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Whole Institutional Transformation for a Sustainable University: The Case of Humanising Education at IIUM

Zainal Abidin Sanusi

Introduction

The continuous change in the higher education landscape has forced universities to respond with diverse models of a university to make themselves relevant. Despite a more demanding need for a contextualised model, the predominant force of neoliberalism still significantly influences and shapes the outcome. Against this trend, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) has embarked on a journey to showcase a Malaysian model of university that addresses sustainable development issues in a holistic manner – taking the whole institutional transformation (WIT) process as its approach. This WIT model aims at changing the university ecosystem by pushing the university agenda to systemically serve the community with other stakeholders, namely government agencies and industry/business players.

Towards implementing the WIT, IIUM has outlined two clusters of change initiatives: (i) structural change to break the institutional silos (holacracy) while integrating the principles of sustainable development into the organisational structure; and (ii) knowledge management change to bridge interfaculty interactions towards generating and disseminating new knowledge for sustainability (a shared platform). This WIT approach, through the two initiatives, is aimed at making IIUM a multidimensional enterprise that draws on the full range of human capacities for "learning to know", "learning to do", "learning to be" and "learning to live together" – in the spirit of making W-hole I-nstitution T-Transformation for H-umanising U-niversity, Making A Novelty – WIT for HUMAN.

Established in 1983, the university has gone through various processes towards achieving its vision and mission. Since January 2019, IIUM has embarked on an intensive journey of WIT to solidify its vision of becoming a sustainable university. The whole journey is clearly outlined in a document called IIUM Roadmap. The WIT process seeks to reinvigorate the operationalisation of the university's mission statements in the context of present and future scenarios – becoming a sustainable university – while standing firm on the foundations set forth by the philosophy and vision of the university.

The philosophy of IIUM is unique in such a way that it is based on two main tenets – that man is the servant of Allah and man is the vicegerent of Allah on earth (M. Kamal Hassan, 1983). This philosophy leverages heavily on the roles of knowledge in achieving the totality of human development, both physical and spiritual, consistent with Allah's creation of man, body (*jasad*) and soul (*ruh*). Thus, knowledge imparted at IIUM must also be total, complete and inclusive of intellectual, spiritual and moral dimensions integrated with the knowledge needed as a global player not only in the field of Islamic studies, but also in other such issues that the world is facing as sustainable development.

With this foundation set for the university, the concept of WIT is nothing new to the origins of IIUM. Sustainable development serves as a new momentum triggered by the global call and resurgence of bringing back the soul of the university beyond the commodification of knowledge. This effort of reviving the original spirit of IIUM, with an additional element of the sustainable development agenda, has proven to be a significant move towards WIT when IIUM was accorded the prestigious Green Gown International Award for the 2020 Sustainability Institution of the Year in New York.

Universities and whole institutional transformation for sustainability

As an institution of higher education, universities should be the phase when learners are exposed and trained to address various issues in a very comprehensive way. Sustainability is not a discipline of study that can be studied through conventional means. It is an approach to be understood and practised holistically. But what does the “whole-institution approach” mean and entail?

An institution-wide approach for sustainability implies a structure designed in a manner that enables all stakeholders – leadership, academics, learners, administration – to jointly develop a vision and plan to implement education for sustainable development (ESD) in the whole institution. For this purpose, changes are advocated and carried out at all levels with predesigned stages and scopes towards addressing the whole institutional need for changes. Within this context of ESD, the comprehensiveness of the transformation needs to be structured and planned so that it will not end up being another fragmented initiative. The ESD is not yet another discipline to be taught, but rather a purpose and process of education – a way of addressing locally relevant economic, environmental and social matters in culturally appropriate ways – making education relevant for students and incurring social transformation that enables sustainable development (McKeown et al., 2012).

