

## COVID-19 AND HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: ADDRESSING SUSTAINABLE UNIVERSITY AGENDA THROUGH UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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### ABSTRACT

Operationally, sustainable university must involve three main activities which are administration, education, and research. It must also consider the engagement with local community. University usually uses the medium of outreach programmes to extend sustainability concept towards the local community. However, the concept of University Community Engagement (UCE) can be challenging especially during this Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 gives both positive and negative impacts towards UCE. Global report shows that the effect of Covid-19 on UCE was mainly negative for Asia & Pacific region. Nevertheless, the report only represents the members of the International Associations of Universities (IAU). How about other universities that are not involved in the report? Has their community engagement affected by this pandemic? As one of the universities that are not included in the IAU report, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) can be a good case study. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the impact of Covid-19 towards IIUM's community engagement during and after the pandemic. IIUM has taken progressive approach by inculcating *maqasid shariah* to drive its agenda towards the sustainability of the university. This paper first look at UCE undertaken by IIUM during the Covid-19 pandemic. It then discusses the relationship of *maqasid shariah* to UCE. The collected data on IIUM's UCE projects were analysed using matrices to identify relationships to *maqasid shariah*. This paper concludes with recommendations on linking *maqasid shariah* to UCE post-Covid-19 period. This study oversees how *maqasid shariah* helps in justifying the needs of community engagement programmes conducted by IIUM and may contribute additional insights to the body of knowledge of UCE literature.

Key words: university community engagement, sustainable university, *maqasid shariah*

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### INTRODUCTION

Operationally, sustainable university must involve three main activities which are administration, education, and research. It must also consider its engagement with local community. As an educational institution, it is also important for universities to act as agents in conveying sustainability concept, knowledge, and ideas to the community. Hence, it is important for each university to instil sustainable approach in their mission, vision, and strategy, and to translate these into education delivery as well as community engagement programmes.

University usually uses the medium of outreach programmes to extend sustainability concept towards the local community. Abu Bakar, Syarif & Abdullah (2020) state that university around the world are highly encouraged to participate in University Community Engagement (UCE) and make UCE become part of their primary functions. In Malaysia, the Ministry of Higher Education is also actively propagating UCE among the universities through its Service Learning Malaysia-University for Society initiative, or more popularly known as SULAM. UCE is a mutual process between both universities and communities to establish lasting relationships that later seek for success in both directions.

UCE is also highly related to sustainability agenda. However, every university has its own vision, mission, and capacity on how they will deliver the sustainability ideas to their own communities. For example, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) has taken progressive approach by inculcating *maqasid shariah* to drive its agenda towards sustainability. It is interesting to see and study how *maqasid shariah* can contribute to the success of the sustainable university agenda.

The concept of UCE can be challenging especially during this Covid-19 pandemic, especially when face-to-face and on the ground activities are being restricted. Therefore, this study aims to analyse the impact of Covid-19 towards IIUM community engagement progress during and after the pandemic. This paper will gain reader interest by first giving more understanding on the key terminologies of what are UCE and *maqasid shariah*. It then highlights the findings by other researchers on how Covid-19 pandemic has affected UCE activities. This is followed by descriptions of some examples of UCE undertaken by IIUM during the

Covid-19 pandemic. Next, the relationships between *maqasid shariah* to UCE are highlighted. Finally, the findings will conclude with recommendations on linking *maqasid shariah* to UCE post-Covid-19 period.

## UCE AND MAQASID SYARIAH

In general, ‘community engagement’ often relate to a set of processes facilitated by an organisation, be it governmental, private, or community-based organisation (Fedorowicz, Arena & Burrowes, 2020). It usually occurs when necessary steps or emergent actions are needed. For example, an organisation may utilise community engagement steps to plan how to address rising social problems amongst community, respond to a community well-being development or also as a response to public health or environmental issues. Community engagement can be done as a one-time event, but much more impactful as a long-term engagement.

Community engagement is considered a crucial component during previous disease outbreaks such as the Ebola epidemic. Ebola epidemic outbreak mostly affected African continent which started in Guinea (World Health Organization, 2020). Surge operation from social mobilization team had educate the communities on what Ebola is, and the preventive awareness had been well delivered. But now, the world is facing with Covid-19 pandemic which by classical epidemiological definition from World Health Organization (WHO) website as epidemic that spreads rapidly, occurs worldwide, crossing international boundaries and infect a very large number of people (Kelly, 2011).

