

How to sustain social campaign programs

Social campaigns always attract public interest, as they directly impact a nation and, more importantly, its people. An example of a social campaign with a positive impact is the European Union-funded Minimum Service Standard Capacity Development Program (2014-2017), which promoted equal access to high quality basic education across Indonesia.

In the program, international donors supported the implementing partners in the country to ensure its success and advocate social change through the policy-making process.

However, despite tangible evidence of the impact and achievements of such programs, questions linger about their sustainability once the donors stop funding them. Sustainability is understood not only as a continuation of the program but also its impacts on beneficiaries, particularly after the donors pull out.

Reality shows that the termination of donor support is often followed by a setback in the program in terms of achievements and impact. In the case of the aforementioned EU-sponsored program, its completion was followed by the issuance of Ministerial Decree No. 32/2018 on the technical standards of minimum service standard, which some education practitioners deem a step back from the impacts expected to be achieved through the previous Ministerial Decree No. 23/2013.

The 2018 decree focuses only on input factors, such as the provision of school facilities and learning equipment, whereas the program also entailed standards for the teaching-learning process, including the quality of teaching staff, curriculums and school management.

Sustaining social campaign programs requires an understanding of their background and origins. Many such programs were initiated by the donor organizations to support local implementing parties in Indonesia



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— be it the government or non-government actors — to achieve national goals. A donor and its implementing partner must be fully aware of and in agreement about their respective roles and responsibilities.

By default, donor organizations support their local partners due to shared areas of work and goals. It is in donor organizations' interest to ensure that the programs run and that the funds do not end up in the wrong hands.

On the other hand, local partners need to realize that support from donor organizations will someday end. They must eventually be able to stand on their own feet to maintain, if not increase, the impacts, for the benefit of Indonesia. It is important to acknowledge that they own the social campaign programs and bear the responsibility to sustain the impacts of those programs and improve them. Thus, they need to be committed and find answers to this sustainability question.

Both sides must discuss the sustainability aspect early on, namely when designing a program, and prior to the provision of grants. Clarifying the sustainability question is commonly stipulated as a requirement by donor organizations for grant approval, but local partners oftentimes give normative, if not unreasonable, answers.

At this early stage, local partners need to develop and present a clear plan for a campaign program's implementation beyond the donor-funded period. The plan shall demonstrate the ability to sustain the financial, institutional and programmatic aspects of the project.

In terms of funding, for example, a diversification of funding

shall enable the local implementing partners to continue a program and maintain its impacts beyond any termination of donor support.

The second aspect can be addressed by developing partnerships with diverse organizations working for the same goal. These must be pursued despite the difficulty in finding local sources of funding, either from the government or private companies.

Lastly, to ensure the programmatic sustainability, stakeholder engagement will provide long-term support and ensure relevance with regard to actual needs.

This initial phase must then be strengthened with a constant review of the program impacts and sustainability throughout the implementation phase through regular monitoring, which also facilitates necessary adjustments to address challenges and various shortcomings. More importantly, regular monitoring can strengthen the program's sense of belonging by reaffirming the local implementing partners' commitment and responsibility.

Finally, once support from donors ends, an evaluation is imperative to determine further measures to ensure the program's sustainability and lasting impact. The evaluation should compare the outcome of the program with its expected impacts.

With particular regard to the program's sustainability, the evaluation will also measure if the local partner's plan to continue the program is feasible and how it will run in the current and actual situation.

For the greater good, donor organizations and their local counterparts have to ensure sustainability of social campaign programs and their impacts on the country and its people.

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