Therefore, the success of initiatives towards becoming a sustainable university are very much dependent on the success of the whole transformation process. This process needs to always offer a standing invitation to be critical of the concept of sustainable development and keep questioning and improving it as a normative principle. It is even more important that, in the spirit of localising the sustainability agenda, the process could lead to contextualisation of the spirit. Here is where the Malaysian narrative of *sejahtera* could possibly be a better term for sustainable development in Malaysia. The United Nations (UN) and UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) fully “... emphasize the potential of ESD to empower learners to transform themselves and the society they live in by developing knowledge, skills, attitudes, competences and values required for addressing global citizenship and local contextual challenges of the present and the future ...” (UNESCO, 2014).

There are several means of promoting WIT. A more feasible approach is for universities to participate in an assessment process that looks at the whole function of a university in the aspects of academic, governance and community relations. The following are examples of award schemes that recognise many aspects of the whole-institution approach:

- Green Gown Awards;
- International Sustainable Campus Network (ISCN) Awards;
- Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System (STARS) by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE);
- Learning in Future Environments (LiFE) Index by Australasian Campuses Towards Sustainability (ACTS);
- Times Higher Education Impact Rankings – it promotes elements of a whole-institution approach in the categories of research, outreach and stewardship; and
- UI GreenMetric World University Ranking by Universitas Indonesia – it focuses on environmental aspect operations as well as economic and social sustainability questions, among others.

Although IUM is agreeable to some aspects found among these schemes, it has designed and developed its own trajectory of WIT for sustainability. The WIT approach entails the integration of sustainability aspects in every area of university governance and administration and the delivery of the three fundamental functions – teaching and learning, research and development, and community engagement – in a more structured and predesigned way. Along with the integration of *maqasid shariah* into the university's strategies and performance measurement, the IUM community recognises that all the environmental practices are aligned with the teachings of Islam and concept of Islamisation, which the university has been advocating for the past many years.

Whole institutional transformation at IUM

The journey of WIT at IUM intensively began mid-2018 as part of an attempt to bring about a more holistic and transformative perspective in "humanising education". The concept of humanising education is derived from Malaysia's National Education Philosophy – to nurture a "balanced and harmonious person" as the outcome of the education system. The philosophy, which was developed in 1987 – many years before the 1992 Brundtland Report on Sustainable Development – jives very well with the idea of ESD as an implementation for achieving sustainable development. In the UNESCO Four Pillars of Education, "Learning to Be" and "Learning to Live Together" are regarded as key, while "Learning to Know" and "Learning to Do" are accepted in many conventional systems.

At the institutional level, IUM is administered based on the Islamic framework of *maqasid shariah*, which outlines five existential qualities of being human – namely the promotion and protection of faith, life, intellect, lineage, wealth, and a balanced way of life. With many common elements between the sustainable development agenda, Malaysia's national philosophy of education and IUM's mission for transformation through humanising education, the WIT at IUM is an interesting case of top-down and bottom-up approach of transformation for sustainability. Collectively, they form a value-based education that repurposes university for a sustainable human existence and progress.

Specifically, like in any other institutional change process, the WIT in IUM is a transformation approach that involves everyone on campus. Changes and transformation are made in totality – rather than in piecemeal or an ad hoc basis – while leaving no one behind, including the surrounding and far-off communities impacted by the existence of the university (Dzulkifli Abdul Razak, 2020). Basically, there are five major aspects of WIT in IUM:

- breaking down of academic and administrative silos in total, transformational and transversal ways;
- building of voluntary teams and teamwork across the academia or structure based on shared aspirations and interests (IUM sustainable development goals flagship programmes) in humanising education;
- allowing for greater creativity and (social) innovation in translating SDGs into a local context and relevance in problem finding and solving;
- enhancing community engagement and empowerment in co-problem solving based on the 17 goals and beyond (when local worldviews are not met – for example, SDG 18); and
- new combination of data and information capture transforming into "new" Key Intangible Performance (KIP) indicators over time.

