

**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS:  
POLICY COHERENCE & MALAYSIAN SOCIETY**

Edited by

Denison Jayasooria & Michael Yeoh

Published by

ASLI – Centre for Public Policy Studies  
& Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance

Published by  
Centre of Public Policy Studies (CPPS)  
Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI)  
Khazanah ASLI  
1718, Jalan Ledang, Off Jalan Tuanku Abdul Halim  
50480 Kuala Lumpur  
Malaysia

Design by  
Asian Strategy & Leadership Institute (ASLI)

Printed by  
Gillin Printers Sdn Bhd  
No 28, Jalan Vivekananda  
Brickfields  
50470 Kuala Lumpur

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
Executive Summary	5
Chapter 1      SDGs & leaving no one behind	7
Chapter 2      SDG & Sustainability Agenda	17
Chapter 3      SDG & National Development Policies	25
Chapter 4      SDG & Science, Technology & Innovation	36
Chapter 5      Relevant papers/statements	45
1. Joint Statement by ASLI-CPPS & CSO-SDG Alliance (March 15, 2017)	
2. Strategic Civil Society Roles for the 2030 Agenda by Dr Hezri Adnan	

# INTRODUCTION

The 2030 agenda has now become the most significant global agenda for human wellbeing. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted by all the United Nations member states on September 25, 2015 including Malaysia who has also integrated a major SDG-related thrust into the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020). In addition, Malaysia has presented the Voluntary National Review (VNR) on July 18, 2017 at the UN in New York during the 2017 High Level Political Forum (HLPF). It is currently preparing for the SDG National Roadmap.

Malaysian Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), academicians and think tanks have been very active in providing input and participating at the national SDG forums in 2016 by way of providing feedback and suggestions including concrete examples of CSO participation in the SDGs.

In this context of policy input, review and analysis, the ASLI-Centre for Public Policy Studies (CPPS) and the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance have partnered together to host a series of four RoundTable discussions on SDGs in 2017. These discussions focused on cross cutting themes and agenda for delivery & implementation. Too often SDGs are discussed in silos, however, SDGs must be viewed from a multi-dimensional view especially in noting commonalities and convergence. SDGs are not meant to be viewed in singular tracts but as a whole cross-cutting issue.

At the heart of the SDGs is the integration of economic, social and environmental dimensions. The SDGs are built on the five key principles of people, planet, prosperity, peace and partnerships. Human rights play an important role in noting each SDG target and indicator, and in ensuring that ‘no one is left behind’ or discriminated.

The four discussions focused on different themes which were:

- A discussion on the National SDG Roadmap from CSO Reflections on the theme “leaving no one behind”, held on March 14, 2017
- A discussion on navigating through Vision 2020, SDGs 2030 & the National Transformation 2050, held on July 3, 2017
- A discussion on the sustainability agenda – undergirding a framework for SDGs in the National Implementation Programme, held on May 22, 2017
- A discussion on harnessing science, technology & innovation for the SDGs, held on September 28, 2017

At each of these discussions, we invited a panel of subject experts from civil society, academia, private sector and public sector to share their views. There were about twenty-three role players in total. Their names are listed in the document of the discussions and the respective programmes.

We have seen much interest and an active participation through the open discussion time. These discussions are documented here in order to facilitate ongoing discussion on these themes. The documented discussions will serve as the feedback and input from CSOs and think tanks to be included in the review by the public sector which will be headed by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) which also serves as the National SDG secretariat.

We also take this opportunity to thank Mr Augustine Chay for transcribing the discussions and the assistance of Ms Melissa Wong from CPPS in proof-reading the text.

Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (Alliance & KITA-UKM) & Tan Sri Michael Yeoh (ASLI-CPPS).

March 14, 2018

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary documents four key lessons. These thoughts are general pointers which have emerged from all four discussions. However, a more detailed summary and findings of each of the discussions can be found in Chapters One to Four.

## **Development Planning**

We recognise that Malaysia has a very good track record in development planning as reflected in the formulation of the five-year development plans. We also note that Malaysia has developed the Vision 2020 and Eleventh Malaysia Plan 2020, before committing to the SDGs Agenda 2030. It is now developing the National Transformational Agenda of 2050 (TN50).

The socio-economic development dimensions of the plans are generally well done as reflected in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan so is the government's commitment to the development of green growth and environmental development. However, policy coherence and inter-relationship between economic, social and environment still need further enhancement and stronger links to the SDGs.

In this context, good governance, accountability and human rights need further strengthening in Malaysian development planning. One area that could be improved is gender and minority non-discrimination, especially in relation to the insufficient commitment from the government and public sector to resolving the land disputes of indigenous peoples. This could be strengthened via inclusion in the National SDG Roadmap and the National Human Rights Action Plan.

Furthermore, adopting a sustainable development agenda across board is essential in order to ensure that is the SDGs are integrated into all development planning initiatives in Malaysia. One way is to replace the current social and environmental impact assessment mechanism, which is engaged and funded directly by the companies involved, with one that is independent and autonomous.

## **Inclusive Development**

In the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, it is stated that there are 2.7 million people in the B40. BRIM recipients number around 7 million. Who are these people and how do we ensure there are equal opportunities for all? It is important that we empower this section of Malaysian society so that they will be able to move away from hand-outs towards self-reliance and self-help.

Malaysia has made a clear commitment to inclusive development and has assured that all citizens are included in development planning and access to services. While this is commendable, in practice and at the implementation level, there are still many grievances raised by subethnic communities such as the indigenous people of Sabah and Sarawak, and the Orang Asli community. Complaints have also been raised by marginalised groups such as displaced plantation workers and among the urban poor from the Indian community. There have been similar expressions of unhappiness amongst B40 women.

Malaysia lacks clear deliverable indicators for measuring and monitoring inclusive development if we are to ensure that “no one is left behind”. There needs to also be an effective engagement mechanism with all sub groups especially among the B40 communities as well as inclusive gender development. There is also a need to address the concerns of the undocumented, such as refugee and stateless communities, especially the children, youth and women.

## **Science, Technology & Innovation**

We recognise that science and technology is an essential component and effective tool to achieve the SDGs. For example, the delivery of clean water requires an effective use of technology to achieve this SDG goal. Likewise, other aspects like healthcare (Goal 3) and sustainable agriculture (Goal 2) depend on the use of science and technology. Therefore, we need to optimise science and technology

through effective policies and state level interventions and strengthen the capacity of the public sector for technological innovation. This role must be undertaken directly by the public sector and not contracted out to private consultants. The public sector must work collaboratively with the scientific community to implement the SDGs as working in isolation will not be productive.

### **Stakeholder Engagement**

There has been good opportunity for consultation and engagement between the public sector and civil society during Malaysia's five-year development planning processes and the annual budgets. Many civil society and private sector individuals are directly involved as stakeholders in national development. This dimension of stakeholder engagement is a key component of the SDGs, not just at the stage of input provision, but also in planning, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and impact assessment. However, civil society involvement beyond planning has been lacking and falls short of the SDG global partnership commitment.

Engagement with all stakeholders is essential. We need a model for partnership included in any national SDG implementation plan. This must be a transparent process and inclusive of all parties, namely public sector, business, civil society, grassroots organisations, community-based groups as well as academicians and professional bodies.

### **Conclusion**

While there are lessons to learn in terms of strengthening Malaysia's development planning process, making development more inclusive, prioritising science & technology, and widening stakeholder engagement, we are lucky that there is a strong commitment to SDGs in Malaysia. But in order to ensure that 'no one is left behind', we need to continue to strengthen our partnership in this SDG process. The agenda before us is to ensure effective delivery and implementation by enhancing our SDG monitoring process, create transparent disclosure of information and ensure greater accountability.

# CHAPTER ONE

## LEAVING NO ONE BEHIND

The first roundtable discussion on the SDGs in Malaysia was on March 14, 2017 and focused on the theme of 'leaving no one behind'. The discussion reviewed the major SDGs themes and their relevance to Malaysia. We recognise that these are cross cutting issues which cannot be buried under a silo mentality as have been done in the past. The SDGs must be made integral to socio-economic and development planning in Malaysian society.

We focused on five themes which were commented on by CSO experts. These are:

- Sustainable environment,
- Human rights issues & concerns
- Poverty & inequality
- Gender concerns
- Access to justice concerns

### PRESENTATIONS

The first roundtable discussion was structured so that seven speakers had a chance to present on the five themes before the open discussion. Speakers included Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer, Mr Rizal Rozhan, Dr Lin Mui Kiang, Ms Sunitha Bisan and Mr Andrew Khoo. All are active in the CSO world and are consistently advocating for greater public-sector accountability.

This team of speakers include both senior and younger speakers from civil society, some of whom have a rich heritage. For example, Ms. Sunitha Bisan's father is the late Bishan Singh, who was a legend in the consumer and sustainability movement. It is encouraging to see how the expertise in the CSO context has been handed over from one generation to the next.

**Tan Sri Michael Yeoh (ASLI-CPPS)** noted that this roundtable is the first in the series of four on the SDG roadmaps, which is a timely endeavour that would bring together leaders and young people under one cause. He stressed the importance of hearing the voices of the youth and the younger generation, and he hoped they would actively share their thoughts and views. He also hoped that Datuk Jayasooria would compile a small booklet that could be submitted to relevant authorities after the discussions were over.

He noted that the role of businesses within the implementation of the SDGs is particularly important to him since the corporate sector tends to neglect the SDGs. He asserted that the SDGs are more than just CSR and expressed his intention to push for compulsory sustainability reporting. This will force all public-listed companies to include a segment in their annual report on the progress they have made regarding the SDGs. He hoped this would encourage business to take on a bigger, more active role in promoting and disseminating the SDGs.

Since it is impossible for each business to focus on all 17 SDGs at once, he suggested that companies chose 4-5 core SDGs to focus on. He also hoped that civil society will be able to work with the government for the long run, and that a form of independent monitoring mechanism could be established to track the government's progress in implementing the SDGs.

**Datuk Denison Jayasooria (Alliance & KITA-UKM)** noted that this grouping of CSOs to discuss the SDGs is an important partnership, and thanked ASLI-CPPS for sharing their physical resources by agreeing to host the series. He then presented Dr Hezri Adnan's book *The Sustainability Shift* to Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, as a symbolic gesture of appreciation for partnership over the four RTDs.

He noted that the global agenda of the SDGs is centred on the five principles of people, profits, planet, peace, and partnerships. While some have accused the SDGs of being “empty slogans and rhetoric”, he wished to give more depth to the discussion by undertaking a critical review of the public and development policies of the Malaysian government.

With 17 goals, 169 targets, and 230 indicators, monitoring Malaysia’s progress towards the SDGs will be a monumental task that will require statisticians, effective monitoring mechanisms and manpower. It is nevertheless a highly comprehensive framework, and Datuk Denison noted that the Malaysian government has voluntarily agreed to submit a report at New York in July 2017.

The Malaysian government organized two national meetings last year, with participation from various civil society groups. In December 2016, the EPU established the National Steering Committee, with 5 cluster working groups and 17 task forces. The CSO engagement had been an important process, despite the lack of opportunities to participate as some civil society organisations were not invited. He briefly pointed out that the SDG targets could be viewed on the UN website.

Datuk Jayasooria noted that there is a conceptual and practical struggle between economy and environment, as well as between human rights and development. He argued that the paradigm had shifted, with economist Amartya Sen arguing that development itself depended on certain freedoms like political freedom, freedom of opportunity and economic freedom from poverty. The SDGs maintain the same ideology, placing importance on the access to education, peace, partnership, access to justice, etc. Arguable, the SDGs was an ideological shift for policy makers and created a need to revisit the Universal Periodical Review process with regards to the sustainability framework outlined in the SDGs.

He noted that broadening access to justice in conjunction with sustainability, poverty eradication and gender is important. The SDGs paint a broad conceptual picture, which is then filtered down into goals, policies, laws, indicators and operational aspects. It is a major undertaking that requires participation from civil society, the private sector and the government.

He then invited the panellists to address various questions, asking what is the potential of the SDGs here for Malaysia and what are the civil society reflections? Are there any gaps between what was said and what is in national plans like the 11th Malaysia Plan? Noting that poverty must be approached in a multidimensional way, what are some inputs for the 12th Malaysia Plan? What are the next priorities? What are the strategies and programs to achieve these objectives, given the complexity of the monitoring process? What is the role of CSOs in this 15-year process – as partners, advocates, or friends?

**Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer (WWF)** began by arguing that the environment features in all 17 SDGs. The ‘no poverty’ goal, for example, included the right to clean air, food, water, and security from the elements, which necessarily involved the environment.

The WWF conducted a mapping process to provide input for the EPU and identified a direction contribution to 8 goals. She was pleased that the environmental agenda has driven forward by how the SDGs are framed. Without going into the specific details, she argued that environmental wellbeing is directly related to human wellbeing via responsible stewardship and maintenance of the planet’s natural resources.

She then moved on to the 11th Malaysia Plan, which consists of 6 strategic thrusts and game-changers intended to help Malaysia stay ahead of a globally competitive landscape while comprehensively addressing the needs of the rakyat and changing the trajectory of country’s growth. She highlighted the preservation of natural resources, which are neglected in favour of productivity and economic growth. However, natural resources like water and air are absolutely necessary for economic growth and population health.

Other objectives involved innovating new revenue sources, managing a transition to a higher skilled

workforce, encouraging more liveable and competitive cities, ensuring that all Malaysians can benefit and participate in the country's progress, and shifting the paradigm of sustainability to a wider scope.

The 11th Malaysia Plan also included several strategy papers; the government has been open to NGOs and public participation during the papers' conceptualisation. Strategies pertaining to the environment were related to the SDGs, with the broad attempt to achieve 'green growth' by decoupling economic growth from environmental degradation and shifting from a 'grow first, clean-up later' development model to one that used resilient, low-carbon and socially-inclusive development as an upfront investment that will yield gains for future generations. Meanwhile, the successful green growth strategy would reduce socio-economic impacts, recognize biodiversity as an important capital, and promote energy efficiency.

While sustainability goals had been included in the 3rd Malaysia Plan, the lack of effective implementation had meant that Malaysia had developed without necessarily integrating environmental concerns into growth targets. While the 3rd Malaysian Plan mentioned Malaysian Wellbeing Index, most of the emphasis was still on boosting GDP. There was also a lack of internal consistency within these targets as the plan also projected an increased usage of oil, gas and coal as energy sources.

Natural resources were also short-changed in terms of its evaluation since it was only valued for resources such as timber and employment opportunities. Meanwhile, a whole range of wealth aspects (e.g. flood prevention, carbon storage, recreation, etc.) was omitted.

To chart a way forward, a paradigm shift is needed. If the 11th Malaysia Plan is implemented well, Malaysia could create a strong integrated environment to support society and the economy – instead of viewing the economy and the environment as an either/or proposition.

**Mr Rizal Rozhan (COMANGO/EMPOWER)** began his presentation by pointing out that as a UN member state, Malaysia undergoes the Universal Periodic Review (UPR) in Geneva once in every five years. However, Malaysia has only started participating in 2009. He polled the audience to find out how many of them were aware of this.

The UPR was created as a review mechanism to improve the human rights record of member states in accordance to the guidelines laid out in the UN Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the International Conventions signed by all member states. He pointed out that Malaysia was one of the frontrunners in terms of nations with the least number of signed conventions (three). As such, it had been difficult to hold Malaysia accountable for human rights offences in the past. Recently, however, the Malaysian government has been more proactive in dealing with human rights issues – the Rohingya crisis was a prime example.

