

Empowering Local Communities Based on Traditional Wisdom and Cultural Ethics in the Digital Era to Support Sustainability in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract

This report discusses a community engagement initiative focused on empowering local communities in Brunei Darussalam by integrating traditional wisdom, cultural ethics, and digital literacy. The program aims to strengthen sustainable practices, enhance socio-economic resilience, and preserve cultural heritage while preparing communities for the opportunities and challenges of the digital era. All service participants from 2 (two) countries, Indonesia and Brunei, taking locations in Kampong Ayer, Pasar Gadong and EnergyHub Dermaga Diraja Brunei Darussalam. The integration of traditional wisdom with modern digital skills proved effective in enhancing community resilience. Participants demonstrated a strong interest in preserving cultural identity while embracing technology for economic and educational benefits.

Keywords - traditional wisdom, cultural ethics, digital era

Abstrak

Laporan ini membahas sebuah inisiatif pengabdian kepada masyarakat yang berfokus pada pemberdayaan komunitas lokal di Brunei Darussalam melalui pengintegrasian kearifan tradisional, etika budaya, dan literasi digital. Program ini bertujuan untuk memperkuat praktik berkelanjutan, meningkatkan ketahanan sosial ekonomi, serta melestarikan warisan budaya sekaligus mempersiapkan komunitas menghadapi peluang dan tantangan di era digital. Seluruh peserta pengabdian dari 2 (dua) negara, Indonesia dan Brunei, melaksanakan kegiatan di Kampong Ayer, Pasar Gadong, dan EnergyHub Dermaga Diraja Brunei Darussalam. Integrasi antara kearifan tradisional dan keterampilan digital modern terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan ketahanan komunitas. Para peserta menunjukkan minat yang kuat untuk menjaga identitas budaya sambil memanfaatkan teknologi demi keuntungan ekonomi dan pendidikan.

Kata Kunci – kearifan tradisional, etika budaya, era digital

INTRODUCTION

Brunei Darussalam is a small yet wealthy nation located in Southeast Asia, situated on the northwest coast of Borneo Island. It is bordered entirely by the Malaysian state of Sarawak and has a coastline facing the South China Sea. The country covers an area of about 5,765 km² and is uniquely divided into two separate regions: the western part, which hosts most of the population and government centers, and the eastern part (Temburong District), which consists largely of tropical rainforests and mountainous terrain. Brunei has a hot, humid tropical climate with high rainfall throughout the year (Loo, 2009). Within the next five years, His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di Pertuan of Negara Brunei Darussalam intend to make Brunei Darussalam a Smart Nation. In its Digital Economy Master Plan 2020-2025, the country aims to integrate ICT into society, economy and governance (Mohd, 2023).

The population of Brunei is around 466,000–468,000 people. A majority of the population is ethnically Malay, including several subgroups such as Kedayan, Belait, Tutong, and Dusun. There are also Chinese communities and other indigenous groups. The official religion is Islam, and most citizens are Muslim, making Islamic values central to Bruneian cultural and social life. The official language is Malay, though English is widely used in education, business, and daily communication (Wafa, 2024).

Brunei is a sultanate with an absolute monarchy, where the Sultan holds full authority as both head of state and head of government. The capital city is Bandar Seri Begawan, which serves as the hub for administration, economy, and culture. Brunei gained full independence from the United Kingdom on January 1, 1984, after being a British protectorate for nearly a century.

Economically, Brunei relies heavily on its oil and natural gas resources, which contribute the vast majority of government revenue, exports, and GDP. These abundant energy resources have enabled Brunei to maintain one of the highest standards of living in Southeast Asia. The government provides extensive public welfare services, including free education, subsidized healthcare, and various social benefits. However, the heavy dependence on oil and gas makes the economy vulnerable to global price fluctuations. As a result, Brunei is working to diversify its economy into areas such as tourism, the halal industry, modern agriculture, and Islamic finance.

Culturally, Brunei emphasizes the philosophy of Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB) or Malay Islamic Monarchy, which shapes the nation's identity and governance. Traditional Malay customs, Islamic practices, and royal institutions play an important role in daily life. The country is known for its peaceful environment, political stability, and very low crime rate.

Overall, Brunei Darussalam is a small but prosperous nation with strong cultural traditions, a stable political system, and significant natural resources. Its main challenges include economic diversification and long-term sustainable resource management (Deterding & Ho, 2021).

Brunei Darussalam's economy is based on the oil and gas sector, with a national income that is among the highest in the world. Its currency is the Brunei Dollar, which is valued at the same level as the Singapore Dollar. In addition to its focus on the oil and gas sector, the Brunei government is seeking to diversify its economic resources through efforts to increase trade and industry.

Brunei Darussalam, known for its rich cultural heritage and strong traditional values, faces rapid changes driven by digital transformation. While digital advancements offer significant opportunities for economic growth and social development, they also present challenges, particularly in maintaining cultural identity and ensuring equitable access (Lopes, 2021).