These five aspects aim to provide the most conducive ecosystem to propel the necessary changes both at a structural level and knowledge orientation. Besides, these aspects seek to trigger initiatives at all levels of the university community so that everyone is involved in the process. In carrying out these changes, IIUM is adopting and adapting them into a local concept called *sejahtera*. *Sejahtera* can be described as balanced lifestyles summarised by at least 10 different elements: spiritual, physico-psychological, intellectual, cognitive, cultural, ethical, emotional, ecological, economic and societal dimensions. While these elements serve as core values in the university, they are designed to be able to reflect myriads of *sejahtera* practices in the economic, social or environmental aspects of the Malaysian society.

Specifically, the three major processes of WIT in IIUM can be described as such: (i) structural change; (ii) knowledge management change; and (iii) synergising IIUM's WIT and whole community transformation (WCT) through the platform of the Regional Centre of Expertise (RCE) on Education for Sustainable Development, namely RCE Greater Gombak.

Structural change

Structural change is very critical to support and induce change and transformation towards sustainability. Without any necessary structural changes, the above aspirations and planned initiatives remain merely as great ideas or, if successfully implemented, will be disconnected. Therefore, IIUM has identified and started introducing changes in two layers of operational components as its critical strategies.

First is the level of institutional readiness that forms the foundation to embark on the process. One aspect of readiness is a strong understanding in the IIUM community on the concept of *maqasid shariah* to ensure it is consistently embraced and embedded through the entire execution and evaluation process. For this purpose, the Office of Institutional and Academic Quality Management was renamed Office of Knowledge for Change and Advancement, with a new mandate to promote understanding on key approaches in the university that include *maqasid shariah*, the national philosophy of education and sustainable development. Another structural change was the renaming of the Office of the Deputy Rector of Students Affairs and Development to Office of the Deputy Rector of Student Development and Community Engagement. This shift of focus from co-curricular activities to community engagement as part and parcel of the institution was significant.

Institutional readiness also means that the whole community of IIUM must be ready to implement and support the WIT process. The university management, academic staff, administrators and the students are engaged on a continuous basis through a designed programme. For this purpose, IIUM has created 29 flagship projects to bring in the changes needed. These projects must be carried out in collaboration with at least two different *kuliyah* (faculties) to ensure interdisciplinary spirit. The projects must be community-based and community-driven besides having to address either one of the pillars of *maqasid shariah* and SDGs. All 29 flagship projects are strategically linked to the overall WIT organisational processes. This linkage is vital to ensure the collective institutional impact of the projects to mainstream the *maqasid shariah* and SDGs agenda in IIUM. The whole university performance will be monitored and evaluated based on this structural organisational link.

At a higher operational level, the implementation of these flagship projects is governed by three components – Islamisation, Integration and Internationalisation – in order to achieve Comprehensive Excellence (CE). These three components have been part of the strategic framework of IIUM for the past many years. The connection between these three components and the fundamental concept of sustainable development demonstrates that sustainable development can be a guiding framework for operationalisation. In addition, sustainable development also needs to be synergised with other guiding principles of IIUM. The first component of internationalisation emphasises on working beyond faculties as well as administrative and geographical sections. It encourages the spirit of working together towards the same goal, regardless of race and geography. It also serves as a platform for Muslims around the world to share the benefits of Islam and actualising the principle of *Rahmatan lil Alamin*, which literally translates as “Mercy to all Beings”.

The second component, integration, implies “breaking the silos” among different fields of knowledge. The expansion of networks globally would have limited benefit if barriers across different disciplines remained strong internally. The third component, Islamisation, is the process and outcome of integrating Islamic values in all the initiatives at the conceptual and practical level. Among these three strategies, the most challenging one is to integrate the players either at the institutional or knowledge generation and dissemination level. For the past many years, all *kuliyah* have functioned based on the traditional division of disciplinary-based knowledge. However, sustainable development issues are very interrelated and interlinked, and these require interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary or even transdisciplinary approaches. Therefore, changes in the way knowledge is developed, imparted and disseminated are inevitable.

