

The Role of Universities in Community Development through Social Innovation (A Case Study of Co-Operative University, Thanlyin)

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Abstract— This study investigates the extent of social innovation support unit (SISU) of Co-operative University, Thanlyin which will create a positive impact for the community and how theories of community development and social innovation can be applied in the universities' organizational dynamics. There are too many people who face social challenges in the community such as jobless, disability barriers, street children, risk and vulnerability, gender issues, low education, environmental pollution, etc. University students and young people can play a role in helping solve these challenges. Thus, it is important that universities play a main role in the community to address a lot of social needs and problems as they have more socially responsible and more innovative potential of young and knowledgeable students and educators. Universities can help students by providing and enhancing the knowledge of social innovation to become better problems solvers of future challenges. Social innovation is the most powerful tool to reduce poverty and improve social inclusion for the local areas surrounding universities. Universities committed to social innovation can contribute to community development process by establishing SISU that promotes the development of ideas, solutions to the problems at hand, and collaboration with students, staff and potential industry stakeholders. Therefore, this study was conducted to describe the role of universities in community development, to explore the practices of social innovation done by Co-operative University, Thanlyin, to assess the effects of SISU on community development, and to inform the policy makers through the results of the research. Descriptive analysis and simple random sampling methods which mean a great deal of completion of data collection and to interpret the results for this research were applied. One hundred and forty (140) trainees among SISU users from Co-operative University, Thanlyin in the community were surveyed. Data gathered including the effects of SISU functions of the university on community development. Results indicate that building SISU at universities will be the positive impact for development of the community and for encouragement of the social innovation culture and mind-set in young people. It was also found that SISU team need to provide vocational trainings for generating learning opportunities as well as job opportunities for those who face many social challenges. Hence, the study recommends that every university should provide higher education to the students to achieve not only academic qualification but also the professional and skill development as well as vocational education to the marginalized and disadvantaged people in socially exclusion and in poverty to achieve a unique status in the community. Moreover, universities' leaders should collaborate with external stakeholder partners in tackling social issues in the community.

Key words: Role of universities, community development, social innovation, SISU, marginalized and disadvantaged people

I. INTRODUCTION

The world today is clearly plagued by more problems than historical period. We face a lot of social challenges like never before. Every day we can learn a vast number of threats of global issues from media. Fortunately, universities, institutions, colleges, and vocational trainings schools play an increasing role for nurturing the educated persons and skilled workers to address social needs of community and to support the national socio-economic development.

In Myanmar, there are thousands of graduate students nurtured from many universities. Most of the university offer higher education degrees in terms of academia and some university provide vocational education, human resource development trainings and life-long learning programs as well as students to initiate project that would benefit the society.

Universities have the educators and young knowledgeable students as well as intermediaries in the use of space, trainings, researches, social networks, and socio-economic development for local area. University students and young people can play a role in helping and carrying out social innovation as they can have various potential ideas to assist the community. Hence, universities can take part to meet the social needs of low-income communities face in times of high unemployment in rural community development surrounding the universities.

Therefore, the academics can apply their knowledge and guide the students to assist the community within their ability. These mutual benefits between the university and the community would enlarge the interrelationship between these two entities. Consequently, it will develop the life-long learning process between the academia, students and community.

1.1 Rationale for the Study

South East Asia Social Innovation Network (SEASIN) project led by Glasgow Caledonian University (GCU), UK from 2017 to 2019, one of a number of international projects which focus on the role of universities to support and drive social innovation through knowledge exchange to develop a close community of universities and social innovators that can effect real social change within their communities.

In the project, universities collaboration network have been implementing by eleven universities from Thailand, Malaysia, Cambodia and Myanmar (South East Asia) and Spain, Portugal and Scotland (Europe). Yangon University of Economics (YUE) and Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU) in Myanmar have been participating in this project to undertake social innovation activities by establishing social innovation support unit (SISU) at their universities respectively. Social innovation support unit of Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU

SISU) is currently being carried out social innovation functions that huge efforts are being made to connect academia with society.

Although there are a lot of social innovation programs in Myanmar, they have not yet linked to the role of universities. The works of SEASIN project are carried out as the link between the roles of higher education institutions in community development through social innovation. This is very new project and innovative works for TCU, for community and also for Myanmar.

Most of the researchers who deal with the issues of community development, community work and social empowerment, do not analyze them in relation to the role of higher education (universities). Therefore, this study explored the innovative ways in the practices of TCU SISU to assist community and investigated the effects of TCU SISU on community development.