The Guidelines for Assessing Community Engagement in Higher Education Institution (HEI) in Malaysia defines community engagement as “a process by which HEI and community build ongoing, permanent relationships and apply collaborative vision to gain mutual benefit”. UCE refers to activities that are conducted by universities by expanding their roles as passive providers for knowledge to active participants, which are the communities. The importance of UCE is even more evident when the Malaysia Ministry of Higher Education began to develop Knowledge Transfer Program (KTP) with research grants allocated to HEI’s researchers who work on projects that involve knowledge transfer to the communities (Ramachandra, Mansor, Anvari & Rahman, 2014). This clearly shows that UCE is given much importance in higher education. Thus, Malaysian HEIs need to employ various mechanisms to promote UCE at different levels and different types of engagement to meet the needs of the communities.

According to Jasser (2005), the meaning of ‘*maqsid*’ (plural: *maqasid*) refers to a purpose, principle, objective, intent, and goal. He added that *shariah* is based on wisdom and supporting people’s welfare for both in this life and the afterlife. Hence, it centres on justice, wisdom, good and mercy. Morales (2015) added that Imam Al-Ghazali has determined the purpose of *shariah* is to connect “*Dini*”, which denotes the matters of hereafter, and “*Duniawi*”, which refers to the purposes pertaining to this world. The discussion of worldly purposes is then divided into five types of purposes or objectives, which are the preservation of faith (*al-Din*), preservation of life (*al-Nafs*), preservation of intellect (*al-Aql*), preservation of property (*al-Mal*) and preservation of progeny (*al-Nasl*). All five purposes are classified into *daruriyat* (necessity), *hajiyyat* (need) and *tahsiniyat* (embellishment). *Daruriyat* means it is a must and basis for the establishment of welfare in this world and the world hereafter in the sense that if it is ignored then the coherence and order cannot be established. This is followed by the *hajiyyat* (need), which is to facilitate life and removing hardship. The last category is *tahsiniyat* (embellishment), which refers to the purpose to beautify life, and to establish ease and facility. Thus, one needs to comprehend the objectives to understand the *shariah* that later allows dynamism, flexibility, and creativity in social policy (Wael, 2004).

As the development of *maqasid shariah* is aimed at the welfare of people in this life, Imam al-Ghazali has indicated that public interest is important as protecting and serving the *shariah* objectives. Imam al-Ghazali stated that *maslahah* (public interest) is the preservation of the *shariah* objectives which covers all mentioned principles, preservation of faith, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. *Maqasid shariah* indicators are to achieve individual and public interests (Abubakar, 2016).

As *maqasid shariah* is closely related to public interest/communities, it is thus important to ensure UCE also address the objectives of *shariah*.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To analyse the relationship of IIUM’s UCE during the Covid-19 pandemic, information on IIUM’s UCE during the period was obtained from the IIUM Board of Governors reports. These reports were compiled by the IIUM Office for Strategy and Institutional Change and are available publicly on IIUM website.

The information obtained was then analysed using matrices to determine the alignment with the components of *maqasid shariah*. Two criteria were applied in this analysis which were keyword and context, as depicted in Table 1 and Table 2 below.

**Table 1: The Keyword Criteria Used to Determine Alignment of UCE to *Maqasid Shariah***

Maqasid Shariah	Keyword
Faith	Spiritual, religion, suicide, and belief
Life	Individual life, population, well-being
Intellect	Education system and technological advancement
Posterity	Social system
Property	Economic and management system

**Table 2: The Context Criteria Used to Determine Alignment of UCE to *Maqasid Shariah***

Maqasid Shariah	Context
Faith	Safeguard the religion by comply the principle of Islam and protecting it, maintaining a good spiritual
Life	Preserving the life refer to lawful action which is eligible to do by sustenance for example food, shelter, marriage, and others
Intellect	Preserving the intellectual by protecting human intellect and mind from any element that could diminish mental ability. It could be preserved by education system and technological advancement
Posterity	Preserving posterity element by determine the social system and prevent the confusion in social through system
Property	Preserving property element by protection of property or wealth associated with economic activities

