

# Innovating legal education: Experiences from Indonesia

Focusing on five concrete themes: legal reasoning, ethics, law in context, gender, and teaching methods, is an effective way to increase the legal education sector's contribution in strengthening the rule of law.

Demand-driven innovation of legal education promotes sustainable changes that match local realities. To realize a demand-driven collaborative process, projects need to provide for adequate facilitation support.

Innovating law courses and creating a network among law lecturers for mutual support, inspiration, and innovation are long-term processes. A three-year project offers a good start for this or to reinforce existing efforts.

Effectiveness of an education innovation process depends on support from many local and national stakeholders, most of all university leadership. Any education innovation initiative to be sustainable would ensure their systematic involvement in the process.

In recent decades, Indonesia has made important progress in becoming a country governed by the rule of law. However, many groups of citizens still face challenges in having their rights honored and finding justice. This situation poses an important question for those preparing law graduates for their role in the legal system: How can legal education become more relevant to supporting the rule of law? Furthermore, how can it provide the legal services required by Indonesian citizens.



Photo: M. Riadhussiyah.

To adequately respond to this question, university lecturers and leadership face considerable constraints. Large numbers of students with few qualified staff make effective teaching a challenge. Universities outside of Java also struggle with limited classroom space and other facilities. In addition, lecturers have to organize their teaching within the restrictions of massive bureaucracy from both the Ministry of Education and their own universities.

In light of these limitations, seven law faculties and one institution specializing in development processes from Indonesia and the Netherlands created the SLEEI (Strengthening Legal Education in Eastern Indonesia) project building on previous Indonesia-Netherlands collaborative projects in the legal education field. Realizing that systems and innovation conditions greatly differ from one law faculty to another, SLEEI sought a tailor-made approach to innovation rather than promoting an existing one-size-fits-all models. SLEEI focused on course development and teaching methods in order to provide graduates with the key legal skills required by the labor market, as well as an awareness of the ethical and inequality/gender issues involved in the problems they address.



**SLEEI**  
Strengthening Legal Education  
in Eastern Indonesia

**SLEEI is a partnership involving:** University of Mataram in Lombok, Wira Wacana Christian University in Waingapu, Artha Wacana Christian University in Kupang, and Pattimura University in Ambon. Expertise and coaching were provided by the Van Vollenhoven Institute of Leiden University and the Royal Tropical Institute in Amsterdam in collaboration with Jentera Law School in Jakarta and Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta. The project was solely conducted in the Indonesian language. SLEEI ran for three years (June 2019-2022) with funding from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs through NUFFIC's Orange Knowledge Programme.

## The five focus areas

During the initial formulation stage of the project, SLEEI partners decided to focus on strengthening legal education around the elements or themes that would provide the best entry points in preparing graduates for professional challenges and to contribute to the rule of law (Box 1). Of the five themes chosen, four address perceived weaknesses in educational content. The fifth aimed to modernize the educational approach, making it more interactive and problem-oriented. With these choices, SLEEI benefitted greatly from experiences of past projects in Indonesia and from careful analysis of problems in the current legal education system in Indonesia.

*Box 1: Five entry points for addressing rule of law in legal education:*

**Legal reasoning** is key in achieving the rule of law's cornerstone of finding a balance between legal certainty, justice, and public purpose. It refers to the systematic and transparent process of interpretation of law by legal professionals, which reflects this balance and leads to careful decisions.

**Legal ethics** creates awareness among students about the importance of accountability of public officials when implementing the law, and encourages students to act accordingly. Accountability is an essential pillar for ensuring healthy and good governance that is not inhibited by corruption.

**Law and gender** builds understanding among students that the legal system does not treat all of its citizens equally. Focusing mainly on the position of women, this theme makes students reflect critically on formal and substantive discrimination in the legal system and how this can be overcome.

**Law in local context** challenges students to include local conditions, customs, and rules in their legal considerations and decisions. It also encourages them to implement and translate national regulations in a way that is consistent with local normative systems, thus contributing to social justice locally.