The whole university approach for sustainability will not be able to function optimally if workplace silos are still predominant. Realising the potentially limiting impact of silo mentalities, IIUM is advocating a different reference to knowledge groupings, internally known as a shared platform. The Tetrahedron Model, as it is referred to in the IIUM Roadmap, is aimed at embracing connectivity, collaboration and communication by collapsing the traditional or conventional way of knowledge division, namely science, engineering, social science, humanities and liberal arts. It is hoped that through the shared platform, it will promote more intensive inter-*kuliyah* collaborations, which will encourage a new knowledge discourse and content that can directly address sustainable development issues.

Knowledge management change

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a problem to the value and purpose of knowledge that are being developed and disseminated in the universities. Universities are now challenged to rethink their roles and purposes as they seem unable to respond to a crisis in a timely and effective manner. This further highlights the existing debate on the disconnection between the education given by the university and the actual action and outcome from the process. The task of implementing the institutional change within a university is a very challenging one.

In translating the concept of knowledge for sustainability into action, the transformation of knowledge management (generation, management and dissemination) at IIUM are categorised into three main clusters: (i) system knowledge; (ii) target knowledge; and (iii) transformation knowledge. System knowledge is about the current situation in IIUM that is critical for its community to know as the basis for everyone's action. Target knowledge is the information provided about the university's mission to be achieved or prevented. Based on these two clusters of knowledge is transformation knowledge, which is to be shared among the IIUM community to provide knowledge stocks that indicate the path to IIUM's goal of becoming a sustainable university. Since the journey of WIT started in mid-2018, many series of discourses and direct engagement sessions have taken place to ensure a wider and deeper understanding of sustainable development is being integrated into the existing body of knowledge in the IIUM community.

For IIUM, the transformation of the culture and content of knowledge is a pragmatic process whereby a person uses their head to know (cognitive ability), their hand to do (psychomotor for mastering skills) and their heart to be (the affective domain of forming values and attitudes which in turn become actions). These three components that make up a person will then learn to live together with others in a harmonious, respectful and peaceful society. This is in line with the four pillars of education set out in a report for UNESCO by the International Commission on Education for the 21st Century in 1996 – "Learning to Know", "Learning to Do", "Learning to Be" and "Learning to Live Together".

Most formal education stops at "learning to know", which focuses on numeracy, literacy and critical thinking. While "learning to do" is concerned with skills and competency, little emphasis has been given to "learning to live together", which involves the development of social skills and values. However, "learning to be" would foster personal development to act with creativity, judgment and responsibility. Putting it together, the head, the hand and the heart must integrate to materialise "learning to live together" (Dzul kifli, 2019). Here is where the IIUM model of university distinguishes itself from the other teaching and learning models.

Several initiatives are being taken to transform the whole generation and management of knowledge in IIUM. One of these is the creation of a continuous and connected learning process throughout a student's stay on campus. For this purpose, the university has carried out a campus-wide engagement process to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum and co-curriculum in light of sustainable development issues. As a result, IIUM has introduced what is called the Sejahtera Academic Framework (SAF). The SAF seeks to connect and integrate various knowledge elements to address the physical and spiritual aspects of human development.

Like in any WIT, strategies are commonly linked to each other to create wholeness in transformation. Strategic implementation must be supported by strong and appropriate structures; hence a new administration and execution model ought to be put in place. In the case of the SAF, several measures have been undertaken to ensure the right models are put in place to support the framework's implementation. One critical new component of the SAF is the introduction of a new compulsory course – Sustainable Development: Issues, Policies and Practices – to ensure every student has an exposure to sustainable development. This course is strengthened with another two compulsory action-based courses – Usrah in Action I and Usrah in Action II; students must conduct actual sustainable development projects on the ground as a requirement of the course.

With these two major transformations taking place at the structural and knowledge management level, the next scope of transformation for a complete implementation of the WIT process is synergising the process and ongoing community engagement initiatives at IIUM. This process includes new programmes being introduced and implemented with the direct involvement of the community, government agencies and business players, specifically in issues that were collectively identified.

