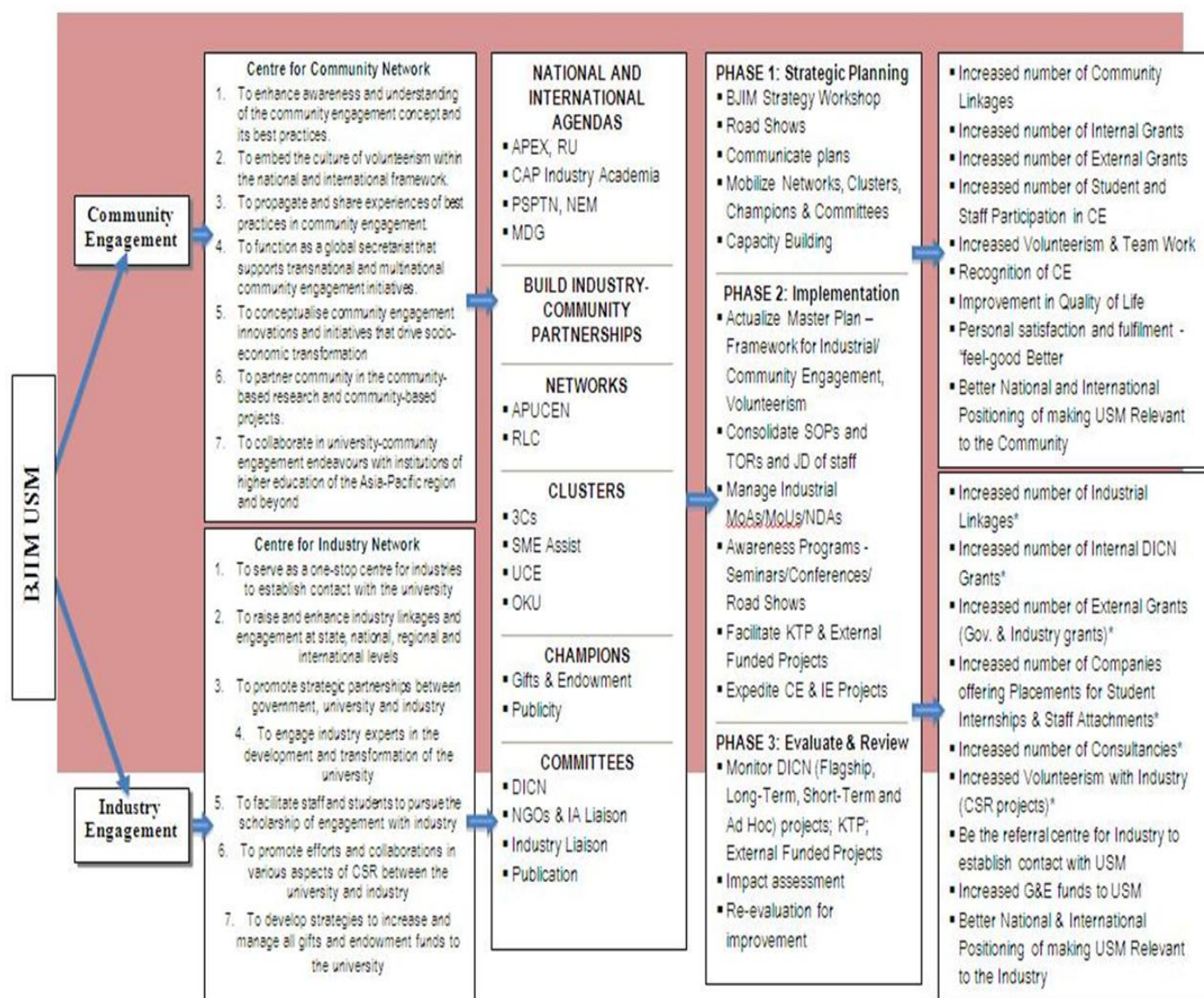


Figure 5: Way Forward: BJIM Implementation Framework (Version 7.0)

Selected Success Stories/Flagship Projects

Each of the following subsections highlights snippets of selected projects under the 6 major themes of health, economy, social work, education, culture and environment.

