

# Community: Subject or object?

*How to build fundamental pillars of long-term relationships between business and community.*

Recent statistics show an increasing trend of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Indonesia. After slightly decreasing from 9,612 in 2013 to 8,885 in 2014, during the first two quarters of 2015, the number of foreign investors increased to 7,603, according to data from the Investment Coordinating Board (BKPM).

This increased interest in investing in Indonesia should be matched by increasing investor capability to deal with local communities.

For many business entities, community is the most important stakeholders, because they operate within or nearby a community. Businesses are not stand-alone: They need information, human resources, access to raw materials for products and clients/customers, which are essential for businesses to operate sustainably.

For example, international consumer producers such as Nestle must work with local farmers to obtain the best coffee, cocoa and milk for their world-class products, while Unilever has been empowering farmers of local black soybeans to produce its famous black ketchup.

A mining company gives local community compensation by providing facilities to obtain social licenses to operate, because the company exploits land and effects the hunting areas of indigenous people.

The term "partnership or collaboration" is trivial, hence business people often underestimate the fact that maintaining harmonized relationships is not always easy.

Communities should be treated as a subject in partnership, meaning they are at an equal level with the companies working in their lands/surrounding. Equality means they are given the right to do what they can to achieve common goals.

Key essential elements of equal-

ty-based partnerships are trust, accountability and sustainability. It sounds simple, but it requires serious commitment to succeed.

Trust emerges from respect. When a company respects its surrounding community, it has to be genuine, because people can feel it. Indigenous people or people in villages are sensitive about this, and vulnerable to the attitudes of business people.

There are preconceptions about how business is generally understood and characterized. Business is profit-driven, wants quick fixes, is hard-nosed, self-centered, greedy and inconsiderate.

Of course not all business people are like that, but such preconceptions can be used as a useful reflection to manage partnerships with stakeholders.

Treating communities equally means respect for their local wisdom. This grows trust, a fundamental element of partnership. Transparency is another attitude that is required when business builds cooperation with communities.

While this is tough because of the commercial confidentiality of many business practices, such "openhanded" behavior should be demonstrated. When a company is honest and transparent about its intention and goals in operation areas, it reveals that the company is accountable, hence credible.

Another attitude that is also difficult to practice is creating mutual benefits for both business and the community. No relationship can last if one partner feels it is being treated unfairly. This is the most problematic situation, because business is naturally a "winning side" while the community is a "losing side".

Is this true? The answer is "no". Business might win in some areas because it has capital and technolo-



**Soy good:** A farmer proudly shows soybeans she has picked, while others continue to harvest. Several companies have established a partnership with farmers to produce soybean-based products.

gy, but business loses easily without access to natural resources or raw materials for products.

### Sense of belonging

When business people want to build a partnership with the local community, it is always wise to counter the preconceptions about business mentioned above.

Communication and approaches should stay away from discussing profit or money, as this can be seen as greedy. Patience and perseverance are better than acting hard-nosed and inconsiderate.

In the end, being self-centered is counterproductive. Compassionate approaches often work well, but do not give any promise that can back-fire.

Interviews with social-economic experts reveal that some of the preconceptions are myths. One expert, who has worked in almost all provinces in Indonesia and studied local communities, shared a few tips on how to deal with local communities: One of the most important steps is learning land-use patterns, to better understand the daily activities of people in certain areas. Religion, local culture, customs and local wisdom should be studied to ascertain the do's and don't's.

For example, when there is a historical site or ritual site, a company should preserve it. Likewise, companies must adapt their operation if they operate in an area with strict cultural or religious rituals.

Rural communities are mostly

made up of farmers or farm laborers, who also earn income from various other activities. Getting the right information from them means knowing when is the right time to chat with them.

Interestingly, many corporate staff who work on community relations have a preconception that local people are demanding, lazy, uneducated, difficult to deal with, hot-tempered and weak-willed. Is this true? If they look lazy or weak-willed, it is because their work pattern does not experience too much pressure (time, speed, deadlines) or they are simply too tired.