Traditional wisdom and cultural ethics play a central role in community life in Brunei. These values serve as a foundation for sustainable development, especially when aligned with recent technological advancements. Furthermore, integrating cultural preservation with digital competencies is crucial in enhancing community resilience and ensuring that traditional knowledge is not lost in the digital era (Fitriadi et al, 2025). This is imperative as the world is in the middle of a transition, with more efforts being put into materialising the vision 2030 via the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (Bin Nur Azalie, 2025).

This community engagement program aims to bridge the gap between traditional wisdom and modern digital skills. By empowering local communities through education, capacity building, and cultural revitalization, the initiative supports the nation's long-term sustainability goals and aligns with global trends in digital inclusion and community empowerment (Human-centricity, Sustainability and Resilience in Asia. (2024).

METHODS

1. Community Workshops

A series of workshops were conducted covering digital literacy, online safety, sustainable resource management, and cultural heritage preservation practices. These approaches follow established frameworks for community empowerment in Southeast Asia, where digital literacy plays a transformative role in socio-economic advancement

2. Focus Group Discussions

Discussion sessions were held with village leaders, elders, youth groups, and local artisans to gather insights on cultural values and sustainability practices. This aligns with emphasis on the importance of community-based knowledge exchange in preserving traditional wisdom.

3. Digital Storytelling Training

Participants learned how to document cultural practices through photography, videography, and social media content creation. Digital storytelling has been increasingly recognized as an effective tool for cultural transmission in rural communities.

4. Collaboration with Local Institutions

The program partnered with cultural associations, educational institutions, and local government bodies to enhance program relevance and support. Similar models have been effective in strengthening cultural preservation frameworks in Brunei.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This community service activity carried out by the Community Service Team from the UNWIKU Faculty of Economics and Business was carried out in November 2025, which was attended by the owner and all service participants from 2 (two) countries, Indonesia and Brunei, taking locations in Kampong Ayer, Pasar Gadong and EnergyHub Dermaga Diraja Brunei Darussalam.

The integration of traditional wisdom with modern digital skills proved effective in enhancing community resilience. Participants demonstrated a strong interest in preserving cultural identity while embracing technology for economic and educational benefits, echoing findings by Abdul Rahman (2021) on cultural sustainability in Brunei

The results of the community service activities carried out are expected to increase the knowledge and insight of participants into the two countries, including:

1. Increased digital literacy among community members

Community members demonstrate improved abilities to use digital technologies, including mobile devices, educational apps, communication platforms, and digital documentation tools. This enhanced literacy better equips them to navigate challenges and opportunities in the digital era.

2. Strengthened awareness of sustainable practices rooted in traditional knowledge

There is a heightened awareness of sustainability principles grounded in local traditional wisdom, such as responsible natural resource use, community-based environmental management, and cultural values that promote long-term ecological balance.

3. Enhanced capacity for cultural documentation using digital tools

The community's skills in documenting cultural heritage—such as traditions, customs, folklore, cuisine, and crafts—have improved through the use of digital cameras, archiving applications, social media platforms, and digital storytelling techniques.

4. Greater community engagement and participation in sustainability initiatives

Community participation has increased in various sustainability-related activities, including environmental programs, cultural training, creative economy initiatives, and community-led development efforts. This engagement fosters stronger ownership and collaboration.

5. Improved intergenerational collaboration

Collaboration between younger and older generations has strengthened, especially in the exchange of traditional knowledge, joint use of digital tools for cultural preservation, and shared activities that integrate cultural heritage with modern innovation.



Figure 1.

Implementation at Kampong Ayer



Figure 2.

Implementation at EnergyHub Dermaga Diraja

This community service activity is expected to provide input to improve knowledge, understanding, skills, and culture for business actors in both countries so that they are better prepared to face competition in the digital era.

CONCLUSION

Brunei Darussalam is a small but highly prosperous nation in Southeast Asia located on the island of Borneo. It operates under an absolute monarchy led by a Sultan, and its society is strongly shaped by the values of Malay Islamic Monarchy (MIB). The country's wealth comes primarily from its abundant oil and natural gas resources, allowing Brunei to provide strong public services and maintain social and economic stability.

However, its heavy reliance on the energy sector poses long-term challenges, prompting the government to pursue economic diversification in areas such as tourism, the halal industry, and Islamic finance. Overall, Brunei is a stable, wealthy country with a strong cultural identity, but it must continue

developing new sectors to ensure sustainable economic growth in the future. The study of local Islamic wisdom in halal tourism destinations also provides a comprehensive analysis of how cultural attractions, unique architecture, and the implementation of Islamic sharia values increase tourists' return intentions and strengthen socio-cultural responsibility in Muslim-majority countries (Alam et al, 2025).

This community service program successfully empowered local communities in Brunei Darussalam by blending traditional wisdom with digital-era capacities. The outcomes demonstrate that cultural ethics can coexist with modern technology to support both social and economic sustainability.

Future initiatives should expand digital infrastructure access, strengthen intergenerational digital mentoring, and integrate cultural-based digital curricula into local schools. With continued commitment, Brunei's cultural heritage can flourish within an inclusive and sustainable digital future.

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