A. Theme: Health

Cleft Lip and Palate Reconstructive Surgery for Underprivileged Children of Bangladesh: A Collaborative Project of USM & Mercy Malaysia (MM)

Project Leader: Professor Dr. Ahmad Sukari Halim

Project Duration: 8 days per trip for 1 year

Budget: RM 31,000.30

Location: Dhaka, Bangladesh

Community Partner: Mercy Malaysia and Bangladesh NGOs

Objectives:

- Build or enhance the capacity of the relevant and key Dhaka Community Hospital (DCH) staff in various aspects of cleft patient care by the USM team
- Treat underprivileged children with cleft lip and palate
- Formalise the working relationships between USM–MM–DCH

Project achievements:

No.	Achievements	Details
1.	Provided free reconstructive surgeries for underprivileged children and adults in Bangladesh – thus contributing to the welfare needs of the bottom billion population in an impoverished country like Bangladesh.	67 underprivileged children treated
2.	The good working relationship with Mercy Malaysia and DCH, and excellent results of the operation performed has enhanced USM's name and the standard of Malaysia medical care at both national and international levels.	The next CLIPP mission is planned from 5th to 13th July 2012; MOU USM-MERCY Malaysia already signed & MOU USM-DCH has been drafted.

B. Theme: Economy

Zero Waste Mushroom Farming – Model Project at the Village of Kampung Belau, Kedah: A Collaboration between BJIM, USM–Kelab Puncak Merbok–Jabatan Pertanian, Cawangan Negeri Pulau Pinang

Project Leader: Dr. Foong Swee Yeok

Project Duration: 2 years

Budget: RM47,974.76

Community Partner: Kelab Puncak Merbok Kedah

Location: Kampung Belau, Merbok

Target Group: 1. Poor Families
2. Single Mothers
3. Unemployed Youth

Objectives:

- Increase the income of the community of Kampung Belau through mushroom farming
- Financially support the operation of tuition centres for the children of Kampung Belau
- Enhance experience for the people of Kampung Belau in retail sales and marketing
- Establish a model project that can be replicated in other villages in Kedah and later as training hub for small scale agriculture product
- Supply high quality organic mushroom, vegetables and compost using environmental friendly material and technology with environmental sustainability in mind



Proposed site has open classroom facility – training hub and conduct mushroom workshop for people from other villages (possible spin off project).

Project Achievement:



Mushroom Inoculation Room



Mushroom Storage Shed

C. Theme: Social Work/Health

INFORMM at SAHABAT: A Community Empowerment Activity for Drug User and People Living With HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

Project Leader: Professor Dr. Rusli Ismail

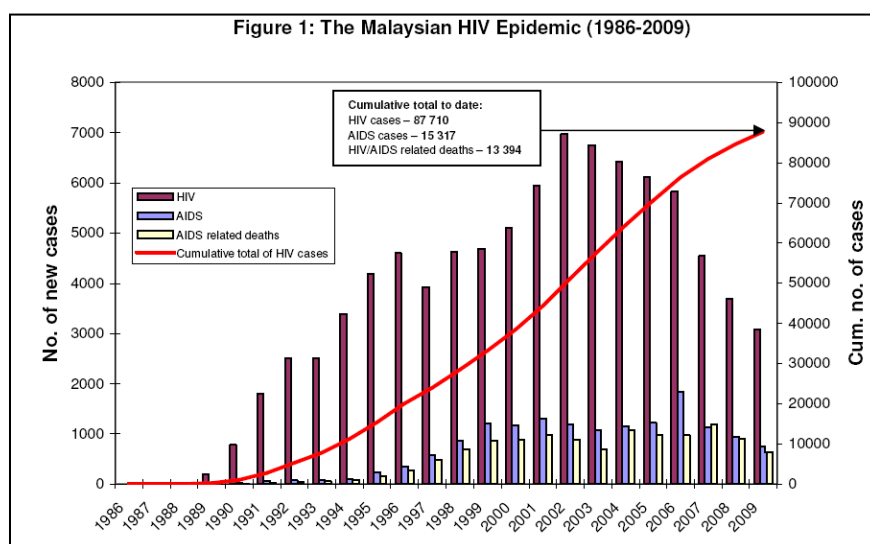
Project Duration: 18 Months

Budget: RM 40,100.00

Community Partner: SAHABAT (Kelantan Patients' Liaison Association)

Location: Kelantan

Target Group: 1. Injecting drug users (IDU)
2. Spouse of the IDU
3. School Children (Secondary School)
4. Local Community



Source: Ministry of Health (2010)
HIV cases by risk factor (2000 - 2009)