## IIUM UCE AMIDST COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Covid-19 gives both positive and negative impacts towards university community engagement. According to the International University Bureau in its IAU Global Survey Report on the impact of covid-19 on higher education, the effect of Covid-19 on UCE was mainly negative for Asia & Pacific region (Marinori, Land & Jensen (2020). Nevertheless, the survey only represents the members of International Associations of Universities (IAU). But what about other universities that are not included in the report? Has their community engagement affected by this pandemic? As one of the universities that are not included in the IAU report, International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) can be a good case study. Moreover, by taking example of UCE undertaken by IIUM, the relationships between *maqasid shariah* and UCE may be seen more clearly especially on how *maqasid shariah* can impact the development of UCE in the future.

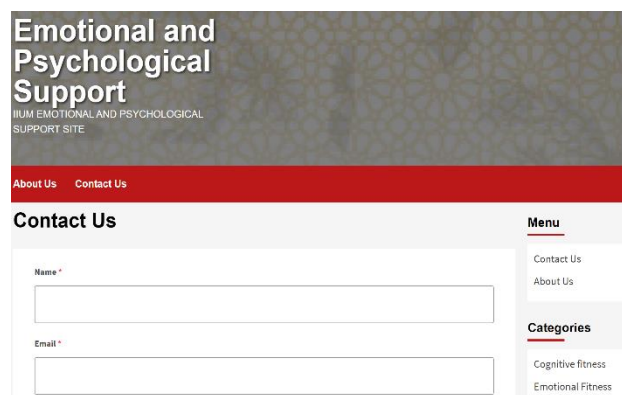
International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) is a public university in Malaysia with its main campus situated in Gombak, Selangor. IIUM is steadfast in its pursuit of sustainability and in working with the communities. Recently, in conjunction with the United Nations Higher Political Forum in New York, IIUM has won the Green Gown International Sustainability Institution of the Year Award. IIUM, thus, became the first university in Asia and in the Muslim world to win such prestigious award. The award

was a result of IIUM's intensified and long-term commitment to inculcate sustainable development approach in its organisational structures and practices in line with *maqasid shariah*.

During Covid-19 pandemic, the Malaysian government has implemented Movement Control Order (MCO) beginning from 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020 and Gombak was listed as a red zone. As a result, many activities had to be postponed or modified, including teaching and learning, and UCE. During this time, IIUM had adopted Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) where classes were carried out virtually to replace normal face-to-face classes. At the same time, many UCE programmes that IIUM has outlined and planned to execute were postponed. Nevertheless, being the sustainable university that it is, IIUM continue to explore ways to engage with communities despite the MCO restrictions.

IIUM was quick to respond to Covid-19 pandemic by disseminating current updates of Covid-19 and providing many guidelines and regulations for all IIUM community to follow. Even though, campuses were closed, the wellbeing of the students and staffs were of utmost priority including their mental health wellbeing. IIUM quickly setup emotional and psychological support group spearheaded by the IIUM Mental Health & Psychosocial Team (IMPACT). IIUM students who remained on campus during this pandemic were get mental-health related support from IMPACT. IIUM also aspires for IMPACT to expand its services to the surrounding communities as well as the nation. IMPACT has since taken the initiative to collaborate with the National Security Council in addressing mental health issue post-Covid-19 period.

Figure 1: IMPACT Website



Another UCE by IIUM during the Covid-19 pandemic was to develop the Medibot solution to be deployed in hospitals and health facilities. IIUM Centre for Unmanned Technology (CUTE), which is under the Kulliyah (Faculty) of Engineering, had invented a prototype robot on wheels, equipped with a camera, a screen, and a temperature check device. Medibot can make the rounds in hospital wards to check on COVID-19 patients so that health workers' risk of infection can be reduced. Medibot was successful and it had made news in 20 countries.

Figure 2: Medibot Prototype



Another Covid-19 solution developed by IIUM was the myTrace smartphone application, which was for deployed to facilitate contact tracing as well notifying public of Covid-19 locational risk. The application was developed by IIUM Advanced Technologies Sdn Bhd with funding came from the Government of Malaysia.

