Tsunami Survivors Look to Utilize Overseas Education to Spur Social Development at Home

Jakarta. In recent years, Indonesia has steadily made its mark on the global stage through stable economic growth and its vast pool of natural resources, not to mention an ever-increasing quality of life for its massive population of over 250 million people.

But for the country to fully realize its great potential, it must also seize on opportunities currently at hand.

Eight students from Aceh, Sumatra, are living examples of how investing in people and education can pave the way for a bright future.

For eight years, Switzerland-based Traficura Foundation has partnered with the United World College of South East Asia (UWCSEA) in Singapore to offer full scholarships to young survivors from the 2004 tsunami that devastated Aceh and which killed hundreds of thousands of people.

After graduating from UWCSEA's International Baccalaureate (IB) program, students typically go on to pursue higher education – most of them embarking on an even farther journey to the United States.

Lailul Ikram took his first step on foreign soil in large part due to the scholarship, which he received back in 2008.

The opportunity to study abroad and the quality education Lailul received instilled in him and his fellow scholars an important inclination towards community involvement, something that has stayed with them ever since, he says.

Lailul Ikram at the Traficura-UWCSEA Scholars Reunion Event on Wednesday (05/07). (JG Photo/Sheany)
Ikram, who is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at Columbia University in New York, has gained real-world experience working at organizations such as the United Nations and Citibank.

"It’s education with and for a purpose [...] It’s about doing all this with a purpose of giving back to society and contributing to thriving communities and thriving society developments in their own countries," Vincent Faber, executive director of the Trafifgura Foundation, told the Jakarta Globe on Thursday (06/07).

During a scholars’ reunion event on Wednesday, International Enterprise (IE) Singapore chief executive Lee Ark Boon said the program represents what can be achieved when the private sector works together with the community and represents an embodiment of the strong bilateral relations between Indonesia and Singapore.

“This scholarship plays an immensely important role in continuing to ensure good relations between the two countries,” Lee said.

In the future, Lee said his organization could also make contributions in the form of vocational training in Jakarta.

IE is a key organization under Singapore’s Ministry of Trade and Industry, which works on facilitating overseas growth of Singapore-based companies and promoting international trade.

Paying It Forward

“You can do a lot for your country [...] Most importantly, you have a responsibility after getting such a good education to pay it forward,” Tan Chin Hwee, chief executive of Trafifgura Asia Pacific, told scholars during the reunion event.

The young scholars not only showed great interest in returning home to Indonesia after receiving their degrees, but have already worked on projects with the mission of contributing to the development of local communities.

In 2011, Ikram started an organization to help women ex-rebels of the Free Aceh Movement (GAM). Microloans were offered to the women to allow them to create authentic merchandise to support themselves.

Rossa Darni, currently pursuing her master’s degree in International Education Development at Columbia University, said she wants to work to ensure equality in education across the archipelago.

“I want to make sure that equality and access is fairly distributed across Indonesia. That’s what I’m going to do,” Rossa said.
Rossa said education is not all about report cards but is rather comprised of a combination between giving back and being active; values she wants to share with other young students across the country.

"After acquiring those skills, they will indeed return to Indonesia to be positive contributors to the development of Indonesia [...] Those kids have the right set of values," Faber said.

Amirah Fadhilina, who graduated in May with a double major in Human Development and Social Relations, Women’s Gender and Sexuality Studies from Earlham College in Indiana, said Indonesian students who study abroad should return home and support local youth.

"I think it’d be great for us to come back at some point in the future and interact with the youth in Indonesia [...] maybe teach, maybe work, you can do whatever you want as long as you don’t forget that you’re coming from somewhere – which is home," Amirah said.

**Traficgura Foundation**

Traficgura Foundation was established in 2007 as an independent philanthropic organization in Geneva, Switzerland, and aims to assist the commodity trading company Traficgura to realize its social responsibilities as one of the largest multinationals in the world.

Since 2008, the foundation has donated $48 million and worked with various organizations to improve socio-economic conditions for vulnerable communities across the globe.

In Indonesia, Traficgura Foundation is working on partnering with local organizations to provide vocational training for young people in Jakarta.

"The first step out of poverty, delinquency, drug addiction is to find your place in society. That place you can find only if you have a productive, fruitful role in society," Faber said.

He added that vocational training underlines the idea that you can turn people from tax-consumers to taxpayers.

"What I mean by that is that when youths are disengaged, they are a burden to society. They use tax money in terms of police, social and prison cost. By shaping them into people that contribute to society, they will make positive contributions," Faber said.
In the future, Trafigura Foundation said it will work closely with the Indonesian government to guarantee the success of its vocational programs. Faber told the Jakarta Globe that it is important for the "state and corporations to work hand in hand."

The foundation aims to kick start a concrete project to promote fuel efficiency, for example, as part of its strategic corporate philanthropic mission.

"We want to work on themes that are of relevance to the industry and sector in which Trafigura operates," said Faber, adding that the foundation works to limit negative impacts on the environment and to improve working conditions and public health.

In his opinion, while the economic, social and environmental agenda may not always be synchronized, Faber believes intelligence and sensitivity to the issues at hand can play a great role in making a positive impact. But while time is of the essence, Faber notes that the “process must not be rushed.”

“To find the time, to find the right compromises and adjustments between conflicting interests […] we have to start working now and we have to be patient,” Faber said.