I sincerely believe that the information through this research will be the positive impact for encouragement of social interactions and social innovation culture and mind-set in young people, help in the building of a new role of the university in the community and the collaboration with external stakeholders for social innovation that encourage students' work-based learning and education, income generating and benefiting the wider community, in turn, enable the future development of nation through social innovation support unit (SISU) of higher education institutions (HEIs).

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To explore the practices of social innovation done by Co-operative University, Thanlyin
- To assess the effects of social innovation support unit of Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU SISU) on community development
- To provide policy makers with relevant information about the contribution of universities to community development via social innovation.

1.3 Methodology

Descriptive analysis method and simple random sampling method were applied in this study to investigate the practices and effects of TCU SISU on community development. The survey team interviewed 140 respondents related to applicability of knowledge and skills, job opportunities and income generating opportunities as well as learning opportunities from vocational trainings conducted by TCU SISU.

Secondary data refers to information collected from reports according to activity plan of TCU SISU from Nov, 2017 to Feb, 2019. Theoretical concepts concerning with role of universities, community development, social innovation are studied through literature review from previous studies in this field on the Internet, reference books, and different researches describe the role of universities in community development and social innovation.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the practices and effects of social innovation support unit (SISU) of Co-operative University, Thanlyin, the role of universities in community development via social innovation and how theories of community development and social innovation can be

applied in the universities' organizational dynamics. The numbers of trainees who have completed the trainings provided by TCU SISU are nearly 230. As they can gain the benefits of applicability of skill, knowledge and attitude obtained from vocational trainings provided by TCU SISU on their employability, 140 respondents who live in rural communities and Co-operative University, Thanlyin are chosen among those trainees according to sample size calculation and collected data with simple random sampling method.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE STUDY

Community development is to support people and community groups to identify and articulate their social needs and social issues and to take practical, collective action to address them. (Dhesi, 2010:705). Natrop (1854-1924) argues that community is impossible without individual as well as individual cannot survive without community, and that education is impossible without interaction of these two subjects. Community development is the work done by community development workers.

The Social Innovation Exchange, for example, emphasizes finding new ways to 'meet pressing unmet needs.' This is echoed by Murray et al. who define social innovations as 'new ideas (products, services and models) that simultaneously meet social needs and create new social relationships or collaborations.'

Universities in community can collaborate better across the region by exchanging of best practice and developing of close partnerships – both formal and informal – between universities and social innovators that can also discover new communities and networks and making a real difference within the communities with social innovation works. (Mark Anderson, 2017).

Waterhouse (2000) gives an interesting example of Derby University is highly sensitive to the community expectations, to be successful collaboration with regional, local, rural and school communities.

III. PRACTICES OF SOCIAL INNOVATION SUPPORT UNIT IN CO-OPERATIVE UNIVERSITY, THANLYIN (TCU SISU)

The vision of Co-operative University, Thanlyin is to nurture the youth to be educated co-operators as well as social business persons with national and social spirit in order to support community development.

3.1 The Role of Co-operative University in Community Development

As the role of universities in community development, firstly, they can address community problems by working to improve education, employment, family income and cultural heritage for sustainable growth in urban and rural areas through research papers. Secondly, they can provide vocational trainings to social exclusion group in community and HRD/ on job trainings (OJT) to enhance knowledge and skills that each employee needs to improve for economic industrial zones. Thirdly, they can play as an intermediary by providing financial support through microfinance projects to rural villages to increase production in agricultural sector. Finally, they can develop embedding social innovation in learning and teaching practices in academic curriculum as a new institutional strategy.

Currently, there are (11) Academic Departments and (3) Administrative Departments in Co-operative University, Thanlyin to offer bachelor, PGD, and master degrees with five major specialization courses and providing diplomas and certificates in vocational / HRD trainings.

As an intermediary coordinator in the provision of a wide range of financial services to poor, Co-operative University, Thanlyin have participated in supporting to villages surrounding university in the Microfinance program of Saemaul Undong Korea project.

Co-operative University, Thanlyin is now participating in SEASIN project, as part of role of university has done SISU activities including workshops, seminars, vocational trainings, waste recycling project to encourage volunteer mind set and generate alternative income to TCU SISU users, in turn, cascade the business ideas and technology by trained students in their respective society and community.

3.2 Social Innovation Support Unit at Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU SISU)

Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU) is currently providing social enterprise management course, one of five major specialization courses for students. SISU is opened to promote social innovation and social enterprise in the community. Thus, SISU is strategically fit with the direction of the university. SISU Management team is organized with four members lead by rector. TCU SISU collaborates with the main eight stakeholders to share social enterprise experience and idea to TCU SISU users, support the project implementation and social innovation in community development.