Objectives:

- Reduce the risk brought about by the sharing of needles and syringes among IDU by providing them with clean needles in exchange for used needles
- Train trainers who would be able to provide training and education on HIV/AIDS to IDUs, their spouses and the community
- Disseminate knowledge on HIV/AIDS and Harm Reduction
- Reach-out to spouses of the IDUs and provide more information on HIV/AIDS and other STD infections
- Empower drug users with the requisite work skills in order to be able to be farmhands

Achievements:

INFORMM-USM community engagement provides win-win situations:

- To community
 - Provision of engagement and harm reduction services for the prevention of HIV spread.
 - Involvement in gainful employment
- To INFORMM-USM
 - Ability to serve needy community and contribute to national strategy for HIV prevention
 - Research material
 - Implementation of research findings
 - Encourages volunteerism and greater participation among staff and students to carry out projects that assist members of community to fend for themselves



INFORMM at SAHABAT-A: Community Empowerment Activity for Drug User and People Living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA)

- To SAHABAT
 - Harm reduction for injecting drug users'(IDU) helps prevent the spread of HIV amongst this sub-community
 - Empower drug users with farming methods and techniques so as to be employable once they leave the centre
 - Transformed' IDU will be accepted by the community and be gainfully employed

E. Theme: Environment

From Waste to Conservation

Project Leader: Professor Dr. K. Sudesh Kumar

Duration: 3 years

Budget: RM 30,630.00

Community Partner: JKKK Kg Nelayan, Teluk Bahang
Plainexus Laboratory Sdn. Bhd

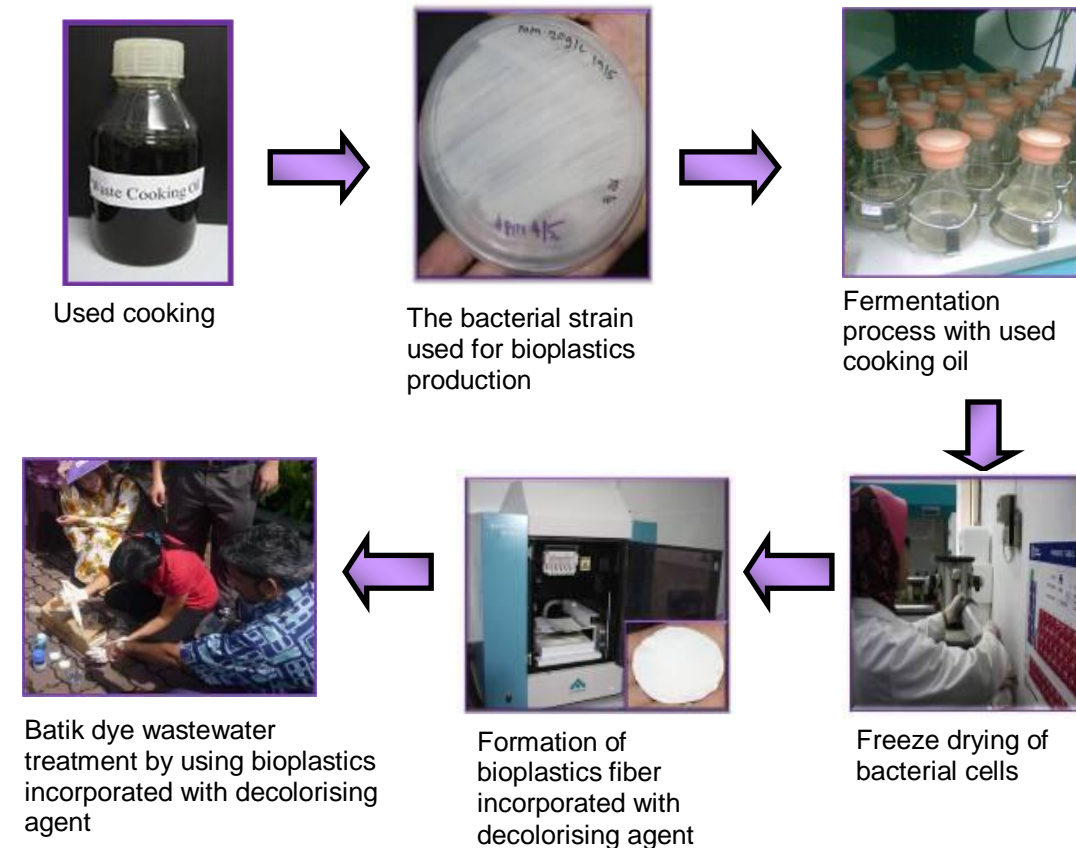
Location: Kg Nelayan, Teluk Bahang, Pulau Pinang