Mr Rizal noted that each state received recommendations from other member states after being reviewed, with each state subsequently accepting or merely 'noting' a particular recommendation. However, nations were now discouraged from merely 'noting' recommendations from year to year in the future. Under the sensitive issue of LGBTQI rights, for example, some recommendations on sexual and health right (e.g. access to HIV medication and contraceptives) were eventually accepted (in part) by Malaysia after successful lobbying.

He noted that Malaysia received many recommendations (232), accepted 152 recommendations, and noted the remaining 82 recommendations. Most recommendations were related to the SDGs, e.g. poverty, sexual reproductive rights, gender inequality, and access to justice. This thus creates an opportunity to lobby the government on human rights issues by linking it to the issue of development.

The SDG exercise and UPR nevertheless involved certain challenges. Malaysia often expresses a diplomatic rhetoric with questions to human rights, but its practices are often incongruent with its rhetoric

(e.g. the statement that there was no conflict between the civil and Syariah courts). He concluded that funding, political will and bureaucratic changes are needed for successful reform.

**Dr Lin Mui Kiang (PROHAM)** began by pointing out that the SDG implementation process from 2016-2030 is divided into three main phases. Phase I involved taking stock of achievements and prioritizing the SDGs according to the 11th Malaysia Plan; Phase II focuses on the post-2020 goals and targets (which would probably coincide with the 12th Malaysia Plan), while Phase III, which will place over 2025-2030, focuses on the remaining goals.

She noted that the EPU and other government agencies and ministries had outlined the strategies and programs outlined by the SDGs. The brainstorming process involved 5 working groups and 17 goals. Other parties like NGOs, the private sector and members of the academia were invited to submit their contributions.

Dr Lin proceeded to outline a few goals, the issues and challenges involved, and the way forward. Goal 1 aimed to prevent poverty everywhere, in all its forms. Targets 1.1 and 1.2.2 seek to reduce the number of people who lived in poverty by half. She argued that the problem was the narrow definition of poverty, which focused solely on income. She also noted that the poverty target is a moving target, and that different solutions are needed to tackle poverty in urban and rural areas. Poverty eradication strategies should be targeted instead of generalised. She also noted the importance of skills training for drop-outs.

Target 1.4 focuses on the accessibility of economic resources to the poor, especially in rural areas. There is a need to ensure that necessary information was available to the poor since a lack of information is often a leading cause of poverty. Dr Lin also mentioned the need for data on employment and unemployment that is stratified by geography and gender.

Meanwhile, target 1.4.1 focuses on the need for access to basic services in poor income communities. The need for transportation services was especially important for communities living in rural areas who are often isolated from main transportation lines. Dr Lin therefore recommended that transportation infrastructure should be inclusive and sustainable for low income communities, that coverage for utilities, water, sewage, electricity, communications and road infrastructure is universal, that stakeholder engagement is reinforced to access development needs with the participants' informed consent, and that access to healthcare services and education is provided for all.

The next target involves securing the tenure of land; a timely concern given the prevalence of land rights issues. She recommended conducting a parameter survey to determine the boundaries of NCR land, and that authorities should provide proper legal ownership documentation.

Target 1.5 aims to build up the resilience of the poor, especially those in vulnerable positions. There is also a need to consider the effects on climate change when planning development and investment projects in the public and private sector.

Dr Lin then noted that government data workers often work in isolation from one another and suggested the formation of a lead agency (possibly the EPU) to coordinate the collection and storage of relevant data between the different agencies. Data for baseline indicators could then be collected and distributed in a more efficient way. Given the lack of coordination between government agencies and a general lack of public awareness, Dr Lin proposed that a central database for poverty eradication be created. This would allow relevant information to be easily accessed by all the relevant stakeholders and participants.

With regards to the proportion of total government expenditure allocated to improving the livelihoods of women, the poor and vulnerable communities, Dr Lin noted that the issues involved the effectiveness of grassroots implementation and the lack of a breakdown for specific targets. She argued that it would be useful to develop a comprehensive B40 action plan to expand outreach and gain a better understanding of

what the respective communities really want and need, to align national development projects with local interests, and provide a budget breakdown for the respective categories.

As for the goals to end hunger, improve food security and promote sustainable agriculture, Dr Lin noted that there is no nationally represented data on prevalence of hunger and undernourishment in the various age groups. There is thus a need for surveys and data collection on this matter. As for food security, she noted that its prevalence was only measured in adults in 2014. More data is thus needed to compile the Food Insecurity Index, and to capture the prevalence of malnutrition and overweightness.

Goal 2.3 aims to double agricultural production; however, Dr Lin noted that data was only available on a per hectare basis (and not per labour), and that there is no clear definition of sustainable agriculture. The government is looking to the private sector to help increase investment in food production. More data on food and commodity markets is also needed.

Goal 10 aims to reduce inequality within the nation; Dr Lin advised the government to engage with CSOs and the private sector for input. With regard to goal 10.7, which aims to facilitate orderly, safe and responsible migration, Dr Lin pointed out that there is a lack of data on the costs of recruitment that borne by foreign workers. The differences in regulations and policies among states on this matter also have to be reconciled.

Other inclusivity considerations include labour market policies and programs to facilitate employment and promote the efficiency of labour markets. Dr Lin also noted the need for social insurance programs to cushion the risks associated with unemployment, work injuries, disabilities, health problems and old age. Social assistance and welfare service programs to provide subsistence to the most vulnerable groups in need of support are also required.

The main issues highlighted by CSOs for SDG implementation include financing, capacity building, capacity gaps, data limitation and coordination of cross-cutting issues. Therefore, CSOs should identify their respective capacities and contributions to the entire process and determine what goals they can address while collaborating with the government. Meanwhile, the government is preparing the national report that will be presented to the UN in July 2017; CSO inputs have been submitted for this purpose. CSOs can now look forward to providing recommendations, suggestions, and inputs to the government for the 12th Malaysia Plan.

**Ms. Sunitha Bisan (NCWO)** noted that she finds sustainable development ideas very exciting, since these very ideas were instrumental in the work that she had been doing for the past years as well as in the work her father had done. She briefly noted the exciting developments that took place over time, which has now culminated in the SDG goals: a global framework for a plan of action.

The excitement came with a sense of fear, however, since it appears that “the whole train had been hijacked somewhere”. The goals are a response to how humans had been living on the planet, and how we have endangered it and our own survival. While she wanted everyone to reflect on how the SDGs shape our thinking, her agenda for the day was to focus on gender.

She noted that the SDGs specifically recognized a plan of action that looks at human rights, but in a Malaysian context, gender and environmental advocacy is still necessary. She argued that it is time to move on from politically correct rhetoric; gender must mean something on the grassroots level, and not as merely buzzwords on the level of discourse.

Ms. Bisan argued that little attention has been paid to power relations between genders in local and international roadmaps. While women’s empowerment is undeniably important, she argued that without changing the landscape that women have to work in, a focus on it alone will not change anything and there will not be genuine progress made. For example, she pointed out that a program aimed to encourage

female participation in agricultural work failed to recognize reproductive work. Without an understanding of how reproductive work contributes to productive work in the family context, we dismiss the potential of projects to be women-centric and place a greater burden on women. We must address power relations in households and the community in order to correct the misconception that family work should be shared amongst all family members.

A gender lens is thus needed to achieve the required transformation for sustainable development. Gender studies have noted the tendency to feminize vulnerability and victimization, which fails to both recognize women as active agents and understand vulnerabilities across the board. In the national context, gender integration has been poorly achieved within the country's development framework. The shortfalls of gender training and awareness-raising in Malaysia is thus disappointing and frustrating.

Another issue is the 'huge' amount of resistance in gender mainstreaming. This resistance has manifested in the lack of gender-neutral documents and the persistence of a binary understanding of the sexes. Unless we understand that a binary definition of gender is problematic, these issues will remain invisible. Ms. Bisan argued that we thus need to focus adequate attention on the right issues of development.

The persistent gaps in inequality are thus unsurprising. With the budget reallocation, prioritizing gender is increasingly important. What is needed now is persistence; we need to be persistently addressing the hard issues and continue advocating. She argued that gender is a very important methodology, and not just an 'add-on' in the work space.

She stressed the importance of good preparation and the need for civil society to advocate for and reinforce gender issues. She lamented the lack of commitment to turning politically correct jargon into an equitable reality. To complement the 3Ps (people, planet, prosperity) of sustainable development, she proposed the 3Rs: representation, resource, realities.

Gender representation should not simply be about quantity, but also about quality. All communities should have access to the resources, whether in the form of infrastructure or information. Finally, we need to acknowledge and understand the realities of gender. The work to achieve social justice and equality continuously involves the likelihood that "things are going down the drain". Motivation from the like-minded is thus needed to persevere. The first step is to adopt a gender lens as a fundamental feature, and to move away from thinking about women in a development mindset. If environmental impact assessments could be institutionalized after years of advocacy, mainstreaming gender could also be achieved in the near future.

**Mr Andrew Khoo (Bar Council)**, began his presentation by noting his comments were his personal opinion, and did not necessarily represent the views of the Bar Council. The SDG 16 is often understood to mean 'access to justice', but this can mean a wide variety of things. A common lawyer's understanding of 'access to justice' would involve the ability to hire a lawyer, be tried by a court, and to gain a fair hearing from a judge (especially for individuals facing financial difficulties).

However, he noted that specific mentions of lawyers and access to courts are relatively lacking in the SDGs. With a few mentions of the rule of law and access to legal institutions, the focus seemed to be on 'peace, justice and strong institutions'. He noted that legal disputes need not necessarily be resolved in court, since the availability of a relevant authority could allow disputes to be settled amicably out of court.

Thus, implementation of SDG 16 involves a multi-faceted understanding of access to justice. Mr Khoo noted that the SDGs also involves a welcomed focus on peace and wellbeing. He cited indicator 16.1.4, which measures the percentage of the population that felt safe walking alone in the area they live in to illustrate that the idea of safety and security is also an important component.

However, the indicators do not necessarily ask the right questions. Drawing from his own experience of regularly using public transportation (and nearly being run down by motorcyclists and drivers at pedestrian crossings), Mr Khoo argued that indicators that measured the extent to which citizens felt safe in their daily lives may be more important than indicators that estimated the threat of terrorism.

This ‘hodgepodge’ approach is manifested in indicators that varied considerably from each other. In a Malaysian context, these indicators are not necessarily helpful in strengthening relevant national institutions. There was also the issue of indicators that may contradict the nation’s inbuilt structural issues, such as the indicator that aims to promote and enforce non-discriminatory laws and policies. Would such goals mean that a change in the Constitution was warranted? Given Malaysia’s past track record, in-built Constitutional provisions supersedes international guidelines and recommendations.

Finally, Mr Khoo expressed his personal concern regarding how the Malaysian government committed an act of ‘intellectual dishonesty’ in its first Universal Periodic Review (UPR) by claiming that it complied with the UN Convention on the Rights of the (with respect to access to education for all children, regardless of their citizenship status) when the children of immigrants and refugees were being schooled in community-based schooling run by CSOs, not the government. Such ‘tumpang glamour’ acts were of concern since it appeared as the CSOs were being entrusted and funded by the government to carry out these activities even though this was not the case. Mr Khoo was concerned that a similar phenomenon might occur (i.e. claiming credit for CSO efforts) when the government presents its report on progress regarding the SDGs in New York in July.

## **OPEN DISCUSSIONS (Q & A)**

Five questions and comments were received:

1. A question asked if representatives from the Orang Asli and transgender communities were involved in the SDG discussions hosted by the CSOs and the government. They commented that access to the courts was still a major issue for many, particularly in the context of single mothers and the Sharia courts.
2. A member of the audience noted that while the importance of paradigm shift was essential for progress (and to halt regression the endeavour should not be dependent on the SDGs alone. She then raised several broad issues, such as the problem of data gathering mechanisms (the statistics departments are not well equipped to gather qualitative data), the fact that the implementation of the GST was a form of tax injustice that contradicts the goals targeting poverty and gender inequality, and the importance of a global, interstate and international partnership in addressing the various problems and challenges. While a strong development focus has since emerged, she expressed concerns that the urgency of the planet’s boundaries has been ignored.
3. Another member of the audience agreed with the concerns about ‘tumpang glamour’. He pointed out that while CSOs were involved in the process of finalizing the budget, they were then ignored when it came to implementation. He proposed a mechanism to allow CSOs to collaborate and synchronize with each other in order to achieve a set of tangible goals in the near future. This will allow CSOs participate beyond consultation sessions and achieve real and lasting change.
4. Another participant asked if civil society saw eye-to-eye with the 11th Malaysia Plan, in terms of the policies that affected small scale farmers, fishers and those who drew their livelihood from the ground.
5. Another participant asked what mechanism would allow for the decoupling of economic development from the environment, especially with regard to a resource-rich nation like Malaysia? How can CSOs influence the three fundamental concepts of global governance (gaining legitimacy, accountability and effectiveness)?

### **The panel of speakers responded:**

Datuk Denison stated that the alliance did aim to become broader and include all CSOs but is limited in terms funding, manpower and logistics.

Mr Rizal Rohan agreed that more representation from the Orang Asli and LGBT communities is needed but noted that they were not significantly contributing to COMANGO despite being members. Regarding the question asked about the paradigm shift, he recommended the ‘development justice framework’ which is based on the five pillars of economic justice, social justice, environmental justice, distributive justice and accountability.

Mr Andrew Khoo clarified that he did not state that access to courts did not matter, but instead noted that there was no indicator that specifically measured access to courts. He noted that 80% of individuals who were charged with a criminal offence appeared in court unrepresented; in 2008, this prompted the Prime Minister to create the National Legal Aid Foundation. He suggested that the issue of women in Sharia courts might fall under the goals aiming to ensure non-discriminatory practices.

Dr Lin Mui Kiang noted that while the SDGs were comprehensive in addressing poverty, there are still problems with implementation. Some groups will be completely left out due to ignorance and a lack of information with regard to the availability of programs that would benefit them. Communication between federal planners and government officials in the state and district level often translated to a big gap between intention, implementation and results. She also pointed out the presence of political problems (e.g. communities that are ignored because they support opposition parties) on the ground.

Ms. Sunitha Bisan noted that the information gap could be bridged more easily these days, but the means of participating in the discussion are not always present. She also pointed out that certain omissions in the planning process (due to a lack of sensitivity and the lack of due diligence) will inevitably become a problem in the implementation stage.

Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer noted that an abundance of resources often meant that our resources are not appreciated and end up wasted. Often, the value of natural resources is narrowed down to its market value, while ignoring its holistic value. There is thus a need to change the mentality, e.g. by accounting for how mangroves protect against coastal erosion and natural disasters. She noted that natural resources was considered in the 11th Malaysia Plan, and proposed that we manage our expectations of viable economic growth while prioritizing access to water, clean air and basic utilities.

### **CONCLUDING COMMENT**

Datuk Denison concluded the RTD by observing that the roundtable had raised many critical issues and concerns which would eventually need to be addressed. He noted that the panel referred to 12 out of the 17 SDGs, which indicated a technical and detailed focus on particular aspects.

He argued that the SDG goals, targets and indicators alone were insufficient – there is also a need to focus on the broader aims of the 2030 agenda. He also noted that CSOs often lack an interdisciplinary approach when working on specific issues; a multifaceted approach could be more productive in terms of achieving holistic progress. He then highlighted the various cross-cutting concerns that had been raised: gender mainstreaming, the need for a gender lens, alleviating poverty, compliance with human rights ideals, natural capital, the need for adequate indicators, and the involvement of local governments and grassroots participation.

He concluded that the good working relationship between the CSOs and the EPU needed to be strengthened and urged CSOs to rise to the challenge despite their logistical limitations.

