



SEASN

**A COMPENDIUM of Selected
Best Practices on Sustainable
Development Goals**



2019 | Vol.1

Nurturing Virtue Ethics For Value Driven Sustainable Development Initiatives

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Abstract

Sustainability and Serenity Hub, Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM) was established in January 2019. Its primary role is to coordinate all sustainable development initiatives led by academicians, administrators and students of the university. A roundtable discussion organized in March 2019 gathered researchers, green activists and volunteers from the university. The outcome was the mapping of current existing activities with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) and the well-being of the community from the principles of Syariah. SDG 4 and SDG11 were found to be the main cluster of current initiatives concentrating mainly on the education for Indigenous People, Special Needs community, sustainable kampung concept, happy city and Green Campus programs such as edible garden, therapeutic garden, mini fruit orchard for the planting tree campaign. This paper discusses some of the core initiatives being encouraged through the nurturing of intrinsic values of wisdom and justice. These values are based on Attasian concept of virtue ethics that drives the inner force of voluntarism. The value-driven approach for promoting sustainable development and community wellbeing gives an inner drive and sustainable motivation. The psychological conscious awareness of the good values of SDG in line with virtue ethics concept need to be awakened to encourage psychomotor self-regulation and individual good practices that will lead to emergent collective societal shared common values, responsibilities and conducts.

Keywords: community well being, virtue ethics, sustainable communities, voluntarism, value-driven sustainable development.

Focus Area: SDG 11 Sustainable Cities and Communities

Introduction

Sustainable development initiatives have been an agenda put forth in USIM 2016-2015 Strategic Planning where USIM Green and Sustainable Campus is one of the strategic thrusts. This indicates the management commitment for the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Diverse efforts from the three main components which are academicians, administrators and students grew but mostly operating in silos. General policy on green and sustainable campus has not been drafted as the roadmap for all initiatives in USIM. Thus, reporting on sustainable development agenda is difficult due to the distributed and fragmented nature of the current approaches. Besides that, even though, there exist regulation on promoting the Reuse, Reduce and Recycle (3R) campaign, it was not well accepted in terms of practice which requires a change of habits. In sustainable development initiatives, creating an impactful awareness in people is the important element that can lead to actions driven internally rather than just through enforcement of regulations.

Sustainability and Serenity Hub was formed in January 2019 to resolve such matters. Its main functions are to become the centralized reporting unit for the SDG outcome, coordinating and monitoring the initiatives and eventually to draft the Blueprint of USIM Green and Sustainable Campus. This is in line with the mapping of the SDGs to the Eleventh Malaysia Plan strategic thrusts in the Mid Term Review of 11th Malaysia Plan 2016-2020 (Malaysia, 2018).



Figure 1 The Mapping of the SDGs to the Eleventh Malaysia Plan strategic thrusts (Malaysia, 2018)

In March 2019, a Sustainable Development Initiatives Roundtable Discussion was organized to gather all the stakeholders to share their efforts, programs, initiatives and discussed issues, challenges and possible future directions towards USIM Green and Sustainable Campus agenda. One of the key discussion is the underlying foundation for USIM Green and Sustainable Campus being itself an Islamic University. Thus, a community well-being framework is based on principles of Syariah (Maqasid Syariah) that emphasized on the attainment of good, welfare, advantage, benefits and warding off evil, injury, loss of the creatures (Khan & Ghifari, 1985). The community well-being is classified by the level of necessity which encompasses of preservation of belief, life, lineage, intellectual and property (Khalid et al., 2015). The framework was mapped to the SDGs as shown in Figure 2 (Abdul Rahman, 2019).