The physical space, facilities and equipment, SISU class room, meeting space, technological exploration room, hall and theatre, leisure space, and reference books were set up at university for SISU users. From November, 2017 to present, TCU SISU have implemented (25) activities including (1) nylon flower making, (2) basic sewing tailoring, (3) handmade accessories, (4) paper art and craft and (5) nylon basket trainings to the women who living in rural communities, staff and students to create more and better jobs.

“Waste Recycling for Social Innovation” project has been implementing to bring benefits to society due to founder and social innovator of Recycle Myanmar donated recycle-bin to Co-operative University, Thanlyin. It helps to cultivate a sense of responsibility to throw wastes into the bins, to foster the people’s ecological awareness and cleanliness in the campus and reduce the future effects of global warming. Students can gain a wide range of knowledge and skills of social commitment, saving some money from selling waste bottles, donation to charity organizations and can make loans some money for sustainable social supporting in the future and have a positive impact on the world in which we live.

3.3 Effect of Social Innovation Support Unit of Co-operative University, Thanlyin (TCU SISU) on Community Development

As social innovation is being creative and discovering new ways of solving social issues to improve better communities, TCU SISU provided vocational

trainings for 7 times. There are totally 230 number of trainees in TCU SISU from 2017 to 2019.

In this study, the analysis on trainees’ perception on Applicability of Knowledge and Skills, Improve Employability and Income Generating Opportunities and the effects of SISU vocational trainings on Community Development is based on the result of questionnaires. It is a descriptive statistic with a total number of 140 respondents among TCU SISU users. The completed responses 140 (100 %) were analyzed by mean value.

3.3.1 Respondents Profile

In this study, the respondent’s profile were illustrated the following factors; (a) Respondents by Gender, (b) Respondents by Age and (c) Respondents by Current Employment.

(a) Respondents by Gender

TABLE 3.1 RESPONDENTS BY GENDER

Gender	Number of Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Male	2	1.43
Female	138	98.57
Total	140	100%

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

As mentioned in Table (3.1), there are 138 female respondents and two male respondents. The majority of trainees/ alumni are female students, academic and supporting staff, dependent women and young ladies in local community surrounding Co-operative University, Thanlyin since handmade vocational trainings provided by TCU SISU are mainly female occupation.

(b) Respondents by Age Group

Table (3.2) shows the respondents by age group. It is found that half of the sample (50.71 %) is the age group of 21 to 30 followed by 20 % having age of 31 to 40. The age group 10 to 20 has 18 (12.86 %). Minority of respondents are older than 40 years of age. The target group of the trainings conducted by TCU SISU was intended to young people and dependent women from local community surrounding the university.

TABLE 3.2 RESPONDENTS BY AGE GROUP

Age Group	Number of Respondents	
	Number	Percent
10-20	18	12.86
21-30	71	50.71
31-40	28	20.00
41-50	16	11.42
51-60	4	2.86
61+	3	2.14
Total	140	100%

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

(c) Respondents by Current Employment

Table 3.3 shows respondents by current employment status according to survey data. It is found that 60 respondents are working at own business/ self-employment, which accounts for 42.86 % of the whole sample, whilst 32.14 % or 45 respondents are attending at training programmes and university, and 14.29 % or 20 respondents are working at government department and minority of respondents are working at Private Companies and NGOs / INGOs respectively. TCU SISU supported vocational handmade trainings for young ladies and women from five villages to be able to earn extra money from home on the side with current job.

TABLE 3.3 RESPONDENTS BY CURRENT EMPLOYMENT

Employment Type	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Attending Trainings Schools / College / Universities/ Seeking Job	45	32.14
Own Business / Self Employment	60	42.86
NGOs / INGOs	5	3.57
Government Department	20	14.29
Private Companies	10	7.14
Total	140	100 %

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

3.3.2 SISU Vocational Trainings Provided by Co-operative University, Thanlyin

TCU SISU provided the five vocational trainings of Nylon flower-making, Basic Sewing Course, Resin Accessories Making, Paper Art and Crafts, Nylon Basket Making to TCU SISU users such as TCU students and staff and women from five villages near Thanlyin to support the local community development. It can expect that the rural dependent women will create small business at home and cascade their knowledge to other women in their villages for income generation, learning opportunities and job opportunities.