**Roundtable Discussion on  
National SDG ROAD MAP- CSO REFLECTIONS  
“Leaving no one behind”**  
Co-hosted by ASLI-CPPS & Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance

March 14, 2017 (Tuesday)

4.30pm – 7.30pm

Persatuan Alumni Universiti Malaya Rumah Kelab PAUM Lot 10476,  
Jalan Susur Damansara (Jalan Damansara Lama) 59100 Kuala Lumpur

The global community on Sept 2015 at the UN in New York collectively agreed to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets. Since then, 230 indicators have been formulated. Malaysia is fully committed to the implementation of the SDGs and in 2016, hosted two national events to discuss national SDG implementation. The first was the SDG symposium in Feb 2016 and the second was the two-day National Roadmap workshop in Nov 2016.

Prior to these two meetings, a SDG Readiness report which included a gap analysis was undertaken. By December 2016, the National SDG Steering Committee was established by the Economic Planning Unit (EPU), as the lead agency, and appointed five members of the CSO Alliance as committee members. EPU has also established in preparation of the SDG Roadmap and the National Voluntary Report to be tabled in July 2017 at New York, five cluster working groups and 17 taskforce teams.

CSOs have been actively participating in SDG concerns, hosting a first session of CSO discussions in Oct 2015 and undertaking mapping and establishing a national CSO-SDG Alliance through 2016. The CSOs have also been participating in various EPU-established SDG committees and providing relevant input.

This roundtable discussion, jointly organised by ASLI-CPPS, served as a public forum to discuss the National SDG Roadmap concerns from a civil society perspective. The theme adopted is “*Leave No One Behind*”, which recognised that people are at the heart of sustainable development and acknowledged the need for sustainable and responsible use of the earth’s resources.

The panel presenters reviewed the SDGs from a civil society perspective, noting relevant goals, targets and indicators with specific reference to what is planned in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, what is being undertaken, what are the gaps and where we go from here. Each of the presenters were given 15 minutes to speak on five key themes identified as at the heart of both the SDGs and the Malaysian development agenda.

Participants were given 3 minutes each for introductions and another 3 minutes to speak once the first round is over. This is to allow as many participants to speak and share their concerns from their perspectives and experiences. The organisers asked participants and presenters to be specific and refer to the documents on UN SDG and 11th Malaysia Plan. The findings of this RTD have been documented and made available to both EPU and the general public as feedback for the national process. The organisers hoped that the roundtable will give greater public awareness to a global and national process being undertaken.

## **PROGRAM**

- 4.30 pm      Registration & Tea
- 5.00 pm      Word of Welcome: Tan Sri Michael Yeoh (ASLI-CPPS)
- 5.05 pm      Setting the Context by Panel Moderator: Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (CSO Alliance & KITA-UKM)

### Panel Presentations:

- 5.15 pm      Sustainable Environment: Ms Lavanya Rama Iyer (WWF)
- 5.30 pm      Human Rights issues (UPR obligations): Mr Rizal Rozhan (EMPOWER)
- 5.45 pm      Poverty & Inequality: Dr Lin Mui Kiang (PROHAM)
- 6.00 pm      Gender Concerns: Ms Sunitha Bisan (NCWO)
- 6.15 pm      Access to Justice Concerns: Mr Andrew Khoo (Bar Council)
- 6.30 pm      OPEN DISCUSSION
- 7.20 pm      Final sum up

## CHAPTER TWO

# SDG SUSTAINABILITY AGENDA

The second roundtable discussion was hosted on May 22, 2017 with a specific focus on the sustainability agenda and the theme of human rights. We noted that much of the discussion with the Economic Planning Unit regarding the preparation of the Voluntary National Review and also in the formulation of the National SDG Roadmap was on seeking to comply with the established goals, targets and indicators. This resulted in a silo-centric focus in a majority of cases. There was also a focus on the implementation of SDGs via the Eleventh Malaysia and subsequent national socio-economic development plans.

The CSO community felt the necessity for a specific discussion on sustainability and also human rights as it was felt that instead of being central to the SDGs and development planning in Malaysia, both have been suppressed within the larger agenda of economic growth. This issue is the focus of discussion at the 2nd Roundtable discussion hosted by ASLI-CPPS and the CSO Alliance

### PRESENTATIONS

There were four key presentations and comments from the moderator on this theme of sustainability and human rights.

**Datuk Denison Jayasooria (Alliance & KITA-UKM)** noted that the Malaysian government committed to the SDG goals on 25 September 2015, and that Malaysia has been preparing a roadmap for achieving the SDGs and the voluntary reporting process (the reports will eventually be presented in New York in July 2017). Various government agencies, CSOs and NGOs (e.g. the Economic Development Unit) have been providing feedback in regards to the various SDG goals in cluster meetings and taskforce groups.

This panel discussion aims to provide a civil society perspective to the SDG goals, and to establish an independent agenda on themes such as sustainability, human rights, gender which may not be given equal weightage when plans to transform Malaysian society are made. He further noted the difficulties in the implementation of public policy, the direct linkages between sustainability and development, and the need for human rights to be part of a holistic development framework. He highlighted the on-going work by civil society bodies as necessary to address issues of land rights, the right to participation, and to ensure that the language and ideals of human rights were included in the development process and environment conservation policies.

Datuk Denison thanked ASLI-CPPS for facilitating the discussion and covering its costs. In addition, he also introduced three relevant books: *The Sustainability Shift* by Hezri Adnan, *Death of the Dragon God Lake: Voices from Tasik Chini, Malaysia* by the Crabtrees and *Memoirs of a Malaysian Eco-Activist* by Gurmit Singh, a prominent veteran environmental activist before introducing the panellists.

**Dr Hezri Adnan (Alliance & Independent Consultant)** began his presentation by showing a photograph that presented a ‘diabolical image’ of economic development: a photo of a young Orang Asli boy standing in front of a massive pile of rubber tires. Dr Adnan noted that large areas of forests had been cleared to make way for rubber plantations, which are a key driver of Malaysia’s economic growth, and thus depriving Orang Asli communities of their traditional way of life.

His talk consisted of six sections: (1) background – past and present societies; (2) the sustainability paradigm; (3) the SDGs framework; (4) the case of Malaysia; (5) demands on policy and (6) conclusions.

Dr Hezri argued that a sustainable society is defined by the relationship of human communities with nature. While charting the transition from a hunter-gatherer society to an agrarian society and then to an industrial society, he showed that man’s relationship with nature is not static, and the ecosystem has

evolved alongside the changes in population density, which accompanied the emergence of agriculture and animal husbandry. Cultivated landscapes have evolved into cities, with a larger portion of the human population living in urban areas over time.

The world's economy has also grown massively in the process, from \$695 billion in 1820 to \$5.37 trillion in 1950. Dr Hezri argued that this sharp increase of human activity has pushed us past many 'planetary boundaries', thus leading to the argument that we have entered the age of the 'Anthropocene', where human activities have profoundly impacted the planet. He also noted that these changes have not coincided with improvements in social justice and economic equality.

He noted that development ideas have evolved internationally, citing several key events such as the 2015 UN Climate Change Conference in Paris and the UN Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The popular definition of sustainability was "development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of the future generation to meet their own needs". The other two pillars of sustainable development are an acknowledgement of the biophysical limits of growth and the need for conservation, and an agenda of social justice.

He noted that there were many other definitions within the academic literature, and these often contradict one another. This is an interdisciplinary problem that involved multiple industries (e.g. agriculture, forestry, fisheries). There has been a shift in environment problems to public policy problems, each with different approaches to achieving sustainability. A consensus on the need to conserve nature, limit pollution, and conserve wildlife has been achieved, as well as a general acknowledgment that climate change is anthropogenic.

Dr Adnan noted that contemporary ideas of a sustainable society often involve a focus on human wellbeing and concerns about equality. He outlined four constituent issues of sustainability: nature protection, resource depletion degradation, controlling pollution and waste, society and human conditions.

He was pleased that the SDGs agreement has shown that the world can achieve a consensus on a set of goals. This has led to an explosion of SDG-related activities from governments, corporations, academia and NGOs. There are some concerns about the obstacles that lie in the way of achieving this 'transformation'; Dr Adnan emphasized the need to avoid the talk-down governance that has been prevalent in Malaysia and argued that different players have to take on important roles to mobilize change. He concluded that the logic of how to mobilize actors should be different.

In his assessment of Malaysia's development profile, he noted both the positives (a reduction in poverty, improvements in GDP per capita, etc) and the negative (an increase in ecological footprint). While Malaysia was doing well in terms of basic needs and indicators, it was doing relatively poorly with the higher aspirational goals under the SDGs.

He noted that the Malaysian government had implemented various development plans that preceded the SDGs, such as the 11th Malaysia Plan and the New Economic Model, and established a governance structure for the SDG roadmaps. However, there are still 11 implementation gaps:

- a lack of an overarching vision on sustainable development;
- a lack of policy integration approaches to mainstream sustainable development;
- ineffective use of instruments linking policy to action;
- a lack of public awareness;
- a lack in technical capacity to address challenges;
- a lack of community participation;
- a lack of multi-stakeholder partnerships;
- a lack of evidence-based policy and decision making,
- no sustainable development database;
- a lack of a monitoring and evaluation system for the SDGs.

He then presented a chart that featured 23 proposed counter measures to address these gaps, divided along a conceptual-practical vertical axis and specific measures – long term fundamentals horizontal axis. He argued that some measures needed to be supported by the private sector, while others would be driven by civil society. An integrative agenda towards sustainability was needed to achieve all these goals.

He argued that the goals for a ‘transformative change’ might not be achieved without political reform, regardless of the flurry of activities and plans implemented. He personally believed that a focus on environmental goals and challenges should be prioritized. He cited water shortage issues and deforestation as primary concerns and noted that a survey of youths placed the environment as the sixth most important concern. He concluded that the right institutional software, hardware and heart-ware are needed to engender a lasting sustainability shift.

**Gerald Joseph (SUHAKAM)** began his presentation by observing that the language used in the SDG framework (as with the language used in the MDGs or other similar development or pro-environment plans) often lacked a human rights framework. He argued that the sustainability debate should not be isolated from human rights or the common people would risk being at the mercy of the powers that be.

His definition of what it means for sustainability to be grounded in human rights is to ensure that no one is left behind. The principles of inclusion and non-discrimination should be advanced to ensure that the rights of marginalized communities, such as the urban poor and the Orang Asli, are preserved. He noted that the SDGs continue the project of mainstreaming of human rights in all organs of the UN - a contrast to the Malaysian tendency to avoid the language and frameworks of human rights when advocating for sustainability and development.

Mr Joseph then argued that the Malaysian government and its citizens should adopt an explicit concept of entitlements and obligations, because the government of the day has a duty to its constituents. The concepts of accountability, participation and non-discrimination should thus be embedded within the SDGs; to discuss the SDGs without using the human rights language would be a disservice to the progress of demands-driven development goals.

He also noted that the EPU’s lead in implementing the SDGs is an advantage, since the EPU is relatively insulated from the political dramas that affected the other government agencies. The government’s enthusiasm in participating in the SDGs (it volunteered to participate in the national consultation process and reached out to NGOs for feedback via its cluster group discussions) is also a positive development.

He argued that the reporting process conducted by the various NGOs and the government should be officially integrated within the SDG process, so that the data could be utilized. Access to all aggregated data (instead of selective sharing of data) would be crucial in tracking Malaysia’s progress towards achieving the SDGs. Without freedom of information, analysts would have to rely on guesswork based on anecdotal comments from NGOs and government agencies, instead of a comprehensive overview of the situation.

Mr Joseph also stressed the importance of recognizing the private sector as an important component of the SDG process; human rights should also be integrated into everyday business processes and operations. While questions on how this integration would involve the environment, sustainability, and workers’ rights remain, integration would be a positive step. He also observed that Bursa Malaysia was planning to enforce mandatory sustainability report by all big corporate players; SUHAKAM should oversee this sustainability reporting and keep track of this development.

One main challenge was the government’s tendency to side-line human rights organizations from the decision-making process (e.g. during national steering committee discussions). Mr Joseph argued that the UN had negotiated a rights-based framework for the SDGs; Malaysia must overcome its political

difficulties with regards to reconciling human rights with sustainability. He noted that there were specific gaps in racial, religious, and gender discrimination in Malaysia, as well as the universal concerns about age and disability.

He then discussed the National Human Rights Action Plan (NHRAP), which had undergone several false starts and changes in leadership. The importance of human rights has been championed by the UN in Geneva, but human rights institutions were not granted the same recognition and opportunities for participation in New York where future SDG meetings and reporting would take place. If the SDG framework interlocked with a human right framework, all the various reports conducted by human rights organisations (e.g. on health in prisons, on land rights of indigenous communities) could be integrated and utilized.

He then discussed the importance of ensuring that human rights bodies like SUHAKAM function effectively, citing the difficulties of handling the high volume of complaints (900+ per year) with a limited budget (\$10 million per year, with recent budget cuts). He also noted that the human rights organisations need the power to oversee law enforcement agencies in order to reduce all forms of violence and corruption. With drug trafficking being the largest business in the world (followed by human trafficking), more work is needed to successfully address abuse, exploitation, and all forms of human trafficking. He briefly detailed the various human rights abuses in Malaysia, such as unlawful detaining, displacement of indigenous communities, widespread corruption and the discovery of a mass grave of 24 human trafficking victims.

Mr Joseph concluded that the SDGs must speak to the difficult issues and complex problems, especially regarding big player accountability. Without addressing high takes bribery and corruption, incorporating a more inclusive approach, and speaking to the specific problems on the group, the goals of the SDGs would not be achieved. While he applauded the work of the EPU in advancing progress, we still have some ways to go in ensuring that a human rights approach gains an equal seat at the table.

Gurmit Singh (CETDEM) argued that contrary to popular belief, little has changed since he began his environmental activism over 40 years ago. Back then, he was criticized by environmental NGOs for talking about human rights. He cited the lack of access to relevant information and the lack of public accountability. He recalled a government official stating that “We are no longer accountable to the public once you elect us to parliament” as an example of the problem.

He also expressed scepticism regarding the EPU’s ability to address the situation, noting that foreign (American) economic consultants were involved in the production of the 10th Malaysia Plan. He cited the lack of public transport data in such plans as a major problem since the sector was a major energy user.

Mr Gurmit expressed scepticism about phrases like ‘paradigm changes’ and ‘transformation’, arguing that little progress can be achieved without a shift in the country’s political structure and the alleviation of its obsession with race and religion.

As for the participation of the business sector in sustainable development, he expressed concerns about ‘greenwashing’, where corporations aimed to project an environment-friendly image without making actual progress with regards to actual sustainable development.

There is thus a need for specific and reliable indicators to measure progress in the area of sustainable development. He noted that the present indicators – the proportion of the population with access to electricity and safe water sources – was insufficient, and specifically cited the need for usage data regarding all the buses, cars, taxis and motorcycles on Malaysian roads. There is a major need to collect data, an area where Malaysia has been generally found to be lacking. Without baseline data to compare against, it would be impossible to measure Malaysia’s progress. He also stressed the need to develop a reliable and non-governmental source of data.

He also pointed out the conflict of interest between the state governments and the federal government on matters of sustainability. As all the income taxes collected from residents of any state are managed by the federal government, the state governments have been relying on natural resources within their own state as sources of income which is an incentive for them to continue clearing forest land to raise funds. There were also concerns about the lack of gazetted water catchment areas (Malaysia had relied on water catchment areas that had been gazetted by the British during its first three decades after independence). He thus concluded that the SDGs alone will not necessarily solve Malaysia's problems.

**Dr Khoo Ying Hooi (UM & PROHAM)** began her presentation by agreeing that thinking about the SDGs from a human rights perspective made sense. However, she noted that the lack of a specific mention of human rights in the SDG document does not make human rights irrelevant; statements such as “leave no one behind” implied inclusivity, which is a human rights principle.