On the other hand, they can be perceived as demanding, difficult to deal with, hot-tempered. The reason behind these perceived characters is

their low understanding of the talking points/context. We should explain things simply.

Often companies or investors assign consultants to make preliminary approaches to the community. When consultants want to enter companies' operation areas, they must: i) obtain knowledge about the area and its inhabitants; ii) fulfill administrative requirements; and iii) comply with corporate regulations related to health, safety and security. Lack of information on local culture is one of the challenges faced by investors, particularly expatriates.

Although such information can be sourced from local government, religious leaders, cultural leaders etc, investors or companies can also look at social media.

Unfortunately most comments are in Indonesian. Administrative procedures tend to create hurdles if the consultants do not hold a specific permit/letter, i.e. from local government. This letter is a pre-requisite to obtain permission from village heads. Administrative requirements for expatriates are more restrictive.

In addition to the immigration permit, expatriates must also get permits from police offices in the area of survey.

In conclusion, managing partnerships with communities should start from treating communities as a "subject" in our conversation, not an "object". As a subject, the community would be empowered and gain a sense of belonging to the proposed project.

Having adequate local knowledge and permits is essential to build the fundamental pillars of long-term relationships. Last but not least, remember the preconceptions about each other (business vs community), to avoid unnecessary misunderstandings. **(Yanti Triwadiantini)**

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# Empowering vulnerable households to combat malnutrition

*Vulnerable households and communities in South Timor Tengah (TTS) district, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) province have improved their nutritional practices following an intervention by Helen Keller International (HKI) through the Mondelez International-funded Rapid Action on Nutrition and Agriculture Initiative (RANTAI).*

Educating communities on how to plant nutritious crops and raise poultry for animal sources of protein might be easy but driving them to do it in a sustainable manner is a challenge.

Alfred Taloin, a public transportation vehicle conductor-turned-farmer and father of two has answered the challenged. He directly engages in planting nutritious crops and raising poultry on his land.

But he is more than just your average farmer as he enjoys a surplus of vegetables, chickens and eggs thanks to assistance from HKI staff in planting crops and raising chickens in 2012.

The 24-year-old Alfred says he sells the surplus to his neighbors and at a nearby market, thus allowing him to earn more income. "I raise about 100 chickens, with prices ranging from Rp 100,000 to Rp 150,000 per chicken," says Alfred, a trained group head, adding, "On average, I earn Rp 1 million per month from selling crops, chickens and seeds."

But above all, he is taking steps to address malnutrition in his household. "Today, the production of nutritious foods for children has increased by 75 percent. We consume vegetables every day and eat eggs almost every day," he says in a convincing tone.

Home gardens with nutritious crops and chicken runs are now common sight in TTS, with Alfred being one of the 4,001 trained household beneficiaries in Homestead Food Production (HFP).

Religious leader Merlin Lapanengga from the poverty stricken TTS district, NTT province, is also directly involved in planting nutritious crops and raising poultry on her land.

Tomatoes, carrots, eggplants,

red spinach and other kinds of nutritious crops grow well in her home garden. Apart from producing micronutrient-rich vegetables, the 32-year-old minister has also established a small chicken run in her house. "By providing an example, thank God, I can see more and more people eagerly following my lead," said the chief of the Neke Church Council, Oenino, TTS.

She acknowledged that people were initially pessimistic about planting the micronutrient-rich vegetables, using the long drought and water shortages as excuses. However, thanks to training from HKI aimed at educating and assisting participating households in agriculture and nutrition through its HFP program, many of them have changed the mindset, believing that nutritious crops can grow on their land, which help meet the much-needed nutrition.

The improved nutrition in TTS is a far cry from what was seen several years ago when diets in the participating households were mainly maize-based, with limited diversity, prior to the intervention involving multiple sectors, with HKI being the driver and program executor.