**Figure 3: myTrace Mobile Application**



IIUM also supported the front liners by setting up a sewing brigade to manufacture personal protective equipment (PPE). Organised by IIUM Academic Staff Association, both staffs and students volunteered to form a brigade and worked together to produce PPE for front liners. The PPEs were then distributed to various health facilities throughout the Peninsular Malaysia as well as in Sabah.

**Figure 4: The IIUM PPEs Sewing Brigade**



Realising the difficulties faced by the IIUM and its surrounding communities due to the movement restrictions, IIUM swiftly arranged for donation drives and collaborations with various parties and non-governmental organisations to fund the cost of food and basic necessities which were distributed to IIUM students and affected surrounding communities. Food and basic necessities were distributed to the poor in the surrounding villages and the marginalised such as the Orang Asli. Apart from food and basic necessities, IIUM also donated personal laptops to its disadvantaged students as well as subsidised internet data plan.



Figure 5: Food Distribution for Students in Mahallah (Hostel)



Figure 6: Laptop Handover Ceremony

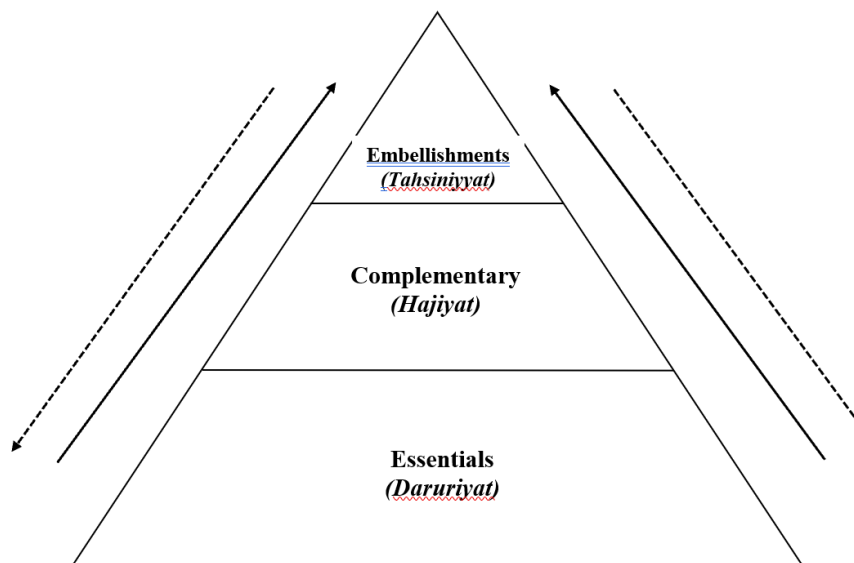


The needs of communities are always changing over time and space (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007). Thus, during Covid-19 pandemic, rather than halting all its UCE, IIUM introduces flexibility in its UCE in line with the current or most pressing needs of the communities. During Covid-19 pandemic, the main aim for MCO regulation such as physical distancing is to safe life by minimising physical contact between people. The high infection rate due to this pandemic has pushed the need to safeguarding life as a main priority. This is in line with the objectives of *shariah* that already includes preservation of life. Thus, IIUM community realise their responsibilities to tackle the *maslahah* of *ummah* by using UCE platform and diversifying their outreach programmes depending on the situation at the time.

#### DISCUSSION: THE ALIGNMENT OF MAQASID SHARIAH AND IIUM UCE

Dusuki and Abdullah (2007) have made long discussion on how *maqasid shariah* together with *maslahah* can be seen in homogenous paradigm. In their study, they highlighted the needs of *maqasid shariah* implementation in corporate social responsibilities (CSR) by organisations. Although CSR and UCE have different literal meaning but both have the same application and objectives in serving good to the local community. Hence, their idea seems appropriate to be used to discuss *maqasid shariah* from UCE's point of view. They highlighted that Islam places more emphasis on collective public interest rather than individual interest. This is depicted by the *Maslahah* Pyramid framework of *tahsiniyat*, *hajiyyat* and *daruriyat*.