However, she noted that the language used in the SDG-related consultations, meetings and opening addresses organized by the EPU avoided mentioning human rights concepts and frameworks. For example, the importance of education was emphasized without any assertion that all Malaysian citizens had a right to education. Dr Khoo argued that pervasive problems such as income inequality and poverty could not be adequately addressed by disconnecting human rights from the sustainable development agenda.

Dr Khoo also noted the difficulties encountered when the TN50 (Transformasi Nasional 2050) plan was drafted; for example, how did one create quantified metrics to measure the progress towards these goals? She noted that the SDG plans are divided into three distinct phases, with clear and comprehensive goals in each phase. The problem, as Dr Hezri and Jerald had observed, is the lack of rights-based approach in the framework. She described a teaching experience that demonstrated how young Malaysians often did not see themselves as a rights holder, with the power to demand the duty bearer (i.e. the government) to protect their rights. The example proves the need for a bottom-up perspective, instead of viewing the matter as a purely top-down approach.

She ended by stressing the need to create greater awareness of the language of human rights among the public. Besides civil and political rights, there was also a need for promote an understanding of socio-cultural, economic, and political rights within the general populace. The one thing that SDGs have done well in Malaysia is created more awareness about sustainability amongst the Malaysian youth.

## QUESTION & ANSWERS

Nine participants made interventions in terms of comments and questions.

**Comment 1: Ms. Josie Fernandez (Society for the Rights of Indigenous Groups of Sarawak)** argued that one of the weaknesses in policy advocacy was the lack of a dialogue with policy makers (what often occurred was a dialogue among advocates and activists). She stressed the need to provide more information in the language of policy makers, for example, via preparing short policy papers on each issue raised in the roundtable today to be presented to policy makers in East Malaysia.

**Comment 2: Ms Shantidairiam Dairim** agreed with Mr Gurmit's more cynical perspective on the SDGs. She argued that there was a need to focus on the International Human Rights scheme, which has already provided a practical human rights framework. She noted that the hype and attention directed towards the SDGs could be 're-used' to divert attention to the human rights framework that is under-utilized in the country.

She agreed with Dr Hezri, who stressed the need to address the underlying causes of inequality (and not just targets and indicators) like the lack of an accountability mechanism, the problems in existing framework and mechanisms, and the conditions that create non-compliance with human rights ideals.

She also expressed scepticism towards the EPU, which she perceived as lacking an intersectional perspective towards development. She expressed similar pessimism towards the private sector; effort and energy are needed to ensure that private-public partnerships protected human rights instead of exploiting the vulnerable for profit. For example, the fact that Malaysia created its own certification for the quality of palm oil products (instead of adopting European standards) was to target large markets in India and China which lacked the European's stringent ethical demands on the production process.

**Comment 3: Dato Saifuddin Abdullah** noted that there were few politicians and senior civil servants (from both sides of the political divide) who were interested in policies. There was thus a need to identify 'little champions' from both sides of the political divide to advance the cause.

He also noted that there would always be sceptics regarding UN recommendations. However, he urged the audience to 'seize the moment' and 'join the bandwagon'. Meanwhile, the state governments which professed themselves to be 'reformists' could be challenged to achieve more.

**Comment 4: Another speaker** cautioned that the SDGs may be treated in a similar manner to CEDAW, where the response was "Malaysia is for human rights, but this kind of human rights is not for Malaysia". She was concerned that the human rights element may be deemed to be 'un-Islamic' and therefore disregarded in Malaysia.

**Comment 5: Another participant** mentioned a workshop on sustainable development that he attended at the Jeffrey Sachs Centre on Sustainable Development at Sunway University. He pointed out that while other countries asked assistance for certain goals, Malaysia has already achieved many of them. Unlike many parts of the globe, Malaysia had widespread access to electricity and clean water. He suggested that a catalogue for what Malaysia has and has not achieved be developed, while citing the lack of protection for the rights of indigenous peoples and the 'tremendous' trust deficit in the government as specific issues that should be addressed. He concluded that the SDGs appeared to be more concerned with basic human needs (a major concern for many underdeveloped countries, not Malaysia) than with human rights issues.

**Comment 6:** A member of the audience was concerned that goal 16 (peace, justice and strong institutions) would not be reported on when the need arose and asked if there was a way to create an accountability mechanism to reinforce political commitment to goal 16.

**Comment 7:** A representative from WWF Malaysia raised three concerns: (1) what would it take for Malaysia to adopt an economy which is truly sustainable; (2) is the legal political governance constitutional environment sufficient to facilitate this transition; (3) how do we move towards encouraging more transparency and accountability with regards to reporting.

**Comment 8:** A participant observed that the strength of the data captured for the purposes of the SDGs is based on the baselines used. He suggested that there was a need to agree on national baseline for data gathering that was separate from the Department of Statistics.

**Comment 9:** Another participant found the SDG framework helpful in providing a practical framework for understanding sustainable development. She suggested that individuals could approach sustainable development from their own actions and decisions, instead of demanding change and progress from the government on this matter.

## **REPLIES FROM THE PANEL SPEAKERS:**

**Dr Khoo Ying Hooi:** In her response to the suggestion about creating a national baseline, Dr Khoo recalled a young entrepreneur who attempted to create an app that would enhance the transparency of the state government. He attempted to gain support from the local councillor, but he had not gain much support from policy makers thus far. The mentality of policymakers was thus a critical barrier.

She also observed that while over 30% of protests worldwide are related to income inequality, protests against income inequality is lacking in Malaysia. She stressed the need for public pressure on the government from citizens and NGOs to create awareness and promote progress.

**Mr. Gurmit Singh:** He argued that business interests are far more important pressure groups than the NGOs. He stressed that transparency from the business sector is a key issue, and noted that gaining support from politicians, MPs and policy makers is a key challenge for any NGO initiative. Communicating with those in power was one issue; the other issue is gaining their support and dedication to a specific initiative. With the advent of social media, however, it is now easier to exert pressure on political figures.

He agreed on the need for comprehensive and reliable data but argued that it was the responsibility of the government, universities and research institutes to collect and analyse data. There is also the problem of bias, dishonest results and making national statements based on small samples of data. He also agreed that there needs to be reliable sources of data that were not collected and disseminated by the government.

**Mr. Jerald Joseph:** He noted that the EPU tends to shy away from the more politically sensitive issues and agreed with Dr Saifuddin about the need to ‘seize the bandwagon’.

He argued that while the government will still be primarily responsible for overseeing concerns such as compliance with the law and minimum wage practices, another strategy is required for the private sector.

As for the question about personal responsibility regarding sustainability, Mr Jerald argued that the international and legal framework deems the state to be the primary duty bearer. The government has inherently accepted that it is bound by obligation to its citizens and should not shirk its responsibilities onto private individuals.

**Dr Hezri Adnan:** He noted that the EPU’s efficacy on leading progress on the SDGs depended on ensuring that the right leadership was in charge, and that they continued to remain in power.

He nevertheless expressed high hopes on an alliance between NGOs, think tanks and the government with regards to achieving the SDG goals. The need for legal reform, adopting the human rights-based approach and the feudal psyche in Malaysia’s cultural system was listed as some of the major challenges.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

Datuk Denison Jayasooria concluded by reiterating it is our responsibility to hold the government accountable, and to remind them that human rights are part of the SDG – even if the government is reluctant to acknowledge this fact.

Regarding the scepticism towards the EPU, he pointed out that at a recent regional discussion at Bangkok, no other government wanted to take part in the UNDP-sponsored discussion on government-civil society discussion. However, Malaysia was represented at the panel by a speaker from EPU and two from the Alliance to discuss the opportunities and challenges for engagement. Malaysia had been highlighted as the best example of government-civil society partnership within Asia Pacific at the discussion especially in the dialogue for data input for SDGs

Datuk Denison also highlighted that the welcomed representation of COMANGO in the National SDG Steering committee is a complete reversal of KDN’s attempts to delegitimize NGOs in the past during the 2013 UPR process. He argued that collaboration between the EPU and NGOs is an on-going process and noted that we had many more years of collaboration ahead leading to 2030.

**Sustainability Agenda – Discussion On The Undergirding Framework  
For SDGs In The National Implementation**

Organised by ASLI-CPPS & the CSO-SDG Alliance

May 22, 2017 (Monday)

2.30pm – 5.30pm (Tea @4-4.15pm)

Persatuan Alumni Universiti Malaya (PAUM) Rumah Kelab

Lot 10476, Jalan Susur Damansara (Jalan Damasara Lama)

59100 Kuala Lumpur

The SDGs provide a comprehensive shift in the development paradigm towards sustainability and development which takes profits, people and the planet in equal importance. In this context, it is not just about GDP and GNI growth but one that is holistic, inclusive, and takes the value of natural resources and the social cost of development seriously.

In the SDG discussions, CSOs have noted that much of the current discussions have shifted to the actual targets and indicators. While this is a useful exercise in setting relevant and appropriate national indicators, however the fundamental ethos and undergirding philosophy of transformation of the society and nation appear to have been neglected. CSOs would like to reaffirm that there needs to be stronger discussion on the 2030 Agenda's declaration to provide a new way of framing the world we all like to be part of.

In this roundtable, the theme of sustainability and the balanced emphasis on people, profits, planet, peace and partnership are of equal importance. The roundtable argues that social, economic and environment concerns along with human rights are the base for the 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. No issue can be taken up in isolation without a clear understanding, articulation and application of the interconnectivity of the five P's from a critical appreciation of both policy and practice.

In this context, ASLI-CPPS & the CSO-SDG Alliance is holding a second SDG discussion to strengthen the formulation of the National SDG Roadmap. Any implementation of the SDGs must take seriously the expected outcomes which must be based on a new way of thinking about development and progress, whereby our policies must create a transformation at the grassroots to ensure “no one is left behind”.

**Agenda:**

**“Sustainability Framework & the SDGs - The Paradigm Shift”** by Dr Hezri Adnan, Co-chair of the Civil Society Organisations for Sustainable Development Goals (CSO-SDG) Alliance Malaysia & author of The Sustainability Shift

**“Human Rights & SDGs: A Framework for Implementation”** by Mr Jerald Joseph, SUHAKAM Commissioner

**“Comments on the Environment & Sustainability Issues”** by Mr Gurmit Singh, (CETDEM)

**“Comments on Human Rights”** by Dr Adrina Khoo Ying Hooi, Department of International and Strategic Studies, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University Malaya & PROHAM  
Panel Moderator: Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (CSO-SDG Alliance & KITA-UKM)

## CHAPTER THREE

### DEVELOPMENT PLANNING – VISION 2020, SDG 2030 & TN 2050

This discussion drew on lessons from Malaysian Development Planning (1970 to 2020) as well as from the MDGs and SDG Agenda 2030. We have been lucky to have a very strong policy planning agenda through the five-year development planning. We had a long-term development plan, the Wawasan 2020, and now the currently-being-formulated Transformasi Nasional 2050 (TN50) which has had a lot of input from young people in the form of their aspirations for the future.

**Dr Denison Jayasooria** who moderated the discussion, provided a bird's eye view of all the major development plans such as Vision 2020, the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, the SDGs and Agenda 2030, and the TN50 as summarized in Table 1 contained in this chapter. He noted several parallels and similarities, as well as both strengths and weaknesses especially in terms of public accountability and issues of governance and human rights compliance.

#### PRESENTATIONS

We had a very good range of speakers, from the more senior and experienced leaders to the younger generation who spoke on their aspirational views for the future. The three youth panellists are also part of the TN50 Circles of the Future project and from a diverse background. The senior members are from a rich heritage of policy planning and active in civil society organisations. This diverse and inter-generational panel is something to be encouraged as there should be more such opportunities to learn from both the past and present generations so as to get the future right for the next generation.

**Tan Sri Michael Yeoh** gave a warm welcome to Mr Stefan Preisner, UN Resident Coordinator for Malaysia, and all the speakers and attendees. He noted that this roundtable is a timely occasion and reminded everyone to take stock of Malaysia's development planning and journey thus far as the 60th anniversary of Merdeka approached. The nation had done well and achieved much in terms of physical and economic development over the past fifty years; Malaysia is, in many ways, a success story that has served as a model for development for many emerging and small countries.

However, Malaysia still needs to address issues in areas like human rights, governance reforms and institutional strengthening. Its development planning needs to address the 5Is: inclusive development, industrial development, infrastructure development, innovation development and integrity. The government and CSOs also need to address the new age of the digital economy, so that relevant policies do not create two new classes of citizens divided by the digital haves and the digital have-nots.

He also argued that in order to future-proof our economic development, it is important for everyone to focus on the vital 3Cs in development planning: competitiveness, competences and cost of living. The nation needs strategies and plans to ensure long term sustainable national competitiveness, develop competences for jobs of the future and address the growing concerns about the increasing cost of living.

While in Kazakhstan for the UN ESCAP meeting on the UN Business sustainability network, he noted that many ESCAP member countries look to Malaysia as a model of development. Many ESCAP member countries are keen to learn about Malaysia's poverty reduction programs, five-year development plans, and its export and investment promotion.

He noted that ESCAP hoped to foster closer linkages between business, civil society and governments on the implementation of the SDGs. Its business advisory council had set up 4 taskforces, each to focus on: green technology; digital economy; banking and finance; and business sustainability. Professionals

from academia, CSOs and think tanks had been invited to be a part of the process of civil and public engagement. One challenge involved was coming up with specific tools and mechanisms to track progress and monitor implementation.

He noted that he had been advocating for the establishment of an independent monitoring mechanism (comprising of representatives from the government, academia, think tanks, civil society and business) for a long time, and hoped that the roundtable could also look into developing tools and mechanisms to better monitor development planning to ensure effective and successful implementation. Finally, he stated his opinion that Malaysia needs to put equal emphasis on social and human development in our development planning, instead of merely prioritizing economic development. Human rights, common values, happiness and human development should also be prioritized to incorporate a people-centred and human rights approach to development.

**Prof Datuk Yusof Kassim, (COMMACT Malaysia)** observed that when it began in the 1970s under the leadership of Prime Minister Tun Abdul Razak, the NEP had two main objectives: to eradicate poverty and to restructure the economy. The goal, even back then, was to facilitate the restructuring of the economy, from an agrarian based economy to an industrial economy, and then to a service-oriented economy.

Malaysia had been developing long-term plans since the 1970s, which each plan typically spanning a decade. The plans aim to use the economy and education as ways to unite society and achieve social cohesion. Instead of redistributing previous growth, the aim was to spread the benefits of free market growth (with strategic government interventions). The economy had been successfully transformed from being agriculture-based to industry-based, with a 6.2% average rate of economic growth (despite the turbulences in the global economy).

Prof Yusof noted that while poverty had been significantly reduced (from nearly 50% in the 1970s to nearly 0.6% in recent years; Malaysia has also reduced the percentage of its citizens that were classified as ‘hard-core poor’ to 0%), the problem of inequality remains. The 11th Malaysia Plan now aims to reduce Malaysia’s inequality index to 0.38.

Malaysia had also benefited from improvements in utilities and facilities, with nearly universal access to tap water and electricity. Nevertheless, Malaysia still lags behind high-income nations like South Korea, leaving its ambition to become a high-income nation unfulfilled. He noted that the target of an average income of USD 15,000 will be difficult to achieve due to the exchange rate but argued that the Malaysian ringgit was actually stronger than its market value.

He argued that plans for economic transformation in the near future should focus on the community as a unit of analysis – instead of the individual. This would allow policy makers to reach its objectives earlier than targeting individuals, e.g. with the goal of reducing the gap between the top 20% and the bottom 40%. A greater focus on the people would not only achieve development goals, but also reduce poverty, and achieve more social cohesion and other non-economic goals such as increased tolerance and resilience. After lamenting the emergence of a ‘pampered’ younger generation, he concluded that despite setbacks, the interconnectivity of the different development goals in the 11th Malaysia Plan was a positive development.