**Interactive teaching** is crucial if the above forms of awareness and legal skills are to be achieved. As is evidenced across all forms of teaching, through interactive teaching students become active learners, are encouraged to develop their problem analysis skills, and are urged to be open to and able to handle different perspectives.



Maritime Law is important in the local context of Eastern Indonesian islands.  
Photo: Jacqueline Vel.

## A demand-driven approach

If lasting improvements are to be made in educational systems, past experience shows that it is not effective for an initiative to promote a new specific model or a one-size-fits-all set of innovations. SLEEI's approach has, therefore, been to create space for each university to *tailor the innovations in legal education* to its specific demands and conditions. Given the rather strict internal and external policy and institutional environment in Indonesia, and the project's limited timeframe, SLEEI focused on innovations that could be made *within the framework of existing curricula*. As such, law lecturers were left to decide how to integrate SLEEI themes into their teachings – either through simply introducing new cases or examples in current courses, or by systematically reviewing and redesigning existing courses. Ultimately, two universities took a further step and developed completely new courses covering a SLEEI theme. One a course on legal reasoning and the other on gender and law.

As part of SLEEI's approach, four senior Indonesian resource experts played a key role as trainers and resource persons as they were in the best position to understand the realities and demands of universities in eastern Indonesia, and translate and adapt international experience accordingly. In addition, SLEEI created ample space for *horizontal networking and support* among law lecturers at the participating universities so they could learn from and encourage each other. Acknowledging that sustainable educational change can only be realized if they are accepted by the institutions involved, SLEEI also gave high priority to the *institutional embedding* of all innovations developed under the project. To achieve this, SLEEI created ample opportunities for systematic interaction with, and the involvement of, law faculty or university management in making all key choices for project implementation in their institution.



Gender aspects in agricultural law, labor law, and inheritance law affect rights of these women harvesting rice. Photo: Jacqueline Vel.

## SLEEI in practice

### Capacity building

As law lecturers are key to improving the quality of legal education, SLEEI made a significant investment in their capacity building. In a first step, an intensive one-week Training of Trainers (ToT) brought together the four senior Indonesian experts, key staff of the eastern Indonesian universities, and Dutch resource persons, in Ambon. Together, they analyzed how the content of the five SLEEI themes and their integration into law courses could best be discussed with law lecturers. They also discussed and trialed various interactive training forms. This allowed each university to subsequently organize two rounds of capacity building for selected law lecturers as a follow-up. While the first round of training concentrated on the content of the five themes, the second round focused more on how to integrate them into teaching and the preparation of teaching guides. Sixty-four lecturers – a third of which were women – were trained in total over the project period.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the training workshops were conducted in either a hybrid format or fully online.

Furthermore, the restrictions on live meetings during the pandemic encouraged the universities to explore additional opportunities for online activities. Consequently, a variety of webinars were organized on the SLEEI themes and related issues, thus reaching a much wider audience than just the core lecturers' group.

### Improving course designs and materials

To integrate the lessons from the workshops into their teachings, all participating lecturers were encouraged to review, adapt, and improve their law course designs, with direct coaching from the Indonesian trainers. The lecturers set their own priorities on which theme to integrate, according to the course topic.

In the Indonesian university system, course designs are known as RPS (*Rencana Pembelajaran Semester*) and mostly use a fixed format. This format lists the learning objective(s) for each course session, its content, the teaching methods, time required, required previous knowledge/courses for students, and the evaluation criteria. Course designs are managed by the law faculties and these provide the guidelines for all lecturers involved in teaching that course. RPS adaptation follows a relatively 'light' internal procedure of change. While this varied across universities, it always led to a formal acceptance of the revised design by the law faculty. A total of 52 course designs were thus reviewed and improved (Table 1).