TABLE 3.4 SISU VOCATIONAL TRAININGS PROVIDED BY CO-OPERATIVE UNIVERSITY, THANLYIN

Types of Trainings	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Training on Nylon Flower-Making	45	32.14
Training on Basic Sewing Course	45	32.14
Training on Resin Accessories Making	25	17.86
Training on Paper Art and Crafts	10	7.14
Training on Nylon Basket Making	15	10.71
Total	140	100 %

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

According to Table (3.4), it is found that most of the respondents 45 (32.14 %) each out of 140 respondents from Nylon Flower Making and Basic Sewing Courses due to TCU SISU nurtured more trainees from these two courses, followed by 25 (17.86 %) respondents from Resin Accessories Making training. There are (15) respondents from the training courses on Nylon Basket Making and (10) respondents from Paper Art and Crafts. The purpose of these training courses is to support the local community development through income generation of dependent women and generate alternative income by students and teachers in the university. As the products are very marketable in fashion trends of Myanmar female youths, this will contribute to the development of SMEs by students and staff. TCU SISU has planned to open social enterprise gallery shop to sell handmade products from these trainings at Co-operative University, Thanlyin that can expect to become social entrepreneurial spirits among students and young people.

3.3.3 Trainees' Perception on Applicability of Knowledge and Skills, Improve Employability and Income Generating Opportunities from SISU Vocational Trainings

The mean of the responses for Applicability of Knowledge and Skills, Improve Employability and Income Generating Opportunities from SISU Vocational Trainings are high above the 4.06. According to the survey, it was found that most of the respondents have trainees' retention and support to community needs and applied knowledge, skills and experience obtained from trainings on their job. Therefore, it can be concluded that TCU SISU practical

activities would have a positive and significant effect on trainees' socio-economic progress, earning extra money from home, small business expansion as well as distribution knowledge to others in community. Some evidence has the effect of neutral, it can be assumed that some do not apply the knowledge and skills that they have received from TCU SISU vocational trainings.

TABLE 3.5 TRAINEES' PERCEPTION ON APPLICABILITY OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS; IMPROVE EMPLOYABILITY AND INCOME GENERATING OPPORTUNITIES FROM SISU VOCATIONAL TRAININGS

Sr. No.	Statements	Mean
1	Apply knowledge and experience on current job.	4.02
2	Create innovation on current job by applicability of knowledge and skills.	4.49
3	Improve more knowledge and skills.	3.93
4	Conform to with current job.	3.32
5	Believe on applicability of knowledge and skills come from TCU SISU vocational trainings.	4.40
6	Help support for life career development by knowledge and skills.	4.62
7	Increase more knowledge and skill of arts and crafts for job opportunities in the life time.	4.52
8	Produce handmade items demanded in market.	3.95
9	Generate income with applicability of knowledge and skills.	4.04
10	Enrich market demands and success business.	3.93
11	Continue innovative production in market demanded products by handicraft.	3.92
12	Continue market expanding by handicraft.	3.58
	Weighted average mean	4.06

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

3.3.4 Trainees' Perception on the effects of SISU Vocational Trainings of Co-operative University, Thanlyin on Community Development

The overall weighted average mean of the effects of SISU Vocational Trainings of Co-operative University, Thanlyin on Community Development are high above 4.33. According to survey, the trainees have positive perception on the effects of TCU SISU on community development. SISU give knowledge, skills in hand and then, apply it to earn money, family socio-economic progress, business expansion, and provide employment opportunities for youth in their environment. It can be assumed that providing vocational trainings are the effective ways to be able to carry and fulfill for community needs. It may be concluded that TCU SISU is bringing about a positive change to people and communities by contribution for social welfare.

TABLE 3.6 TRAINEES' PERCEPTION ON THE EFFECTS OF SISU VOCATIONAL TRAININGS OF CO-OPERATIVE UNIVERSITY, THANLYIN ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Sr. No.	Particular	Mean
1	Support to community development through the vocational trainings provided by TCU SISU.	4.72
2	Assume the effective ways to be able to carry and fulfill for community needs.	4.66
3	Improve team work and collaboration skills.	4.90
4	Expand social network.	4.31
5	Give a good business opportunity through social innovation knowledge and thinking.	4.37
6	Support for job opportunities and income generation.	4.23
7	Share knowledge and skill to people who face social challenges in community.	3.92
8	Create learning opportunities for community needs people.	4.91

9	Satisfy knowledge and skills.	4.23
10	Help for marginalized people in community by continuously cascading vocational trainings.	4.37
11	Obtain the concepts of social innovation to address social needs and problems in community.	3.83
12	Participate in addressing social problems with the ways of social innovation by university students and young people.	3.58
13	Assist the sustainable development in community by social innovation ways.	4.24
	Weighted average mean	4.33

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

3.3.5 Multiplier Effects of TCU SISU on Community Development by Trained Trainers

The multiplier effects of TCU SISU cascade the business ideas and technology by trained students and staff in their respective society and community. Such trainings could be given to students, academic and supporting staff and dependent women, who can in turn provide the same training to unemployed people at the local level for providing learning opportunities. (200) trainees could be provided Nylon Flower Making and Basic Sewing Courses by trained trainers of TCU SISU for rural women and young ladies from five villages near university to enhance the income generation.