**Dr Lin Mui Kiang, (Proham Exco & Alliance)** began by tracking the broadening definition of sustainable development, which was initially defined at the 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development (the Brundtland Commission) as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. More recent definitions included a focus on human rights, culminating in the UN Sec Gen’s 1997 Programme for Reform, which called for the integration of human rights into all UN activities and programmes.

She noted that Malaysia had made significant progress in achieving 6 of the SDG goals: eradicate poverty and hunger (goals 1 and 2); reduce child and maternal mortality and combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases (goal 3); achieve universal primary education (goal 4); promote gender equality and empower women (goal 5); and develop a global partnership for development (goal 17).

However, she argued that there is still a need to take aggregated data into account, and not just focus on the national averages. Effective targeting on specific marginalized communities is needed to ensure that no children or youths are left behind (e.g. drop outs and children in isolated areas who do not attend schools). Likewise, there is still a need to be alert and vigilant with respect to gender equality, maternal mortality, combatting HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability. She then ran through various statistics to show the gap in living standards between the poor and the average citizen, and to make another case for a multi-dimensional analysis of poverty:

Moving on to the SDGs, she pointed out that it is a long and comprehensive list of 17 goals, 169 targets and 230 indicators. Among other things, the SDGs aim to end poverty, reduce the widening gap between rich and poor, provide quality education, promote peaceful and inclusive development, eliminate discriminatory laws, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions. The PM and the Government have both committed to it and will report on its progress via organizing steering committees and working committees that will work on the various issues at hand:

She noted that the government's concerted collaboration with NGOs and the private sector to achieve the SDGs were divided into three phases:

Phase I (2016-2020) – prioritising the SDGs according to the 11th Malaysia Plan

Phase II (2020-2025) – focus on post 2020 goals and targets

Phase III (2025 – 2030) – achieve any remaining goals and targets in line with Malaysia's capacity and global role

The government intends to align domestic competencies and organisations with SDG and capacity building. It aims to localize SDGs at sub-national levels by replicating multi-stakeholder governance at state level, with a framework for strategic communication that includes advocacy, seminars, roundtables and a national portal, EPU road show at state level. Funding will be provided through the 5-year Malaysia Plans, private sector, civil society and international agencies to formulate national indicators and establish databases.

This integration of the SDGs into the national planning and development process is a welcome change since it guarantees that the SDGs will then become part of the KPIs of the ministries and civil servants. This also includes a concerted collaboration between academia, CSOs and private sector and regular monitoring and evaluation exercises.

Dr Lin then elaborated on how the 17 SDGs have been incorporated into various thrusts of the 11th Malaysia Plan:

Thrust 1: Enhancing inclusiveness towards an equitable society - SDGs 1, 2, 5, 6, 10, 11

Thrust 2: Improving well-being for all - SDGs 3, 11, 16

Thrust 3: Accelerating human capital development for an advanced nation - SDGs 4, 8

Thrust 4: Pursuing green growth for sustainability and resilience - SDGs 6, 7, 12, 13, 14, 15

Thrust 5: Strengthening infrastructure to support economic expansion - SDGs 7, 9

Thrust 6: Re-engineering economic growth for greater prosperity - SDGs 2, 8, 9, 17

However, she expressed concern that some goals may be side-lined or forgotten in the process of economic development. To be a high-income nation by 2020, Malaysia's GNI/capita must be US\$15,000. According to the EPU, the average income per person has fallen by 15% from US\$10,345 in 2013 to US\$8,821 in 2016, which means that Malaysia has 3 years to double its GNI. She also argued that more work is needed to achieve a suitable level of emphasis on each and every goal. She observed that NEM 2010-2020 was similarly premised on the goals of achieving high income, inclusivity and sustainability.

Inclusivity means that no one will be marginalised from the country's progress. This will entail, among others, reducing the divides between urban and rural dwellers, and between various ethnic groups, in an equitable and market-friendly manner. Sustainability refers to not only managing the environment well, but also to the way the government manages its resources and finances.

The VNR and Roadmap which reported on SDG goals 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, 14, and 17, and which was drafted with input from various CSOs, were scheduled to be presented to the UN on 18 July 2017. The next step was to work with CSOs, private sector and academia in preparation of the 12th Malaysia Plan to incorporate the SDGs into plans, programs and financing for implementation, coordination and evaluation.

Dr Lin concluded her presentation by elaborating on the various challenges that lay ahead, including:

1. Ensuring the political will to maintain commitment by all levels of government to implement and deliver the SDGs;
2. Providing sufficient funding through the 5-year Malaysia Plans for the private sector, civil society and international agencies;
3. Ensuring that the rule of law applied to everyone, and that human resources guidelines and principles of non-discrimination applied;
4. Ensuring good governance without playing into the familiar politicization of race and religion, which will only create an environment of fear and insecurity while dampening FDI and growth;
5. Avoiding corruption and the leakages of funds which would negatively impact development and Malaysia's debt burden;
6. Improving the quality of education in line with human resources, productivity, R&D, and the 4th industrial revolution;
7. Carrying out monitoring and evaluation with disaggregated data, no selective targeting, along with the ability and willingness to address problems seriously and effectively.

**Ms. Ng Yeen Seen's (Centre for Research, Advisory & Technology (CREATE)'s and Member of the TN50 Circles of the Future)** presentation looked towards the future and focused on how the changes brought about by the 4th Industrial Revolution would be reflected in the TN50. She noted that the SDGs had been conceptualized with an awareness that the trends of unsustainable economic growth, overconsumption of non-renewable resources, wealth inequality and environmental degradation could not persist into the near future. The SDGs thus present a critical opportunity to promote sustainable growth for everyone through progressive policies that place people and the environment first. Meeting the SDGs would require a combination of public, private and philanthropic capital.

She observed that the millennial generation in developed economies had a lower level of income than their parents for the first time in history, while the population in China was ageing rapidly. This suggests that the world had reached a tipping point in growth sustainability.

Ms. Ng then moved on to discuss the idea that the world was entering a new phase of disruptive change. She aimed to highlight the three central challenges posed by this brave new world (which cannot be

easily solved through regulation and well-meaning government initiatives), as well as five principles that citizens and the government could use to shape these new technologies and systems.

The first challenge is to ensure that the benefits from the new system are distributed fairly. Resources have always been unevenly distributed, with certain groups of people missing out on the benefits of systems because they are unavailable, irrelevant, or unaffordable. Given the tendency of institutions to privatize profits and concentrate wealth and opportunities, this problem would undoubtedly persist unless stopped.

The second challenge involves managing the externalities to minimize the risk of damage and harm to vulnerable communities. She argued that too little had been done in the past to protect vulnerable communities and the environment from the unintended consequences of change. This was especially important given the power and unpredictability of the disruptions, and their effect on disadvantaged communities, that will be caused by the 4th Industrial Revolution.

The third challenge lay in ensuring that the fourth industrial revolution would be human-led and human-centred. Human values must be prioritized, so that humans could be empowered rather than overrun by new technologies. Given the potential for future technology to intrude into private realms, collect data, influence thoughts and predict human behaviour, this was especially crucial. Handled correctly, the capacity of data-gathering and data-crunching at an unprecedented scale nevertheless presents an opportunity to improve human life.

Ms. Ng then moved on to outline the four principles that citizens and leaders can draw on guide and shape new technologies and systems as they emerge. A new leadership mindset is needed to overcome these challenges, as well as a mindset that is adapted to 21st century challenges.

The first principle is to focus on systems instead of technologies. She argued that systems that deliver wellbeing can be improved through proper investment and cooperation.

The second is to view technology as empowering, not determining. Instead of viewing technology as being impossible to control and direct, we need to value human decision-making and agency, and design systems that harnesses new technologies to enable more choices, opportunities, freedoms and control over lives. This was especially crucial given the prospect of machines that can make decisions and act without human input and influence our behaviour in overt and subtle ways.

Third, technology should be seen as products of particular designs, instead of existing as they are by default. Instead of resigning ourselves to the inevitability of default options, we can use design-thinking and system-thinking approaches to understand how we can shift these systems into new and beneficial configurations.

Fourth, Ms Ng advised that we need to focus on the importance of values at all stages of innovation. All technologies have implicit value instead of being mere tools.

Ms. Ng concluded that these challenges require responsive and responsible leadership that involved the capacity to think and act with a long-term timeframe. There is a need to prioritize equitable and inclusive development on local and global levels, while also prioritizing societal values and a shared vision for change. With a systems-based leadership (which involves technology leadership, values leadership and governance leadership), a shared vision of change with inclusive values can be cultivated. This can empower wide-spread innovation and actions among all stakeholders in society.

**Mr Rashvin Pal Singh, (MENGO & Member of the TN50 Circles of the Future)** noted that TN50's nationwide concept of youth engagement had meant that 1.2 million youths attended the events and forums and shared their opinions via the various online feedback channels. As a member of the environment, food, energy, and governance circles, he had a glimpse of the feedback from the grassroots level. Various

forward-thinking ideas had been proposed, such as setting a target of 50% renewable energy sources and creating a thriving biodiversity landscape in Malaysia. These ideas will be compiled within the youth report, which would eventually be submitted to the EPU.

He noted that a few key challenges had emerged at this stage. TN50 used a standard view on sustainability, which focused on society, the economy and the environment. He was concerned that there would be a very lopsided focus on economic policies, with environment and social issues being side-lined (e.g. championing manufacturing and then promoting recycling efforts).

He proposed that the environment should be the over-arching umbrella, where economic and social goals could be achieved within certain economic parameters. This way, the linkages and interconnectedness between the various SDGs could be explored without ignoring the bread and butter issues. He also argued that this approach would allow for true innovation.

Mr Jufitri Joha, (Malaysian Youth Council & Member of the TN50 Circles of the Future), noted that TN50 aims to further Malaysia's evolution from a poor country to a great nation. Based on his experience with communication with Malaysian youths in various dialogue sessions, he noted that the youth are generally excited and positive about the country's future prospects. He nevertheless opined that they needed to be equipped with futuristic thinking skills to overcome their limited life experience and restricted thinking horizon, while learning from the past and not ignoring history.

He also noted that a number of youths were sceptical of TN50, e.g. a few saw it as an attempt to erase the legacy of Tun Mahathir. He proposed that these contrary and sensitive views be welcomed and discussed, so long as they are constructive. He noted that in general, the youth want their voices to be heard, their issues to be solved and to be given important roles. He proposed that the top government leaders allow the youth to express their needs and aspirations without fear or discrimination, and without pandering to them.

He approved of the format of the TN50 dialogues, which only gave each speaker 10 mins to speak before opening to questions and comments from the audience, noting that it had broken convention and forced government officials and policy makers to listen to the youth. This bottom-up approach could hopefully allow the policies to be successfully implemented without political manipulations and diversions.

He noted that the government aims to encourage more participation from the youths in policy making and implementation, as specified by the 2015-2035 Malaysian Youth Policy. Efforts have involved the National Social Council, National Youth Council, Youth Parliament, National Consultative Committee on Political Financing, and annual Budget Consultation Sessions. Mr Jufitri noted that this shows a serious commitment to support the nations' sustainable development agenda, while ensuring that the youths are actively involved in the discussion of the future. The aim was to prepare the young people for the future – i.e. promoting 'smart youths' and not 'frustrated youths'.

Mr Jufitri pointed out that the National Youth Council had agreed to intensify efforts to hold discussions with young people, setting a target to hold discussions with more than 1 million young people. With over 14.34 million youths in the nation, the council hopes to work in tandem with other government agencies to ascertain the aspirations of more youths. The new dialogue sessions will involve focus groups that target diverse groups, interfaith groups and indigenous youths.

He noted that some of the aspirations raised by the youths were free education, a healthy living environment, and a peaceful multi-ethnic community. These aspirations were gathered and coded into five main pillars: society and governance, living, wellbeing, lifestyle and work. Each circle was led by an appointed youth and an adult expert to empower young people to develop youth-adult partnerships to work together in decision-making for national development and avoid past partnership that manipulated and tokenised youth.

Drawing from his own personal experience in participating in the ‘Islam in 2050’ circle, Mr Juftri noted that an effort was made to have representatives from diverse schools of thoughts and standpoints (e.g. liberals, conservatives, Sufism, etc.), while omitting extreme ideologies and promoting moderate and inclusive views. Non-Muslims were also invited to participate to ensure peace and prosperity in a multi-ethnic society. Malaysian identity, societal values, equity across societal segments, and social safety nets were among the topics discussed. He concluded his presentation by quoting the vision statement from the focus group, which described a future vision of Malaysia as a peaceful, plural and multicultural nation that championed dignity, humility, openness, respect, and tolerance.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION – QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

There were seven comments and interventions during the open discussion time.

**Tan Sri Michael Yeoh** pointed out that there were only 8 goals in the MDGs but 17 goals in the SDG – does this mean that the MDGs have failed or have been absorbed into the SDGs? Do most nations even have the capacity to achieve all 17 goals or are they hampered by incongruities with national policies? The SDGs also overlap with TN50 and Vision 2020, which aimed for a harmonious, prosperous and sustainable Malaysia. Harmony is a vital attribute for any nation; the Middle East is a prime example of how the lack of harmony should not be taken for granted. He opined that the older generation was largely responsible for the lack of harmony in the country and stressed the need to counter extreme and polarizing views.

**Mr Andrew Khoo (Bar Council)** grouped his concerns into three ‘Ps’: product (outcome), principle and process. He was concerned about the lack of political plurality in the SDGs, since the process was commanded by the ruling political party. He noted the sceptical view that TN50 had been drafted with more goals in scope to give Malaysia another 30 years to achieve the aims of Vision 2020. He also pointed out the difficulties that lay ahead in promoting diversity and pluralism in the nation, citing the LGBT community, the indigenous communities and refugees as groups that continue to suffer from omission and marginalisation.

With regards to process and product, he wondered about the extent to which all the aggregated feedback and opinions from the public and NGOs will be acted upon when it came to the time for implementation.

**Ms Shanthi Dairiam** agreed that the spirit (not just the indicators) of the SDGs should be emphasized, as well as the need to focus on groups and communities (and not just individuals). She noted that the value of inclusivity is part of the SDGs and argued that there is a great need to focus on ‘group disadvantages’. For example, the Bumiputera community of East Malaysia is 8 times poorer than the Bumiputera of West Malaysia. She also pointed out that there are various ways of assessing poverty and inquired about the efforts made to ensure that the groups who have left poverty continue on their track towards upward mobility. She also noted that there is a general lack of a safety network in Malaysia, to protect residents from unexpected economic shocks. Finally, she pointed out the problem of highly educated Malaysian women who are either dropping out of the workforce or under-employed in lower-paying jobs - is this due to personal, communal and professional discrimination?

**Mr Thai Ming Yeow (MBM)** suggested that efforts towards achieving the SDGs could be more integrated if a stronger and more interlinked partnership between the various committees working towards the different goals is established.

Another participant wondered if generational differences are considered in the SDGs, and how different criteria for each generation could be created in line with achieving Malaysia’s ambition of joining the top 20 nations in the world. Finally, she inquired about what TN50 was going to do to achieve change in Malaysia’s schools since targeting the young is essential to achieve palpable change.

A young participant noted that the TN50 website featured a notably digital-intensive and futuristic vision

of the aspirational Malaysian lifestyle and asked if this emphasis on technology has also been carried over into other aspects of the TN50.

Another participant who focused on sustainable production and consumption stated that her efforts in reaching out to youths and the community had resulted in 40 guidelines for sustainability and asked the TN50 representatives about the possibility of collaboration.