Figure 8: The Maslahah Pyramid



Source: Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007

The *maslahah* framework can act as a guideline and ethical filter mechanism while implementing community engagement programmes (Dusuki and Abdullah, 2007). The three levels of judgement provide different degrees of importance but mutually dependent and interrelated with each other. As mentioned before, the needs of community can change, hence this framework provides a mechanism for adapting to the changes. The arrows pointing upward and downward indicate that there are flexibility and change mechanism during the decision-making process. In other words, depending on various circumstances that arise amongst the public, any element of *maslahah* may be elevated upward or pushed downward as long as it is within the framework of *shariah* and not vice versa.

The *daruriyat* (essential) level represents the most fundamental needs to be fulfilled rather than the next two levels. Hence, as the arrow going upward, the decision-making degree will be less fundamental even though more perfection and society's wellbeing will be attained. It assumes that as the basic needs of one individual have been fulfilled, they will strive for the next level of achieving perfection. Nevertheless, Islamic principle of motivation always encouraged the Muslim to continuously strive for success in this world and hereafter (Dusuki & Abdullah, 2007).

The dynamism of the *Maslahah* Pyramid may assist any decision-making process that relate to public wellbeing depending on the context, space, and time. For example, nowadays the situation changes due to Covid-19 pandemic and universities are encouraged to respond to the new *maslahah* accordingly. At IIUM, the university management realigned the University's roles within the society as far as these do not contradict the principles of *shariah* and in line with its vision and missions of Islamic and sustainable university.

IIUM's UCE during Covid-19 pandemic were strongly grounded on the *maqasid shariah*. The following table shows the relationship of IIUM's UCE to the objectives of *maqasid shariah*. In line with the priority of saving lives during the pandemic period, many of the IIUM's UCE during the period is in alignment with the *maqasid shariah's* objective of preservation of life.

Table 3: Alignment of IIUM UCE with *Maqasid Shariah*

Programme	Relevance	Objective of <i>Maqasid Shariah</i>
IIUM Mental Health & Psychosocial Team (IMPACT)	Due to Covid-19, many students need to limit their movement and stay inside room. This might affect their mental health and some severe cases might trigger suicide thought due to low mental support from others. Hence, IMPACT aims to provide mental health support through online platform.	Preservation of Life Preservation of Faith

Programme	Relevance	Objective of <i>Maqasid Shariah</i>
Medibot	Covid-19 is a fatal virus if not treated seriously. Medibot is an advanced technology prototype robot which is useful for limiting health worker physical contact with Covid-19 patients.	Preservation of Life Preservation of Intellect
myTrace	A technology advancement that helps Malaysia Government in COVID-19 contact tracing. Thus, it also helps individual life to be more aware.	Preservation of Life Preservation of Intellect
PPEs Sewing Brigade	The needs for PPEs are crucial during pandemic period due to sudden increasing demand of PPEs by health workers. PPE is a health preventive measure when health workers need to handle Covid-19 cases.	Preservation of Life
Food distribution to students and communities	Food is the basic needs of human life.	Preservation of Life
IIUM Covid-19 Relief Fund: Laptop and data plan for needy students	To make sure the continuation of students' online study	Preservation of Intellect

IIUM understands that in times of emergency, preservation of life become the necessity (*daruriyat*). Hence, as can be seen from Table 3, majority of the highlighted UCE by IIUM during the Covid-19 pandemic was focussed on the preservation of life. However, being the sustainable university that it is, IIUM continue to adopt sustainable approaches in its UCE whenever possible during the pandemic. For instance, food distributed to students and communities were packed in biodegradable containers. IIUM was also concerned about sustainable consumption and ensured that food distributed was not in excess to eliminate wastage.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has demonstrated that in changing community needs, universities can, and should, adapt their roles in serving the communities. In the case of IIUM, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the University did not halt its UCE but explored other ways and means to engage with communities. Being guided by the *maqasid shariah*, IIUM discharged its duties in supporting the communities during the pandemic by focusing on the need to preserve lives. At the same time, sustainable approaches were incorporated where possible to ensure its sustainability agenda remains.

The dimensions of UCE and *maqasid shariah* share common objective, which is to achieve benefits and prevent harms in society. Although UCE is a voluntary basis, in Islam, the implementation of UCE is an obligation for every Muslims who are the *khalifah* of the *ummah*. It is thus recommended that universities develop their UCE in line with the objectives of *maqasid shariah* since it can be a tool to guide the development of UCE within the framework of *shariah* and identify the objectives that need to be prioritised depending on the situation at hand.

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