Majority of the respondents report that they want to share their knowledge and skills with people who face social challenges in community. Moreover, they want to generate learning opportunities with proper guidance and genuine care to achieve a status of being a sensational person for unemployed people, disabled people, street children who face difficulties in society. Therefore, it is concluded that social innovation culture, mind-set, training and learning opportunities and empowering for young people could be supported through social innovation support unit (SISU), in turn; it can embrace social innovation and can help build a new role of the university in the community for sustainable social supporting in the future.

TABLE 3.7 MULTIPLIER EFFECTS OF TCU SISU ON COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT BY TRAINED TRAINERS

Multiplier Effects on Community Development	Respondents	
	Number	Percent
Not yet applied	40	28.57
Job opportunities after training	40	28.57
Income generation at home	40	28.57
Learning opportunities to community	20	14.29
Total	140	100 %

Source: Survey Data (April, 2019)

According to table 3.7, it was found that there are 40 (28.57 %) respondents among 140 respondents have not yet applied the knowledge, skills and experience. They are on the margin of interest and difficult to estimate for their effects of socio-economic progress after the trainings. 100 (71.43 %) respondents apply such knowledge and skills. Thus, they can have more employment opportunities and income generation if they have more applications of their knowledge and skills on their job as well as creation of job opportunities to meet other social needs in their environment.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study primarily examined the practices and effects of TCU SISU with a view to trainees' perception.

All of the vocational trainings to the women, staffs and students are not only to provide the social innovation concepts but also to address the social needs for changing the community and environment.

Results indicate that all functions of TCU SISU are filling a gap in the market with an efficient way for marginalized group in community. They could carry out systematically for university's connectivity technology; connect international organization, a wide range of eco system network. Students, staff and external users are able to create products and search market using SISU facilities, and equipment and apply technical-know-how in their daily lives.

It was found that TCU SISU supported for women, young ladies, students and staff by providing vocational trainings of nylon flowers, nylon basket, and technical know-how of basic sewing, ideas and technology of paper art and crafts and resin crystal handmade accessories to be social business minded persons during higher education and women's regular income by creating their own business in their home.

In addition, students can learn a lot of knowledge, creative thinking, and entrepreneurial spirits from seminars and educational talks and imitate the methods of social enterprises visiting by students. Moreover, TCU could provide higher education to the students as well as vocational education to marginalized people for job opportunities and also encouraging students' work-based learning and education that enable the future development of nation.

Therefore, university leaders can consider the key roles of universities and building of new institution of SISU that committed to social innovation for socially excluded – the marginalized, and disadvantaged people in community with the process of quality assurance for university development and with the collaboration of university community teachers, staff, and students, and external stakeholders' alumni, parents, consultants, academicians, entrepreneurs, employers, NGOs, etc. that will be the positive impact for community.

V. RECOMMENDATION

The study recommends that the contents which will support the community in curriculum should be included when universities' leaders and planners design or redesign or review a set of curriculum. In addition, they should try to make policies attempting to promote high quality researches from university community are widespread in different fields.

Moreover, they should carry out vocational trainings to be continuously opened to enhance the knowledge of social innovation: how to generate ideas, meet the social needs in the society to become better problems solvers of future challenges. Such training courses can be given to students, staff, young people and women, who can in turn provide the same training to marginalized people to improve the local community's socio-economic development.

Also, Academics and NGOs should work together in partnership to carry out seminars and educational talks to increase the knowledge and develop new insight of students and young people in local community. Then, forming of university charity team

should also be required to share opportunities with social spirits in today community and nurture young social entrepreneurs who are keen on social innovation and build their networks for potential collaborations for good.

Every university should provide higher education to the students to achieve not only academic qualification but also the professional and skill development as well as vocational education to the marginalized people in socially exclusion and in poverty to achieve a unique status in the community.

Overall, the study recommends that universities' leaders should build SISU at each university respectively to be beneficial for the community and collaborate with external stakeholders to participate in tackling social issues and in reducing poverty. One positive aspect of the information dissemination in regard to building SISU at universities can affect through policy makers to support partially the economic development of the nation from the multiplier effects of addressing social challenges of the community.

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