## PANEL'S RESPONSE

**Mr Jufitri Joha** addressed the question on generational differences and reiterated the mentor-mentee relationship in the various forums is a good way to balance the wisdom of the older men with the spirit of the young. By including the youth in the implementation process, it will be harder for politicians to manipulate outcomes and divert from the original objectives. In regards to the LGBT community, he noted that their opinions and needs must be addressed, even if the religious bodies have 'agreed to disagree' with regards to their life choices.

**Mr Rashvin Pal Singh**, noted that concerns about the environment were initially categorised under 'living environment', which was unsubstantial. He was pleased that after the concerns were raised, a separate focus on environment issues was created, proving that their feedback had been taken into account and acted upon. As for the question regarding the 'digital-centric' nature of the TN50, he agreed that the TN50 was conceptualized with the assumption that major technological advancements are inevitable.

**Ms. Ng Yeen Seen**, raised her concern about why the WWF was not included in the Circles of the Future focus group, and noted that the resolution could be forwarded directly to the EPU. She encouraged everyone who felt that their voices are not being heard to proactively reach out to the EPU. She noted that it was up to the consultants employed by the government to filter through all the feedback and opinions provided by the masses and the NGOs. She also argued that the bottom-up approach had its own limitations; her personal observation was that this approach tends to encourage a focus on present concerns instead of looking into the problems of tomorrow.

**Dr Lin Mui Kiang**, agreed with Tan Sri Michael Yeoh on the importance of harmony, and opined that Malaysia did have the capacity to take on the SDG goals – provided that there is sufficient will. She also expressed her concerns about the Prime Minister's previous statement that "human rights are not for Malaysia", which discourages progress in this domain. Resource management is also a critical issue since state government has an incentive to monetise state natural resources to make up for a lack of funds. She also argued that the cost of 'doing things the wrong way' is higher than the cost of fixing the problems and stressed the importance of disaggregated data (e.g. poverty rates) and the coordination of services (e.g. 28 agencies implementing 29 welfare programs in isolation from one another).

**Prof Datuk Yusof Kassim**, noted that tackling 'pockets of poverty' are particularly challenging – hence the need to specifically target impoverished groups of people like fishermen, rubber tappers, and the Orang Asli. Relative poverty will always exist, but absolute poverty can be eradicated with the proper effort. The challenge is to gain a real understanding of the consumption needs of these groups on a day-to-day basis. He argued that a per capita understanding of poverty is more relevant, since families will have a varying number of children and dependents to feed. He also agreed that those who were technically over the poverty line are still vulnerable to changes in the economy and opined that the government did recognize these vulnerabilities.

## CONCLUDING COMMENT

In making some concluding remarks, **the Resident Coordinator, UN in Malaysia, Mr Stefan Priesner**, commended the organisation of the Development Policy Discussion and quality of speakers, and gave a comprehensive overview of the evolution of global development policies from a focus on economic development to human development and now sustainable development as described in the 2030 Agenda

and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Mr. Priesner emphasized the importance of remembering that the SDGs are grounded in the principles of “leaving no one behind”, sustainability and human rights. He stressed the importance of participatory processes in policy development toward ensuring that the needs and interest of all groups are taken into account. He highlighted the need to ensure inter-generational justice by making sustainability central to development planning, given current planetary boundaries that have even been exceeded to some degree. He mentioned the need for a robust monitoring and evaluation system and echoed the need for disaggregated data, pointing out that the precision and availability of the data makes it easier to target specific groups. He also spoke about the merits of moving the focus from absolute poverty to relative poverty, notwithstanding that the latter would persist to some degree.

In addition, **Datuk Denison Jayasooria** thanked all the panellists for their respective contributions, as well as the audience who sat through the entire discussion and raised relevant comments and opinions. He concluded that the state of development planning in Malaysia is relatively good (with regard to the reports, discussions and interactions). However, serious consideration is needed in specific areas – as well as a more open acknowledgment of the challenges and failures to pave the way for future success. He noted that policy documents often omit the failures (which is counterproductive as failure is often a stepping stone to future success).

He reiterated the importance of targeting specific groups and communities (e.g. women, indigenous communities, sub-ethnic communities) and the real need for disaggregated data (instead of average statistical figures that omit specific realities). Datuk Denison also pointed out the discrepancy between Malaysia’s ambition of becoming a top 20 nation and its practice of relying on the definition of poverty used by the bottom 40 nations.

He acknowledged the need for meaningful participation from the stakeholders has been highlighted, but also noted that there are risks that the voices from particular subgroups (e.g. forest-based communities, women at the margins) might slip through the tracks (especially in the format of large town hall gatherings). He argued that popular aspirations needed to be checked against facts and evidence and reiterated the need for an independent monitoring mechanism. TN50 seems to ‘reinvent the wheel’ without seriously considering global standards, themes and benchmarks, which means that its linkages with the SDGs have to be carefully monitored.

**Table 1 Birds Eye View - Socio-Economic Development Agenda**

	<b>VISION 2020</b>	<b>11TH MALAYSIA PLAN</b>	<b>SDGs</b>	<b>TN50</b>
<b>Year Launch/ duration</b>	Feb 28, 1991/30 years	May 21, 2015/5 years	Sept 25, 2015/15 years	Yet to be/30 years
<b>Key mover</b>	PM Dr MM @ Malaysian Business Council	PM Najib @ Parliament	UN & at General Assembly/New York	PM Najib
<b>Motto</b>	Developed nation by 2020	Anchoring growth on people – ‘No Malaysian is left behind’	Leave no one behind	Top 20 country in the world by 2050

	VISION 2020	11TH MALAYSIA PLAN	SDGs	TN50
<b>Key Themes</b>	<b>9 Challenges</b> C1 United Malaysia, C2 Self-confident society, C3 Maturated democratic society, C4 Moral & ethnical society, C5 Maturated liberal & tolerant society, C6 Scientific & innovative society, C7 Caring society & resilient family, C8 Economically just, C9 Prosperous society	<b>6 strategic thrusts:</b> Inclusive, wellbeing, human capital, green growth, infrastructure & economic growth  <b>6 game changers:</b> productivity, B40, TVET, Green growth, innovation & competitive cities  Transforming public service	<b>17 Goals, 169 Targets &amp; 230 Indicators</b> G1 end poverty, G2 end hunger, G3 health, G4 education, G5 gender equality, G6 Water & sanitation, G7 Energy, G8 Eco growth, G9 innovation, G10 reduce inequality, G11 cities, G12 consumption, G13 combat climate change, G14 Oceans, G15 ecosystems, G16 peace & justice, G17 implementation	<b>Not yet. But there is a framework for the work</b> Circles of the Future with a focus on: CF1 Work & Value creation, CF2 Living & Well-being, CF3 Governance CF4 Society & CF5 Lifestyle
<b>Strength</b>	Not just economic development. National unity & Eco justice is key. Moral character & self-confidence central	Review of 10MP & built on it in terms of socio-eco planning	Comprehensive, interdependent especially eco, social & environment including governance & human rights	Youth engagement & participatory – web based/ interactive with youths  Circles of future includes youth leaders &
<b>Weakness</b>	Human rights & environment neglected. Term ‘community oriented Malaysian democracy. Gender neglected	Neglects human rights & governance.  Public accountability, transparency of data lacking & building trust neglected	Too much & difficult to implement. Weak reporting as voluntary & not like UPR compliance. Financing for development	No formal consultative process like NECC  No series review of the past ex Vision 2020 & implementation -3 decades
<b>Assessment of achievements &amp; lessons from challenges &amp; failures</b>	No formal review of 9 challenges, achievements, challenges & lessons. Only academic writings & reviews	Built in via ICU and result oriented monitoring & KPI. Needs stronger public accountability to build trust	Monitoring & impact assessment built. Access to CSO & academic groups	Not yet
<b>End</b>	2020/3 years	2020/3 years	2030/13 years	2050/33 years

**‘Navigating through Vision 2020, SDG 2030 & Transformational National 2050:  
Aspirations, Achievements & Apprehensions in Development Policy Formulation & Execution’**  
Organised by ASLI-CPPS & CSO-SDG Alliance

July 3, 2017 (Monday)

2.30pm to 5.30pm

Persatuan Alumni Universiti Malaya (PAUM) Rumah Kelab Lot 10476,  
Jalan Susur Damansara (Jalan Damasara Lama), 59100 Kuala Lumpur

Malaysia has had a long history of development policy planning; the most significant policy was the New Economic Policy which was a 30-year development plan from 1971 to 1990. Much has been written on the NEP and its impact. Over the years, we have undertaken a systematic development planning approach and we are now in the Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016- 2020).

Since 1991, the aspirations of Vision 2020 with its nine challenges has been the central guiding policy focus. However, in recent months, we have been bombarded in the media by two aspirational documents; one is the global Agenda 2030 including the 17 SDGs, targets and indicators. The other is the TN50, the most recent national dialogue process with 1.2 million young people that was described as a participatory process that “started as an idea [and] has now become a national movement”.

What do we make of all these development policy endeavours? Are these just political exercises? Have these policies had an effective impact upon all sections of our society whether class, ethnicity, gender, age and locality? Is there a policy planning fatigue? Is this really enabling social cohesion and social mobility? Is it improving the daily lives of ordinary people?

ASLI-CPPS and the CSO-SDG Alliance are hosting a development policy discussion to review these developments from different perspectives and to make some sense of prior policy discussions. Is Malaysian development policy just chats or are they grounded on solid policy review, analysis and data, and the intent to ensure that ‘no one is left behind’? Will it ensure that all Malaysians will be able to experience a better quality of life and a sustainable future?

**Welcome Speech:** Tan Sri Michael Yeoh

**Bird’s eye overview of global development policies from the UN perspective:** Mr Stefan Priesner (Resident Coordinator, UN in Malaysia)

**Bird’s eye overview of Policy Planning in Malaysia: Setting the stage for policy discussion:** Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (Alliance & KITA-UKM)

### **Panel Speakers**

Lessons from Malaysian Development Planning (1970 to 2020): Prof Datuk Yusof Kassim, Chairman COMMACT Malaysia

Lessons from MDGs and SDG (Agenda 2030): Dr Lin Mui Kiang (Proham Exco & CSO-SDG Alliance & National SDG Steering Committee, Representative

Transformational National 2050: Youth Aspirations and Future of Malaysia:

- Mr Rashvin Pal Singh (Mengo & TN50)
- Ms. Ng Yeen Seen, (CREATE & TN50)
- Mr Jufitri Joha (MBM & TN50)

## CHAPTER FOUR

# SDG & SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY & INNOVATION

### PRESENTATIONS

**Mr Voon Zhen Yi, (ASLI-CPPS)** began by greeting all the speakers and thanking the audience for attending the discussion. He apologised on behalf of ASLI's CEO, Tan Sri Michael Yeoh, and CPPS Director, Ms Caroline Cheong, who were unfortunately unable to attend. He noted that the panel discussion allows civil society and members of the public to contribute towards the realisation of the SDG goals in Malaysia by 2030. While Malaysians are generally avid users of technology, he noted that Malaysian society lacks the “crucial culture and mindset for innovation”. This has arguably held Malaysia back from excelling and venturing beyond its comfort zone (e.g. preferring to use cash instead of Touch n' Go or Smart Tag to pay the toll on highways). He argued that access to the tools for sustainability would be futile if there was no mindset amongst the population to live sustainably. He hoped that the discussion today will cultivate better science, technology and innovation in the country via policy and cultural changes.

**Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria** who moderated the discussion, explained that the CSO-SDG Alliance approached development from various backgrounds: poverty, women and children, youth, human rights NGOs, and environmental groups. However, the links between development, human rights activists, and environmentalists with science, technology and innovation are relatively weak and need to be improved. He argued that there is a need for this gap to be bridged in the concept of the SDGs.

The theme of ‘harnessing science, technology and innovation’ thus presents a unique opportunity for sociologists, social scientists and activists to address complex problems like land rights, access to water, forest conservation, and deforestation. The question was how the fields of science and technology can be harnessed to achieve the various SDG goals such as healthcare, agriculture, and human rights. He noted that the business community would also be keen to focus on how money or capital can be generated through new sustainability initiatives.

**Tan Sri Datuk Dr Haji S. Omar bin Abdul Rahman** began his presentation with the disclaimer that while he was no longer the President of the Academy of Sciences Malaysia, he remains a senior fellow within the organisation. He was also presently serving as the Chairman of the Commonwealth Partnership for Technology Management. He argued that the crucial role of STI (science, technology and innovation) in any global and national development effort should be universally accepted as STI is always either the major enabler or main driver in any development effort. In fact, Dr S. Omar believed that STI is one of the four pillars of development together with politics, economics, and sociology.

The MDGs had included a special report on how to apply science to achieve the various development goals spread across various domains. He clarified that for today's roundtable, he would focus specifically on the domain of policy since it is his area of speciality. He argued that there are serious shortfalls in most areas of the SDG's 17 goals and 169 targets in terms of implementing the STI. For example, regarding goal 17 (partnerships for the goals), Dr S. Omar argued that it was impossible for developing countries to meaningfully collaborate in addressing all 17 goals and 169 targets. All nations have to deal with their respective limitations in resources and capacity, and thus have to make distinctions between the desirable and the actionable, doable, and feasible.

In Malaysia's context, the core objective of the National Economic Transformation Program was to create a “Harmonious, Prosperous and Sustainable Nation”. This involved (1) the provision of basic needs (food, water, shelter, primary healthcare, energy, sanitation, literacy, and gainful employment), (2) improvements in the quality of life, (3) wealth creation and economic competitiveness and (4) good governance and responsible government. The 17 SDG goals could be segmented into these critical technology-dependent objectives.

Dr S. Omar noted that technology is essential for all of these goals. For example, clean water is a basic need which is guaranteed by the use of technology in the process of harvesting, storing, processing and distributing water. Without STI, Malaysia's objective of being an innovative and knowledge-based economy would remain unrealised. This is also applied to other goals such as good governance and improvements in the quality of life.

He argued that these four critical technologies could be used to achieve the 17 SDG goals, provided that there is national capacity for policy formulation and to prioritize and the authority to commit resources. Individual countries should prioritise based on their respective capacities and resources; what a country needs is a competent national governance structure for policy development and formulation for the national STI priorities.

However, many countries lack the optimum STI government structure and capacity and will therefore not be able to adequately address even their own needs with respect to the critical technologies, let alone respond meaningfully to goal 17 of the SDG or the national level STI requirements for goals 1 - 16. He also pointed out that many nations have outsourced STI policy formulations to consultants, obtaining "beautifully written documents based on 'best practices' which may not be relevant to the countries concerned".

Malaysia has been conducting training workshops on STI policy and management through ISTIC and ASM. The enhancement and extension of this initiative is needed to achieve critical mass. Dr Haji S. Omar then outlined the SMART collaboration model that avoided exploitation in favour of cooperation and collaboration within a robust framework to achieve equitable and mutually beneficial outcomes.

He concluded that the SDGs are a common ground for global goals and national action as they contain similar objectives to many national socio-economic transformational programs. However, the demands of Goal 17 can only be achieved if global goals coincide with national priorities and developing nations have the capacity to deal with the 1-16 global goals and 169 SDG targets. Furthermore, determining and managing national priorities require an optimal STI policy environment which is lacking in many developing countries. Thus, the first priority is to build STI capacity (Malaysia has been contributing towards this). Such efforts need to be enhanced to achieve the critical mass of STI policy and management personnel in these countries. With a robust framework for cooperation and smart partnership between nations, the SDG goals will be more attainable.

