

Many companies have teamed up with the government, NGOs and scholars to implement partnership programs to improve the livelihoods of grassroots communities. How do they implement such programs and what benefits can stakeholders gain? Recently, The Jakarta Post's Sebastian Partogi talked to Company-Community Partnerships for Health in Indonesia (CCPHI) executive director Kemal Soerawidjaja about the issue.

*Question (Q): What are the things that companies and government agencies need to do when they are about to engage in community-partnership programs?*

Answer: Proper implementation is the key to successful communitypartnership programs. There are steps that need to be followed thoroughly. First of all, they need to conduct an assessment first of the respective recipients of their programs. You can't just design a program haphazardly. Before you devise a program, first you need to find out the problems and issues that need to be addressed in your target community. This is where scholars and NGOs can come into play because they have research skills.

NGO activists have a competitive advantage in terms of community partnership-related research because most of them have a real expertise in accessing the grassroots communities. They know how to penetrate into their respective communities of concern and engage with the latter.

Research studies in the form of monitoring and evaluation activities are equally important to make sure that the programs are impactful.

*Can you give an example of how a community-partnership program attempted to address the issues and problems faced by a particular target community?*

Let me take two separate HIV/AIDS awareness programs carried out by [tire maker] PT Gajah

Tunggal and [consumer goods giant] Unilever as an example. They have both delivered awareness programs to their respective workers who work in their factories; Gajah Tunggal's factory is located in Banten while Unilever's is located in Cikarang, West Java. Both companies have been concerned about the so-called 'mobile men with money' phenomenon among their factory workers, most of whom live far away from their wives and who may incorporate high-risk sexual behavior into their lifestyle. This is a social phenomenon that needs to be tackled.

Although the beneficiaries of the programs are the two companies' factory workers only, the programs can also have an impact on the community as a whole. Just imagine this, the companies employ thousands of workers in their factories. If the workers engaged in high-risk sexual activities, their behavior would, without question, potentially spread [sexually transmitted diseases] to local people who lived near the factory.

This is why preventive action is essential.

*The example you have mentioned illustrates how a particular partnership program benefits its target community. But how do community-partnership programs directly benefit companies?*

When companies involve themselves in community-partnership programs, they can get certain things that will benefit their operations. By empowering as well as improving the life qualities and skills of the community around the area where they operate, they will be able, for example, to turn the local residents into their human resources. The partnership programs will also increase local people's loyalty and sense of belonging to the company, motivating them to lend a helping hand for the company when needed.

However, corporate bosses should not expect that the benefits will come immediately after they finish the implementation of the program. Community-partnership programs are long-term investments which, nevertheless, will bring long-term benefits to the company.

*You have mentioned that the partnership programs can also be beneficial to the company's operations. Can you give an example of how a partnership has enhanced a company's production and manufacturing processes while, at the same time, empowering their suppliers?*

Let me take Nestlé's creating shared value (CSV) program, through which they enhance the skills of dairy farmers and help them to improve their welfare. If we look at it from a pragmatic point of view, why should a company care for the conditions of the dairy farmers who are not their employees or the cows that are not their possessions? However, when we look at it as a long-term investment, the CSV program is very beneficial to their business because by training the farmers to produce high-quality milk, they will unquestionably improve their business.

Meanwhile, to ensure that the farmers are able to concentrate on producing the best milk possible, we need to also take care of their families. The company does this by, for example, procuring biogas that helps the families improve their quality of life by reducing electricity costs and making the process of cooking easier.

Community-partnership programs are also very beneficial to mining companies as these programs can help them to minimize resistance from local residents toward their operations. Environmental impact analysis (Amdal) documents are not sufficient [to ensure smooth mining operations]; mining companies also need to improve the quality of the lives of local residents living in their operation areas.

We have discussed how the partnership programs benefit corporations. How do the partnership programs benefit other stakeholders: the government, NGOs and scholars?

Putting it in a nutshell, all stakeholders get a good reputation for having executed an impactful community-development project. They can use this for organizational as well as personal branding.

In other countries, benefits for companies and organizations who conduct community-partnership programs are even more concrete: they receive tax breaks from their respective governments. In Indonesia, we haven't reached that point yet, but we are moving toward that direction.

*How to further consolidate cooperation among the government, corporations, NGOs and scholars in the community-partnership programs?*

From the more technical side, it is better if companies adjust their communitypartnership programs to those of the government. One of the government's current priorities is, for example, reducing the maternal mortality rate (of which Indonesia has one of the highest in Southeast Asia). In this case, medical-equipment manufacturers need to supply clean and proper gynecological tools to local community health centers and train the centers' respective nurses on how to use these tools, for example.

On the social aspect of the implementation of the program, sometimes each stakeholder has their own ego: the government feels as if they are the most knowledgeable party in terms of societal problems, the company feels entitled to have its say approved all the time since it is spending a lot of money to fund the project, and so on. This has often stalled cooperation.

This is why dialogue among the stakeholders is very important from the project's day one.

CCPHI is striving to help the prospective partnering parties to hold dialogue and set common ground before they eventually start to execute their programs.

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