Target Group: Fishing Community of Kg Nelayan in Teluk Bahang

Objectives:

- Prevent re-utilisation and open disposal of used cooking oil
- Educate our citizens on the hazardous effects of used cooking oil consumption as well as its pollution effects upon disposal into natural environments
- Raise co-operation from various parties in efforts to preserve the green environment for a sustainable tomorrow
- Develop new applications for used cooking oil

Methodology:





The process of batik dye wastewater decolonisation by bioplastic incorporated with decolourising agent

Impact/Achievements:

No.	Achievements	How many?
1	Manage to gain participation from Teluk Bahang community	80 people
2	Collection of used cooking oil	50 Litre
3	Conversion of used cooking oil into bioplastics	30%
4	Establishment of batik dye wastewater decolourisation at lab scale	Lab Scale Treatment
5	Engagement with Industry partner Plainexus Laboratory Sdn. Bhd. to produce bioplastics at a large scale	1 Industry partner

F. Theme: Culture

DREAM & HOPE: A creative movements workshop integrating mainstream children, disable children and children from shelter homes

Project Leader: Dr. Mumtaz Begum Aboo Backer

Duration: 1 year

Budget: RM 6,000
Community Partner: NGOs and Home for PWDs
Location: Penang
Target Group: 1. School Children
2. Children with Special Needs

Objectives:

The objectives of this innovative cultural project were to:

- Utilise theatre as a medium for self-expression and creativity
- Stimulate children to explore freely their fears, desires, hopes and dreams, thus discovering themselves
- Promote understanding, acceptance and tolerance among children with different abilities and needs

Achievements:

Series of workshops completed and integration of children via children's stories, desires and dreams conducted successfully.



Barometer Check

Challenges

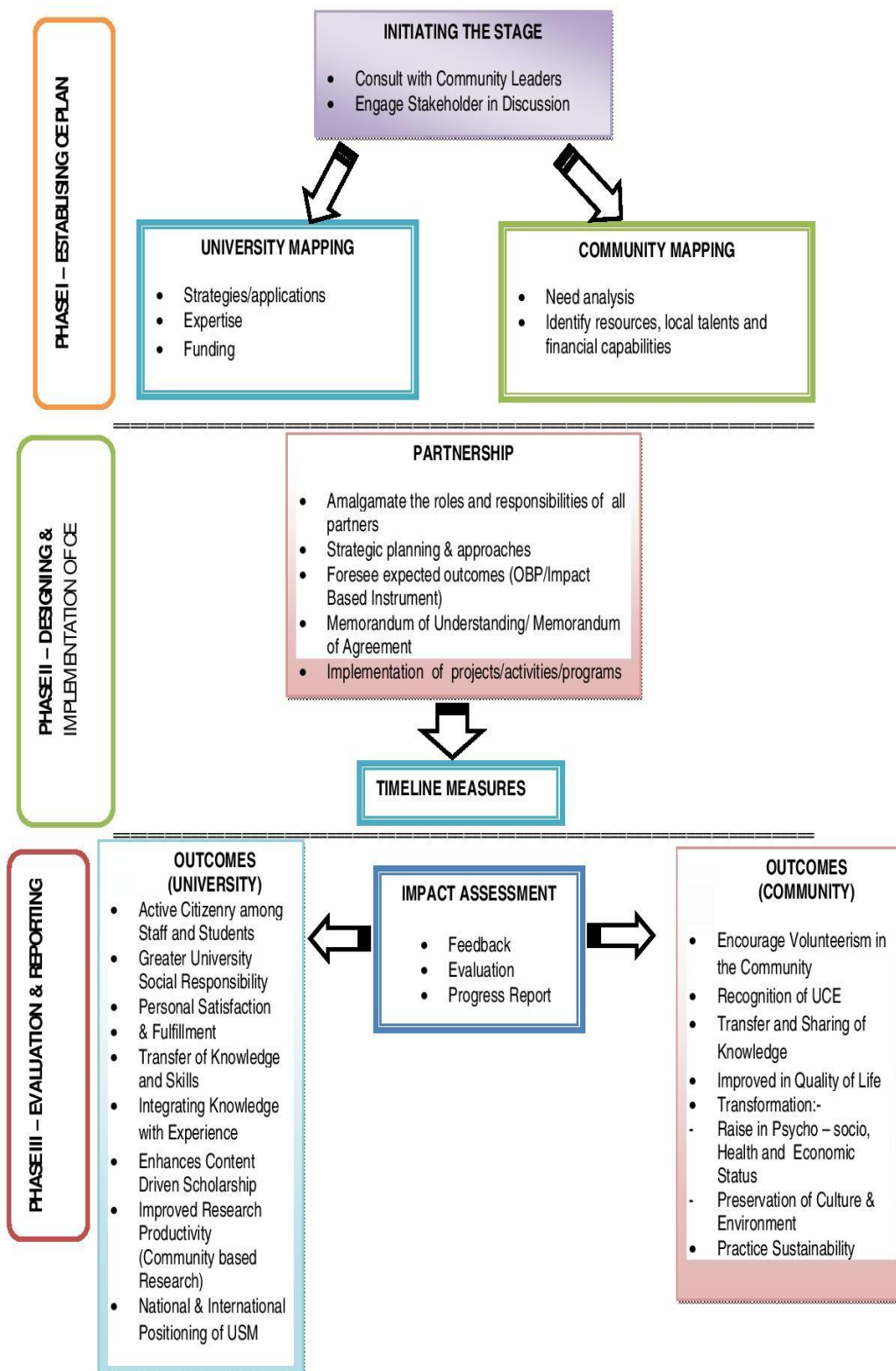
The common challenge faced in carrying out community engagement varies as there have been gaps in the understanding about the best way to carry out CE. One of the many challenges is making the university's community understand the right way of conducting CE activities and abiding to the CE policy established.