**Dato Dr Lee Yee Cheong (UN Broadband Commissioner)**, began his presentation by talking about the 2000 -2015 UN MDGs, which were the precursors to the SDGs. He noted that he was the only Malaysian represented in the UN Millennium Project, which was spearheaded by Kofi Annan and Jeffrey Sachs. He noted that the Millennium Project had many shortcomings which were addressed by the UN Millennium Project Science, Technology and Innovation Task Force. When attending the UN Commission on Sustainable Development sessions in New York, he arranged for Jeffrey Sachs to engage civil society leaders in dialogues. During a session he chaired, Sachs had posed a challenging question to civil society leaders: what are you going to do for the MDGs (without relying on the UN or the government)? Only the youth civil society groups posed a response; their report (which was published six months later) cited 40 best practices to promote the MDGs in four continents of the developing world.

He then summarized his criticisms of the UN MDGs (2000 – 2015):

1. it was unambitious, targeting to reduce poverty, hunger, chronic diseases only by half;
2. it was silo-like, without addressing cross-cutting issues like youth employment, energy, SMEs;
3. it was government-centric, without engaging the private sector and NGOs as direct stakeholders. They had been driven by the G7, and were constrained by the limited development funding provided to the developing countries;
4. it did not provide solutions for the developing world's urgent problems, which mainly fell under poverty eradication via gainful employment and wealth creation.

Dr Lee spoke briefly about his role in the UN Broadband Commission, which is backed by leading IT companies such as Microsoft, Nokia, Intel, Facebook, and Twitter. While these companies were keen on pushing broadband connectivity throughout the developing world to access a larger market, the UNESCO-appointed committee insisted on stopping to clarify what kind of content would be made available, and what benefits it would provide.

Dr Lee then moved on to summarise his criticisms of the UN SDGs:

1. there are too many goals and targets;
2. there have been limited support from the G7, which are now pursuing a “My Country First” ethos;
3. there are now 17 silos instead of 8. While the MDGs did not include energy, the SDGs are still fragmented with each individual domain (e.g. energy and water) claiming primacy over the other goals.

He proceeded to outline his own focus: education, gender equality and the impact of the digital revolution. He argued that the 4th Industrial Revolution is actually the latest phase of the same industrial revolution that began with steam and mechanical power in 1784, despite the popular argument that the smartphone and new digital technologies have brought forth a paradigm shift. The key driver of the revolution has been economic growth through consumption in industrialised countries, leading to the colonisation and semi-colonisation of less developed countries and regions for raw materials and cheap labour. The industrial revolution has thus been underpinned by the political and socio-economic ethos of the West, which can be characterised by (1) individual rights above community rights; (2) lower taxes, more benefits; (3) government non-intervention in business; (4) short term profit over long term investment; (4) living beyond their means; (5) a ‘not in my backyard’ approach towards infrastructural development.

If nothing is done, the 4th Industrial Revolution will be associated with rising wealth inequality and the shrinking of middle income families. The other major concern that has appeared is massive job loss, as the amount of jobs created (2 million) is insufficient to offset the loss of 7 million jobs in traditional services and manufacturing.

He argued that the developing countries are no longer following Western development models but are creating their own development models. China serves as the role model, guided by a focus on providing citizens with basic necessities (clothes, food, shelter and transportation) and the Chinese proverb “To Get Rich, Builds Roads First”. With the “One Belt One Road” initiative (OBOR), China is sharing its development ethos with the rest of the world. Inspired by the historical Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, it aims to connect economic trade, civilisation and peace.

While doubts have been raised about China’s capacity for such a grand undertaking, Dr Lee argued that OBOR is actually an initiative by the entire developing world. He noted that his organisation, ISTIC Malaysia, is working together with the associated Academy of Engineering & Technology of the Developing World (AETDEW) and the China National Development & Reform Commission International Cooperation Centre (NDRC ICC) on OBOR Human Capacity Development Programs for OBOR Countries. Their concerns involve providing training for locals, encouraging the mobility of engineers and technicians, techno-pruner training, and the Civilization School Curriculum Design (which aims to change the ethnocentric approach of most nations’ curriculums).

He argued that a shift in mind-set is needed to promote awareness of neighbouring civilisations and engender harmony and tolerance. Countries also need to avoid rote learning, and promote learning by doing, while encouraging the freedom and availability of knowledge. He suggested that the tenets of the Golden Age of Islam should be promoted, which encouraged knowledge in science, religion, poetry, literature, music and the arts.

**Dr Noriah Jamal's** presentation on nuclear technology began with an overview of STI as an integrative concept. STI consists of science (as a systematic study within education and vocational training), technology (the application of scientific knowledge for practical ends), and innovation (the implementation of new and significantly products). Each is inextricable from the other.

She believed that nuclear energy is compatible with the SDGs, which aim to integrate and balance the three dimensions of economy, society and environment, noting that nuclear energy's share of GDP has increased from 0.024% (RM 138.64 million) in 2006 to 0.032% (RM 236.62 million) in 2008. Nuclear energy can support sustainable development by providing complete development solutions, data to support policy development, data for assessment of intervention and efficiency or progress towards the goal.

Nuclear energy supports 9 out of the 17 pillars, e.g. helping to end hunger by providing the energy needed for food security, protect the life of livestock and enhance production, and promote sustainable agriculture. It can also ensure health and well-being, ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy, support education and training, build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation, combat climate change, meet growing energy demands for development, improve energy security, reduce environmental and health impacts, protect ecosystems and biodiversity, and strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Malaysia has signed the Treaty for the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and is a member of the IAEA, CTBTO, RCA, and FNCA, organisations that uphold the safe use of nuclear technology in the country and the world. The challenge now lies in crafting an effective nuclear technology policy that can be sustained until 2030 (the existing nuclear policy runs until 2020). National policies and STI agendas thus should be aligned with the new sustainable development paradigm.

Dr Noriah also elaborated on the need to nurture talent among its citizens, which is a challenge for many nations. Without talented and educated people to participate, the best government structures, institutions and funding will not amount to much. There is thus a need to nurture four main sources of talent to realize the potential of the STI in supporting the 2030 agenda: (1) the general population; (2) the private sector; (3) government employees; (4) people at the grass-roots level. Besides encouraging STEM graduates, there is a need to ensure that there are enough science-based jobs to accommodate them. Current STI investment strategies provide R&D funding under three main priority areas: (1) medical & healthcare; (2) green growth for sustainable development; (3) water, food and energy nexus. There are two main forms of funding: the SMART Challenge Fund and the GoFund.

Lastly, she argued that STIs had to be applied from today until 2020 for solution-driven priorities. Application of STIs should engage the private sector and should focus on the use of existing technologies while building the foundation for long-term R&D activities. Finally, she argued that there is a need to honour scientists and engineers who focus their work on urgently needed solutions for a sustainability transition.

## **OPEN DISCUSSION – QUESTION & ANSWER SESSION**

**A participant** noted that STI is a cross-cutting component for all the SDGs, spanning poverty, hunger, employment, environment, health, and education. However, she questioned if practitioners are aware of the scientific advances that are required for their work, and if scientists are aware of the needs of the people on the ground? While cutting-edge technology may be available, they must be transferred and delivered to the end-users for progress in their respective fields. Furthermore, there is still a tendency to work in silos as experts in various fields do not share their knowledge or collaborate on multi-faceted problems. Thus, how can all the scientific discourses and practitioners be integrated in a way that can achieve the SDGs?

**A second participant** posed a question to Dr S. Omar: how do universities and learning institutions train scientific professionals to achieve the critical mass he mentioned? Furthermore, how should they be prepared for interdisciplinary work?

**A third participant** asked Dr S. Omar to re-examine what Malaysia had achieved so far in terms of STI after investing a significant amount of national GDP to this end. Malaysia seems to be losing efficacy in promoting research and development and argued that government officials must understandably demand evidence of results when approached for R&D funding. After all, the government represents the interests of the entire population, and not just the rakyat.

**A fourth comment** was also addressed to Dr Haji S. Omar, asking what are some of the examples of critical technologies needed for good governance? How would such technologies be implemented in Malaysia?

**A fifth participant** expressed her opinion that developing nations should emphasise the means of implementation instead of global partnership and invited the speakers to share their views on this matter. She asked Dr Noriah if she could provide an update on the status of the nuclear power plant development in Malaysia.

**A sixth participant** argued that Malaysia needs to be a technology leader and innovator, instead of simply adopting and using imported technologies from other nations which will require Malaysia to prioritise areas where it could be a pioneer. However, given the change in political will from time to time on the various technologies, how can Malaysia develop sufficient experts and research outcomes? Furthermore, how can Malaysia combat the problem of brain drain, where its brightest scientific minds tended to migrate to other nations?

**The last comment** was that applicants for future R&D grants should be asked to link their research proposals to the relevant SDGs as a way to promote SDG implementation in Malaysia.

## PANEL RESPONSES

**Tan Sri Datuk Dr Haji S. Omar bin Abdul Rahman**, noted that specific government agencies (e.g. MARDI, the Nuclear Institute of Technology, etc.) were mandated to solve the implementation problems within their respective areas, to find new and validate new knowledge in their domains, and to promote innovation. As for universities, they would approach research in a different manner since the focus was to create new knowledge and to train people. However, he noted that universities have also been encouraged to promote findings that can be commercialized and applied for the public good.

As for the matter of critical mass, he pointed out that the government officials within the Ministry of Science have not been trained to create science policy. Furthermore, the policy requirements for developed countries are completely different from developing countries. Any drafted STI policy should clarify the different roles of the government, the population, and the private sector in promoting a vibrant scientific culture.

He stressed the need for a ‘champion’ for STI policy implementation at the highest levels of political power, which we currently do not have. In the current political landscape, any national priority on STI has to be supported by a relevant ministry in order to be effectively implemented.

Dr Haji S. Omar also argued that the subjects offered in university do not have to perfectly correspond to current career paths. The point of the university was to “open the mind” and encourage lifelong learning, as there will always be a need to imbibe new areas of knowledge. Students should thus focus on learning to learn and picking up specific skills, while remaining open to learning new skills and areas of knowledge in the future.

He concluded with the prediction that the 4th Industrial Revolution will be driven by three mega-trends: the physical, the biological and the digital. Technology stands to benefit multiple facets of society and should not be ignored in the effort to achieve the SDGs.

**Dato Dr Lee Yee Cheong** pointed out that the scientific community has never policed its members, e.g. creating weapons of mass destruction. He argued that unchecked science and technology can have negative effects on society even though the discourse surrounding it is nearly always positive.

He pointed out that in societies that do not respect science teachers, scientists and engineers (e.g. in Africa), it will be difficult to expect them to focus on working for the benefit of society. He argued that Malaysia needs to accord more prestige to scientists and engineers in the country so as to encourage more Malaysians to aspire to join their ranks and to engender more goodwill towards society at large. There is also a need to encourage creative thinking in the primary and secondary levels before more innovation can be achieved at the tertiary and professional levels.

Furthermore, Malaysia's investment levels in R&D (2% of national GDP) pales in comparison to investment in the USA and China. He pointed out that Huawei itself spends the same amount of money (\$11 billion) on research and development and argued that the Malaysian private sector needs to invest in R&D alongside the government. He also pointed out that the need to integrate the natural and social sciences in formulating national policies for STI initiatives.

Dr Lee also noted that the South-South cooperation had freed many developing nations from being overly dependent on funding and financial aid from developed nations. With increasing confidence in individuals in the developing world, the STI partnerships need not be dependent solely on large MNCs.

He addressed the question of nuclear technology in Malaysia by pointing out that public opinion is not always in line with the facts. Nuclear technology is becoming increasingly safe but is resisted more than the building of nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers. Without support from the general public, it is unlikely that Malaysia will be ready for nuclear technology in 2030.

Dr Lee addressed the importance of primary school teachers by noting that many Nobel Prize winners credited their schoolteachers for nurturing their interests in science and supported the need to recognise the important contributions of schoolteachers. He pointed out that Finland, Singapore and Vietnam (countries who are top scorers in the PISA test) all paid primary schoolteachers a relatively high wage which is comparable to the wages of an engineering graduate. He also noted that young people with bright ideas need not necessarily pursue R&D and a university education, but instead can focus on bringing their ideas to the market. The youth should engage in 21st century creative skills, and not forced into pursuing the life sciences if they are interested in other areas.

**Dr Noriah Jamal** shared a success story from her research group about a new strain of rice that had been accepted by the locals and was being developed for commercialisation with help from the Ministry of Agriculture. She noted that the Malaysian government had shifted the energy policy away from nuclear when oil was discovered in Terengganu, a decision that had a major effect on research and development initiatives. She stressed the need for public acceptance for nuclear energy initiatives since there tends to be widespread fear and anxiety about nuclear technology in general. Like Dr Lee, Dr Noriah believed that without a receptive public, nuclear technology initiatives in the country will not be able to progress.

Lastly, Dr Noriah argued that all youth should play an important role in implementing and driving the STIs in Malaysia instead of leaving to work in developed countries who tend to aggravate the brain drain by importing STEM professionals from developing countries.

## CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Datuk Denison concluded that the session had been productive in relating the pursuit of science to the SDGs and highlighting the importance of STI in achieving the SDGs. Activists, civil society agents, NGO actors, and the private sector should collaborate and interact with scientists to approach the complex goals and problems in a more holistic and effective manner. The ultimate aim of both STIs and SDGs should be to improve the welfare and wellbeing of society. Policy makers should thus work actively to attract and engage with scientists when making plans to achieve the 17 SDGs and avoid the tendency to work in isolation.

Commenting on the panel presentations, Datuk Denison recognised that Dr S. Omar had provided a comprehensive vision of how the 17 SDGs were interlinked with improvements in quality of life, wealth creation, good governance and an effective policy environment. The smart partnership model is clearly an important step in moving away from the ‘best practice syndrome’. He further noted that the linkages made would be helpful, as sociologists and anthropologists could analyse social problems well, while scientists were better equipped in proposing effective solutions.

With regards to Dr Lee’s presentation, he commented that Dr Lee had covered a broad area, moving from science and technology to civilizational studies, poetry and literature. He also observed that many were critical of the Chinese model of development (especially with regard to human rights) and wondered about the extent to which it was consistent with all the SDGs. He concluded that the panel speakers had focused on the “heart of science”, which ultimately aimed to improve human wellbeing and civilisation.

In the case of Dr Noriah Jamal, Dr Denison noted that she had made a useful point linking nuclear science and technology with specific aspects of the SDG and outlining the challenges of building a scientific society and nurturing talent. He opined that this perspective would be illuminating for those who were not directly involved in nuclear science and technology. After all, many people are not fully aware of how STI is involved in enhancing basic needs, quality of life, and promoting economic growth.

Datuk Denison also noted that there is a dichotomy between how the arts and the sciences are viewed in Malaysia, with the arts disciplines often being seen as a ‘second class’ to the sciences. He argued that a multidisciplinary approach can be beneficial in Malaysia, as the world’s leading innovators often benefited from access to various disciplines. He also argued that Malaysia should invest more in primary school teachers and mothers, since they often had a formative impact on a child’s development.

### **Harnessing Science, Technology and Innovation**

#### **For The Sustainable Development Goals**

Organised by ASLI-CPPS & CSO-SDG Alliance

28 September 2017

2.30pm to 5.30pm

Persatuan Alumni Universiti Malaya (PAUM) Rumah Kelab Lot 10476,  
Jalan Susur Damansara (Jalan Damansara Lama), 59100 Kuala Lumpur

During the formulation of the 2030 Agenda, it was recognized that technology, science and capacity building are the major pillars of the SDGs. In order to eradicate poverty and reorient current unsustainable development trajectories over the period 2015 to 2030, we must develop and disseminate affordable technological solutions in the next fifteen years. The research, development, deployment, and widespread diffusion of sound technologies in the context of a Green Economy is also closely linked to other core elements and means of implementation, including innovation, business opportunities and development, trade of environmental goods and services, finance and investment, and institutional capabilities. STIs play an indispensable role by resolving various emerging issues we face and by providing scientific data and analysis for better political decision.