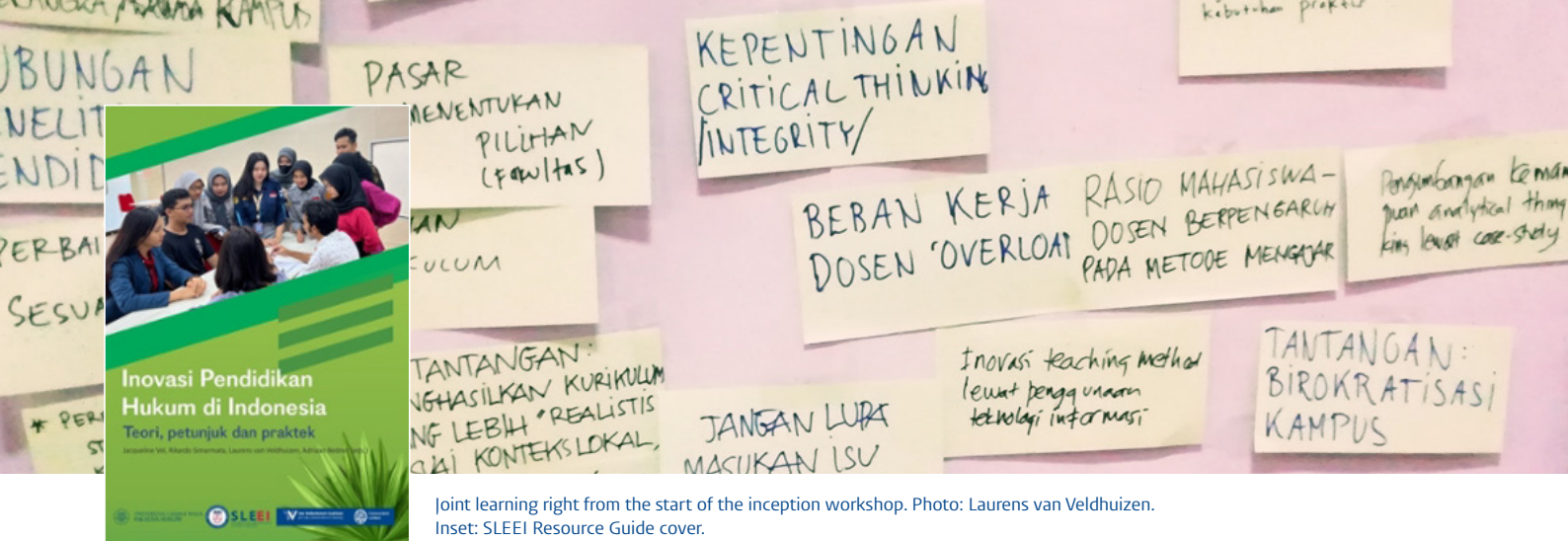
During the final year of the project, the law faculties also proposed to review the study guides (*buku ajar*) of the revised and improved courses, in order to integrate the SLEEI themes. Lecturers, individually or in teams, took up the challenge to work on these guides for their students. A total of 20 study guides were thus reviewed and/or (re)written and submitted to SLEEI for endorsement.

Table 1: Overview of courses with revised course designs

Law field	Examples of courses addressed	No. of RPS
Introduction to law	Introduction to law	2
Criminal law	Criminal law, Anti-corruption law, Criminal law outside the Criminal Code	8
State law /HTN	Administrative law, Constitutional law, Environmental law	10
Private law	Contract law, Labor law, Intellectual Property law, Inheritance law	16
International law	International law, Diplomatic law, Human rights and humanitarian law	8
Metajuridica	Agrarian law, Adat law, Law and gender	8

**Total**

**52**



Joint learning right from the start of the inception workshop. Photo: Laurens van Veldhuizen.  
Inset: SLEEI Resource Guide cover.