Synergising whole institutional transformation and whole community transformation

It is conceived that a university is a microcosm, containing most aspects of society. This recognition of the institution can be seen as equivalent to a small to mid-size town, complete with collectable data, and capable of measuring and monitoring its own impacts, such as water, energy and waste flows. It can also lead to an understanding of a university as a living laboratory for exploring sustainable lifestyles, new ways of conducting enterprise and documenting the benefits of sustainability practices. Therefore, the university and its surrounding entities can be considered as one community. The concept of an ivory tower has long been obsolete and universities must play a more direct role in transforming the community to become a sustainable society. As the Secretariat for RCE Greater Gombak, IIUM is now set to play this role.

An RCE is a network of existing formal, non-formal and informal organisations that facilitate learning towards sustainable development in the local and regional communities. The term community is part and parcel of the university's learning ecosystem, and not just to serve as a venue for co-curricular activities. The purpose of an RCE is to connect formal education institutions with local stakeholders in the effort towards sustainable development. Hence, the term community university – "communiversity" – has a strong potential to mainstream this change from WIT to WCT. The community is not only limited to the neighbouring community, but society at large in different areas beyond Gombak, either in the region or internationally where the community is facing sustainable development challenges. The RCE network is global enough that it can serve as another platform to fulfil the mission of IIUM No. 6 & 7: "To enhance intercultural understanding and foster civilisation dialogues in Malaysia as well as across communities and nations; and to develop an environment that instils commitment for life-long learning and a deep sense of social responsibility among staff and students."

The RCE framework synergises very well with the WIT of IIUM. The university, as the epicentre of the RCE, has long been striving to promote the concept of learning environment within its institution and the surrounding community. The success of the RCE agenda on ESD starts inside out whereby it is very much dependent on how IIUM, as a sub-community, can itself function as a sustainable community before extending its internal culture to the surrounding community. In a more general implication of the RCE's framework, the whole university's functions – from the formal graded courses to extra-curricular activities, to various research activities, to everyday operations in administrative offices, cafeterias, hostels and every place in the university – should be geared and reoriented towards a sustainable development-oriented ecosystem, with the *maqasid syariah* reinstated in all appropriate occasions.

The university, as a sub-community of the Greater Gombak society, has created and aligned its living and learning environment with Islamic practices, which by default encapsulates the concept of *maqasid syariah*. The introduction of the sustainability concept is perfecting the ecosystem of the university. With the WIT, IUM views the operations and facilities management of the university as not just a physical operation, but part of an academic tool to provide learning opportunities to its students' and staff's daily routines. It is undeniable that a student's learning time spent outside the formal curriculum is relatively higher. Thus, in IUM, all routine operations and facilities, which have been usually taken for granted, need to be adjusted so that it would showcase a sustainable lifestyle. In realising this need, it is not an overstatement to suggest that until and unless this model is fully adapted and adopted, efforts to achieve institutional sustainability will not be successful. While this process of strengthening IUM as a member of RCE Greater Gombak is taking place in various aspects of ESD, collaborative activities between IUM and other members of RCE Greater Gombak are intensively taking place in the area.

Specifically, RCE Greater Gombak has identified three focus areas of sustainable development in which the stakeholders are working on – “Whole Community Transformation Towards Sustainable Society”, “Spirituality and Sustainability in Creating Balance and Harmonious Living”, and *Sejahtera*, that is “Mainstreaming Indigenous Knowledge and Local Wisdom”. These three areas were decided based on the prioritisation of major sustainable development issues in the area of Greater Gombak. There are now at least 15 stakeholders representing different agencies, including schools, government agencies and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), that are directly engaged with RCE Greater Gombak. To date, several activities have already been carried out and many more are in the pipeline. It is interesting to note that RCE Greater Gombak has brought together various actors, who under normal circumstances would not have been found to work collectively. This is a very significant contribution of SDGs towards transforming the community to become a sustainable society.

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