Speaking at the first STI forum in June 2016, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, “Over the next 15 years, progress in STI will be key to delivering on all the SDGs – from poverty eradication to agriculture and food security, to energy, to water and sanitation, and climate change ... Innovation is embedded in the SDGs, together with advancing science and technology, as Goal 17, but STI must not be limited to SDG 17. They cut across all the SDGs as an important element of implementation.” He added that innovation is also a mindset and an attitude and it means questioning assumptions, rethinking established systems and procedures, and introducing new strategies. Linking science, technology and innovation with progress in sustainable development at the ground level will be the greatest challenge. It is crucial that all stakeholders from government, universities, research agencies and institutes, NGOs and private sectors take transformative steps in a holistic manner toward STI for SDGs.

This is what Malaysia aspires to do. Malaysia has an overarching goal of becoming a developed nation that is inclusive and sustainable by the year 2020 with a society that is stable, peaceful, cohesive and resilient. A central challenge to the government is establishing a scientifically advanced and progressive society, one that is innovative and forward-looking, which is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific and technological civilization of the future. This challenge underscores the important role of STI, particularly in facing the rapid changes of a globalized and competitive world. Realizing that STI are central to propel the socio-economic landscape of the nation. STI must be strengthened and mainstreamed into all sectors and at all levels of national development agenda. STI should be pervasive and touch the lives of every Malaysian.

The National Policy on Science, Technology and Innovation 2013-2020 aims to harness STI for Socio-economic Transformation and Inclusiveness. It states that this overarching STI policy is also crucial to harmonize and consolidate all of our STI activities and programmes. It is an essential component that should be placed at the centre stage of all national development plans and strategies. Its strategic thrusts include: advancing scientific and social research, development and commercialization; developing, harnessing and intensifying talent; energizing industries; transforming STI governance; promoting and sensitizing STI; and enhancing strategic international alliances. These policy objectives are closely aligned with the SDGs. The question is how will these be implemented and translated into reality?

ASLI-CPPS and the CSO-SDG Alliance is hosting the 4th in a series of development policy discussion roundtables to review these STI development policies and programmes from different perspectives and to make some sense of all these so as to as well as to ensure that these are not just mere proclamations but are really grounded on policy review, analysis and data so that all Malaysian will be able to experience a better quality of life now and in the future in a sustainable way and ensure that “no one is left behind”.

## **PROGRAM**

Welcome address: Mr Voon Zhen Yi, (ASLI-CPPS)

Moderator: Setting the stage for discussions, Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria, (KITA-UKM)

### **Panel of Speakers:**

1. Tan Sri Datuk Dr. Haji S. Omar bin Abdul Rahman, President, Federation of Asian Scientific Academics and Societies (FAsAS) / Former National Science Advisor
2. Dato Dr Lee Yee Cheong, Commissioner of UN Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development.
3. Dr Noriah Jamal, Director, Planning & International Relations Division, Agensi Nuklear Malaysia (Nuklear Malaysia)

### **Open Discussion Time**

# CHAPTER FIVE

## RELEVANT PAPERS

### 1. JOINT STATEMENT BY ASLI-CPPS & CSO-SDG ALLIANCE

ASLI-CCPS and the CSO-SDG Alliance hosted a discussion on the National SDG Roadmap-CSO Reflections entitled 'Leaving No One Behind' on March 14, 2017 in Kuala Lumpur.

We had a lively discussion yesterday and the input from Civil Society Organisation (CSO) experts on the panel was very refreshing. The thoughts centred on themes such as environment & sustainability by Lavanya Rama Iyer (WWF); human rights and the Universal periodical review by Rizal Rozhan (EMPOWER); poverty & inequality by Dr Lin Mui Kiang (PROHAM); gender mainstreaming by Sunitha Bisan (NCWO) and access to justice by Andrew Khoo (Bar Council). From the presentations and feedback from the participants, we have identified ten key pointers to present as inputs into the preparation of the National SDG Roadmap.

First, it was recognised that Malaysia has seriously taken the SDGs goals as part of public policy planning. There are synergies between the SDGs and the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, particularly the chapters addressing the educational, health & human wellbeing, the bottom 40%, the multidimensional poverty indicators and in the green growth for sustainability. This was a very good start but the challenge is now in the implementation.

Second, it was also acknowledged that the Economic Planning Unit (EPU) has created spaces for CSO participation at the national discussions in 2016, in the National SDG Steering Committee, thematic cluster groups and also in the specific SDG taskforces. CSOs appreciate the spaces given and hope there will be ongoing participation in planning, deliver, monitoring and implementation through the fifteen-year agenda and three Malaysia plans (Eleventh, Twelfth and Thirteenth).

Third, it was recognised that much of the focus in national policy discussions has been on the 17 SDG goals along with the 169 targets and 230 indicators. While this is necessary and important, it is equally necessary to draw on the UN Transformational Agenda 2030 document which has the substantive underlying background, ethos and ideology the goals, targets and indicators. Without the framing documents and themes, the exercise will just become a technical process losing the substance and depth and miss the focus on paradigm of sustainability development.

Fourth, the discussions highlighted some thematic and cross cutting concerns. For example, it was noted that the National SDG Roadmap discussions lacked the discussion on the of sustainability and development such as the balance between people, profits and planate in a sustainable way. It is not enough just to use these terms as slogans but the values must be ingrained as the conflicts and contestation comes in the implementation and often economic and business value and considerations are placed on higher priority than people and the environment.

Fifth, of utmost importance is to strengthen our understanding and commitment in three areas: (1) towards a sustainability agenda and framework, (2) towards gender mainstreaming or utilising gender lenses not just in SDG 5 but for the whole agenda for change, (3) using human rights as a cross cutting theme of not just economic, social, cultural rights but also civil and political rights – namely that people have right to voice their concerns and participation in holding the state actors accountable. Access to information will become a central principle for participation and holding the state actors accountable.

Sixth, we also noted that there is a mismatch between the targets and indicators set at the global level. There is a need to have national indicator-setting forums to formulate what are specific indicators which will capture the aspirations of Malaysians at the national context. In this context, alternative indicators

could be developed; for example, indicators for natural capital and its value, a wellbeing or quality of life index and a multidimensional poverty index for the B40 and urban poor which captures their aspirations for social mobility and wellbeing.

Seventh, it was suggested that local government, including the district offices at the grassroots levels, should play a major role in SDG implementation. More work must be done to create greater awareness and enhancing their 'buy-in' for the SDG process especially from agency officers at the district level as well as the local authorities. Local governance must adopt a sustainability agenda. Programme Local Agenda 21 (LA21) was mentioned as a good example but its full potential has not been tapped at the local governance level.

Eighth, there should be a review undertaken on the specific issues and recommendations raised in the UPR process on human rights compliance alongside the SDG goals and targets. The common areas and concerns should be tabulated and discussed. This will enable the National SDG Roadmap to also take note of the UPR obligations.

Ninth, the role of CSO and nature of CSO engagement need to be more clearly defined. CSOs do not want ad hoc participation. They want to be equal partners with the public sector at planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. They like to ensure that there are adequate structures and resources that can enable effective participation. It was strongly expressed that public funds should be made available to CSOs to implement the SDGs especially in undertaking awareness programs, coordination, capacity building and enhancing the richness, quality and diversity of CSO engagement in this process.

Finally, it was noted that CSOs should strengthen alliances with private sector as there are many good CSR initiatives by businesses. It is hoped that more public-sector companies, especially the public listed ones, will also adopt the sustainability ethos and framework for the total operations in addition to undertaking CSR projects. The call now is to move beyond CSR by framing it in SDG terms.

Jointly issued by Tan Sri Michael Yeoh (ASLI-CPPS) & Datuk Dr Denison Jayasooria (CSO-SDG Alliance). March 15, 2017.

## **2. STRATEGIC CIVIL SOCIETY ROLES FOR THE 2030 AGENDA**

By Dr Hezri Adnan

### **A 'Transformative' Development Agenda**

The period of 2015 and 2016 is often presented as the watershed moment for genuine transformation to address unprecedented ecological, social, and economic challenges that were global in scale. It saw the convergence of at least six major multi-lateral processes, including the review of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a reconfirmation of the Beijing Platform of Action on women and gender, the Paris Climate Change Summit, the discussion on financing of development in Addis Ababa, the agreement on the New Urban Agenda at Habitat III conference in Quito, and most importantly, the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a new set of global benchmarks that UN member states are expected to achieve by 2030. The transformative remit of the SDGs as the post-2015 development framework is clearly stated in the outcome document of the UN General Assembly meeting:

“We are determined to take the bold and transformative steps which are urgently needed to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path. As we embark on this collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind.” (in: ‘Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development’, 2015). Although the SDGs are not legally binding just like their predecessor, the MDGs, these new goals have created an unprecedented euphoria of discussions and activities at the international level since their launch in 2015. Many believe that the seeds of transformation do exist within the SDGs, and that they present countries with an opportunity to permanently transform the nature of development by making

environmental and social sustainability a defining characteristic of their economic policies. But the transformation cannot happen without enhancing the collective responsibility of all major development stakeholders. Recently, the newly-appointed UN Deputy Secretary General, Amina J. Mohammed, called for a re-think of UN systems to meet the 2030 Agenda and said that “achieving the SDGs is not an option, but an imperative for a safe and secure future of prosperity, opportunity and human rights for all”.

### **Harnessing Partnerships for the 2030 Transformation**

To mobilize collective action, scholars such as Hajer and colleagues (2015) argue for the need to move away from ‘cockpittism’ so that we can discover the new logic and means to achieve sustainable development:

“Top down steering by governments and intergovernmental organisations alone cannot address global problems. In view of the limited effectiveness of intergovernmental efforts and questions about the capacity of national governments to affect change, the SDGs need to additionally mobilise new agents of change such as businesses, cities and civil society. To galvanise such broad set of actors, multiple perspectives on sustainable development are needed that respond to the various motives and logics of change of these different actors”.

The former UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-Moon, echoes this view and calls on governments to ensure an enabling environment for civil society organisations (CSOs) to operate. Stating that “[t]he role of civil society has never been more important”, he also emphasized that strong and inclusive multi-stakeholder partnerships will be vital to effect the necessary transformative changes when he argued that ‘the new agenda must become part of the contract between people, including civil society and responsible business, and their governments – national and local’.

Since this pronouncement in 2015, CSOs have been included in decision-making bodies of several global partnerships such as the Global Agriculture and Food Security Program, the Global Partnership for Education, and the Global Alliance for Vaccination and Immunization. In addition, SDG 17 specifically calls for partnerships between governments, private sector and civil society. At the national level, however, a key challenge is fragmentation among CSOs in addition to the known challenge of silo-based governance in the public sector, both of which are restraining deliberations on SDG strategy and policy-making. Moving forward, CSOs with progressive aims must come together in an alliance to monitor and help implement the SDGs.

### **Roles of Civil Society for the 2030 Transformation**

At present, civil society’s place in the global development agenda is widely recognized. In Malaysia, there is an urgent need to position civil society as a social movement that is more ambitious than a mere protest movement. Indeed, Malaysian CSOs must aim to become a powerful political force equipped with ideas and tools to articulate an alternative to conventional economic development. The founding of the Malaysian Civil Society Alliance for Sustainable Development Goals is a step in the right direction. The following four steps and their respective tasks are key in strengthening the Alliance as we march towards 2030:

- Stage 1. Group Creation and Envisioning – What Can We Become?: This stage begins by defining the sustainable development agenda for civil society, justifying why working together beyond the usual alliance around crises is important, and outlining the vision and strategies on how to engage with governments and other stakeholders.
- Stage 2. Capacity Building and Network Broadening – Who Do We Need, Where and How? The next step is building the alliance and its capacity for sustainable development solutions using SDGs and other instruments as a tool for advocacy and policy-oriented analysis.

- Stage 3. Creative Solutions – What Business Models? Next is finding and assessing which sustainable development solutions can be practiced widely with the help from the business sector as well as finding politics of change that is grounded in the lives of Malaysians.
- Stage 4. Strategic Mainstreaming – How to Create Systemic Change? The last stage looks to create credible institutional structures for civil society leadership in the sustainability transition and to shift Malaysian society from the politics of limits to the politics of possibilities, and from insecurity to hope.

To date, the debates surrounding the SDGs have mainly been concerned about the setting of goals and indicators. Less attention has been paid to discussing the roles and responsibilities of CSOs.

Listed below are the potential roles for CSOs, both traditional and non-traditional.

1. **SDG Mapping and Alignment:** CSOs can help conduct information gathering exercises to identify which Malaysian NGO is working on which goals and map their work to the various targets. CSOs also stand to benefit from aligning the framework of their programming to that of the SDGs. However, in order to do so, CSOs need to forge new partnerships with other CSOs based on interlinked targets.
2. **Partnering with Federal, State and Local Governments:** CSOs should participate in all communication channels including in the preparation of the SDG Roadmap and Voluntary National Reports, as well as in policy dialogues and fora with an aim to avoid sector-specific thinking and action. Where possible, CSOs can share expertise with government agencies. There is also a need to identify and engage champions within the government who can spearhead reform and encourage other public officials to join forces.
3. **Awareness Raising and Engaged Citizenry –** We need to build the capacity of citizens and CSOs to understand and process information regarding the SDGs and develop mechanisms and tools to amplify citizen voices. In addition, we need to capitalize on ‘smart technologies’ to develop citizen science, especially in the area of real-time data monitoring.
4. **Localisation of the SDGs –** The strength of many CSOs is their local nature. The greatest impact is achieved when programs align with local culture and needs. CSOs can identify creative solutions on the ground and where possible, assist with the institutionalization of community structures for engagement. Local champions could emerge from these exercises.
5. **Build Coalitions Across Key Policy Areas –** Governments are more likely to create spaces for dialogue with coalitions than with individual CSOs. A coalition or alliance can combine resources and share expertise while promoting deliberative governance, facilitating inclusivity and generating holistic solutions.
6. **Act as SDGs Watchdog –** CSOs can enhance accountability systems by serving as advocates and, when needed, jolting the government into action. CSOs may produce shadow SDG or VNR reports that assess the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, analyse the structural obstacles in its realization, motivate future reporting and develop periodic policy briefs and other knowledge materials.
7. **Promote and Pilot Alternative Models of Development –** CSOs can work to identify best practices and real-world sustainable development solutions, encourage the growth of hybrid organisations i.e. business with social purpose and civil society as market actors as well as analyse these modalities and figure out ways to scale them up in the Malaysian context.

8. **Compel Moral Arguments for Action** – Because SDGs revolve around quantitative targets and benchmarks, there is a danger that the 2030 Agenda is treated as predominantly technocratic project with the experts monopolizing the discourse. It is therefore important that CSOs remind other stakeholders that sustainable development has a strong ethical, or moral, pronouncement as to what should be done. It is a normative value system, on a par with human rights, democracy and freedom- and thus the moral imperative should always be highlighted by CSOs.

In short, there is a need for CSOs to reflect on the form of future cooperation as we march towards 2030. Relevant questions worth pondering include: first, is there a need for an SDG charter for the Malaysian CSOs, and second, should there be a coordinated platform in the form of an eminent persons group or a commissioner for sustainable development in order to concretize the institutional space that will allow SDGs analyses and recommendations to be taken seriously by the policy-makers in Malaysia? These questions are key to unravel the potential roles of CSOs in the effective implementation of the SDGs.

*Dr Hezri is the Co-Chair of the Malaysian CSO-SDG Alliance & Visiting Fellow, Institute of Strategic & International Studies Malaysia*