### Underlying causes of under nutrition

TTS has had a persistently high prevalence in the key indicators of malnutrition among women and children. According to data sources, TTS is district where many households face food insecurity - which is a key determinant of malnutrition.

Malnutrition and food insecurity has led to children experiencing stunting, becoming underweight and going through delays in mental development, while pregnant women suffer from anemia.

Basic Health Research held by



**Nutritious sources:** Housewives pick mustard greens growing in their home garden (left) while another housewife feeds her chickens.



Courtesy of HKI

Ministry of Health in 2007 showed that six out of 10 children under 5 years old in the project areas were stunted. Malnutrition also occurs among pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers.

This explains why HKI, with funding from Mondelez International, is implementing the HFP model under RANTAI, which aims at addressing the underlying causes of under nutrition related to food insecurity, poor infant and young child feeding practices and improper health-seeking behaviors.

The five-year RANTAI program has reached at 4,001 vulnerable households, with 1,601 in the first phase in 2012 and the remaining 2,400 in the second phase in 2013. The targeted households come from 17 sub-districts and 74 villages.

Mondelez Indonesia's managing director Sunil Taldar explains that one of the reasons behind the malnutrition is people's lack of awareness of the importance of nutritious food choices.

That is why Mondelez International strives to raise public awareness on the issue by funding RANTAI, which is in line with the company's the Call for Well-Being platform, a call for action in four areas "that are critical to the wellbeing of the world and where Mondelez International can make the greatest impact: sustainability, mindful snacking, safety and community partnerships," he remarks.

Referring to RANTAI, he says

that the program builds the capacity of households to plant nutritious vegetables and fruits.

"These vegetables and fruits vary and are easy to find and grow, such as eggplants, beans, green and red spinach, tomatoes, bitter gourds, kale, carrots, chayote and lettuce," he says.

According to Taldar, it is impossible to solve global issues by themselves and "so we partner with experts who can help us figure out ways to address these complex societal issues."

"We choose and work with partners that have similar concerns and with their expertise, together we can help improve community health," he says.

Given the large scope of the complex societal issues, HKI, as RANTAI's appointed executor, views this project as collaboration with key stakeholders in the community.

"From the inception, we have engaged government officials, health staff, religious leaders, community health volunteers and village chiefs in the planning of the program," said Prateek Gupta, country director of HKI Indonesia.

"They have been the ones who have been helping us identify the households that could benefit from the program and they have provided advice and support on an ongoing basis," he adds.

### Routine monitoring

The year 2016 marks the end

of the RANTAI program, which is entering the exit phase. Efforts are now under way to evaluate the program and make it sustainable.

Gupta says that to assess program implementation, "we collect data on a broad range of indicators that helps us quantify how practices have changed at the household level."

"As a result of our routine monitoring, we know that the beneficiaries are growing more varieties of micronutrient-rich vegetables. In addition, we have learned that many of the households now have more chickens due to improved vaccination practices as well as improved chicken coop construction."

According to him, significant improvements have also been seen in the Food Consumption Scores of participating households since the start of the project.

The Food Consumption Score provides an estimate of the amount of quality foods eaten in a household. "When we started our project, only about a third of households that were a part of our project had an 'acceptable' diet as

per the Food Consumption Score," he says.

"Within six months of implementation, our monitoring found that more than 80 percent of our households had an 'acceptable' diet and that percentage has been sustained since."

"We would like to ensure that all of the households participating in our program are optimally practicing the skills that they have learned through training," he says.

Gupta says that neighboring households that weren't initially part of the program take on some of the key practices on their own and that is a great sign for sustainability.

"We are also encouraging the beneficiaries to access the village allocation funds so we are sensitizing the heads of villages on the benefits of the program."

"Based on HKI's experiences in other countries in Asia, we have seen our participating households sustain their activities long after HKI has stopped actively working in these areas," Gupta says. **(Sudibyo M. Wiradji)**

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