### Joint learning and the SLEEI resource guide

The SLEEI team put considerable effort into creating a joint learning environment and promoted intensive interaction between lecturers at the local universities, the Indonesian trainers, and the Dutch experts. This was invaluable in determining how legal education can be innovated in the context of eastern Indonesian universities. Key milestones in this process were the preparation of five working papers on the SLEEI themes – written collaboratively with the Dutch experts and Indonesian trainers – as well as the detailed discussion of their content with local university lecturers during the ToT. Discussion with the trainers during subsequent staff training activities at each of the universities, and the efforts to actually integrate the SLEEI themes into existing courses, provided additional detailed insights into what worked and what did not in the specific context of each university.

To ensure that all SLEEI's experiences and learnings were well captured, and to inspire future efforts in strengthening legal education in Indonesia, SLEEI prepared and published a book, a resource guide on innovating legal education. A one-week writeshop among university representatives, trainers, and Dutch experts provided an excellent platform in which to analyze project experiences and jointly draft key chapters. As the guide targets law lecturers and their managers, it is currently published in Bahasa, available online and in print.

### Challenges

As law lecturers were given a key role in the innovation process, ensuring course quality levels was a key challenge. Course designs are simply plans, so the quality of the innovations introduced and their impact on teaching is dependent on how effectively the lecturers implement the revised plans. Writing good study guides requires

excellent skills, good content structure, and a lot of time for reflection and revision. By the end of the project, the lecturers at the eastern Indonesian universities have only just started their writing process and will need support in finishing the study guides.

As the project progressed, differences between large and small universities also became more apparent. At the two large universities, due to the project's limited training capacity and available budget, not all law lecturers could participate in the SLEEI activities. This made coordination of innovation in course design within the law faculties more challenging. The SLEEI approach works better if all law lecturers participate, as seen at the smaller universities.

### Sustainability

The improved course designs and study guides have been reviewed and approved through the usual internal procedures of the relevant law faculties. Their integration into university systems will ensure that they will continue to be used now the project has ended. Several faculties confirmed their interest in continuing and expanding the SLEEI innovation process to other law courses, involving other lecturers. Others plan to use the five SLEEI themes as a yardstick in the regular revision of their curriculum.

As previously highlighted, SLEEI made an effort to maximize opportunities for horizontal networking between law lecturers of various universities for *sharing, learning, and mutual support* in education innovation. The informal network that emerged continues to function as a source of information and support, through an active WhatsApp group, among other channels. SLEEI partner Gadjah Mada University, based in Yogyakarta, has agreed to function as

a 'hub' and contact point for the network post-project. UGM will continue to host the SLEEI website and organize the dissemination of SLEEI materials, such as the resource guide. There is certainly great interest in and support for SLEEI's type of innovation from other law faculties in the country, as is evident from discussions during the SLEEI national conference held in early 2022 that led to the Mataram Declaration (Box 2). It will be up to the emerging network and its allies to find the means and resources to meet this demand.



Sharing and learning among lecturers as a key strategy towards sustainability.  
Photo: UNRAM.

#### *Box 2: Summary of priorities from the Mataram Declaration*

1. Strengthen collaboration and networking on legal education, linking up with ASSLESI (Asosiasi Studi Sosio-Legal Indonesia).
2. Involve other universities in SLEEI education processes and capacity building of lecturers.
3. Continued donor support for legal education innovation along SLEEI lines.
4. Promote the use of information communication technology (ICT)-based interactive teaching methods and approaches.
5. Link the SLEEI approach with related legal education initiatives, such as legal clinics.
6. Encourage further development and use of interactive learning methods.
7. Assist eastern Indonesian universities in successfully participating in international partnerships.

This document is based on SLEEI project reports and enriched through intensive discussions among partners during the project writeshop and the final SLEEI conference in Mataram.

Further contact and activity information on <https://sleei.law.ugm.ac.id> and [www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/law/strengthening-legal-education-in-eastern-indonesia](http://www.universiteitleiden.nl/en/research/research-projects/law/strengthening-legal-education-in-eastern-indonesia).

Contact at VVI: prof. Adriaan Bedner (project director) and dr. Jacqueline Vel (SLEEI coordinator)  
email: [vollenhoven@law.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:vollenhoven@law.leidenuniv.nl)