Overcoming the differences between academics and the community has not always been amicable especially when working with non-traditional community that has a wide political and racial divide. Consequently, initiating a project, programme or activity with a community can also be problematic if it does not get the 'buy in' from the entire community. This will lead to the difficulty of engaging and sustaining community involvement

Mitigating Challenges to Achieve 'Insaniversiti' and Synergetic Partnership

The DICN, USM has developed a systematic mechanism to review and award grants and subsequently monitor the progress of the projects, programmes or activities. Basically, CE involves joint identification of problems, planning of strategies, and the combined mobilisation of resources to transform the psycho-socio-economic well-being of target communities as indicated in the diagram. CE is a bi-directional process that involves community synergising its manpower base with the expertise, facilities and knowledge database of the university to affect a more holistic economic and social transformational impact on target groups. In return for such collaboration, the university obtains both quantitative and qualitative data feedback that could serve as input in the design of more effective transformational collaborative programmes in the future. We also train people with holistic outlook and humanitarian heart. Elements for effective engagement include synergistic partnership, altruistic commitment, and project sustainability allied to the tenets of cooperation, the objectives of cross-disciplinarily and the ideals of humanity current and future as stipulated in the long range diagram and will serve as a basis to ensure the standards for orchestration and mobilisation of USM staff and student corps to change people's lives for a better future.

PROCESS FLOW & GUIDING IMPLEMENTATION OF USM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Conclusion

Meaningful and effective engagements are the key principles in building synergetic partnership with the community to ensure sustainability of CE ideology, concepts, knowledge transfer and activities. These endeavours are in tandem with USM's manifestation of the *Insaniversiti* concept where the pursuit and transfer of knowledge is to empower the community. Ultimately, what underpins the solutions presented in this paper are the same ideals encapsulated in the principles of community engagement – clarity of purpose, willingness to learn, understanding differences, building trust, communication, sharing of control, respect, capacity building, partnership, and commitment. Strategic community partnerships are key component of systemic community engagement. These partnerships draw on the strengths of community groups as an array of supports through 'Synergetic Partnership' to bring forth changes and prepare communities for the 21st century. Strategic partnerships also create a culture of communication between university and community to ensure the services provided meet the needs of their communities. Innovative and constructive collaboration between the university and community will often provide significant progress toward creating sustainability. USM cherished its vision of empowering the disadvantaged and marginalised within the framework of a sustainable tomorrow through *Insaniversiti* in which CE plays a prominent part in positioning USM as a CE champion.

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