Figure 2 Mapping of Maqasid Syariah to SDGs

One of the successful initiatives was the Edible Garden and Mini Fruit Orchard projects initiated by the Facility Development and Management Department, USIM. Edible Garden is a garden that uses 'edible plants' concept known as a vegetable garden or fruit, red chilli, citrus, lady fingers, tomatoes, flower cabbage includes turmeric as shown in Figure 3. The success factor was attributed not only to the management commitment and support but mainly the voluntarism spirit of the administrative staffs stems from a deep passion and high sense of responsibility. They willingly spend their time after office hours or come earlier in the morning. The best practice shared in this article becomes the inspiration of the value-driven sustainable development encouraged by virtue ethics that gives the deep meaning to a person's outlook of life that influences the way a person does things.



Figure 3 USIM Edible Garden, Agrofarm and Mini Fruit Orchard

In the Aristotle theory of ethics, the concept of virtue ethics emphasizes character traits that emphasize on four cardinal virtues: wisdom, justice, courage and temperance. Al-Attas (2015) deliberated in his book *On Justice and The Nature of Man* that the true foundation of ethics is wisdom and justice where courage and temperance are subsumed under it. Some maintain justice inherent in nature itself while others believe it stems from God's will. According to Al-Attas (2015),

"Wisdom is the knowledge given by God that enables the recipient to know the right place or to render correct judgment as to the right place of a thing or an object of knowledge. Justice is the condition whereby things or objects of knowledge are in their right places"

Value of a rational being is wisdom either theoretically or in practicality (Kania, 2017). Based on this premise, value-driven sustainable development is the inner drive that harnessed wisdom and justice. The SDG could be achieved through an educational approach that builds the virtue ethics that promote the good life, happiness, flourishing and life lived well. The value-driven motivation will produce actions related to being sustainable that will appreciate the benefits of the conduct to oneself. For example, the 3R campaign probably lacks good success due to the understanding that it will only benefit others thus will not go into the trouble of collecting recycle materials. So the focus of the campaign will not only highlight the benefit to the environment but what spiritual values or moral indicators that we are practising with a simple act such as switching the lights off, reducing the amount of water and food wastage or even planting trees that give a deeper meaning and inner commitment to those acts. As a Muslim for example, it is part of the belief that wastage is prohibited and a small act such as those that is considered as good deeds, makes you a good person which

will be rewarded accordingly later in the Hereafter. Strengthening this belief has resulted in an interesting outcome in terms of sustaining good behaviour and should be encouraged even more as depicted in Figure 4. Collectively, emergent behaviour of the community will give an impact through shared a vision model based on the value of giving and saving the planet to the person and the community that give the spill over effects to the environment. The commitment is much more permanent through the self regulating principles.



Figure 4 Virtues Ethics and Values Drive Good Deeds

On the other hand, eco-challenge events were organized that involves USIM students in the form of Green Explorace. Participants will move in a team from one checkpoint to another where green activities such as gardening, planting, seedling, plogging which is a combination of jogging with picking up litter will be carried out. Response from participants was very encouraging. They have the chance to learn about gardening, walk around the campus and appreciate the environment and it is a stress reliever doing the gardening. The sense of commitment to the trees that were planted, seeing them grow gives a sense of fulfilment that they have done something beneficial and useful to the environment. Every second through the oxygen was emitted.

This good sense is also obvious when the Students Council Representative requested to collaborate on the next event called Lestari Run. The run involves around 1000 students during the orientation week of Tamhidi Centre for the new enrolment of pre-university programs. Similar activities will be carried out with wider space around campus, more trees including that involving landscaping.

At Save Our Rainforest Race (SORR) on 30th March 2019 organized by Pertubuhan Pelindung Khazanah Alam Malaysia (PEKA), 120 students voluntarily participated in four buses that travelled to Melaka to join the challenge. This is a promising beginning and a good indicator that the youth can be motivated and inspired by nurturing the good values and creating a sense of responsibility to protect nature. They will be leaders of the future generations inculcating with green and sustainable development awareness.

Besides the effort, one of the challenges is the maintenance of the gardens especially during the semester break when students are not around the campus. Thus, we are setting a smart edible garden concept by the installation of IOT based control system to assist in managing the plant especially daily watering. A humidity sensor will be used to collect the data of the soil that can be monitored with smartphone apps through a cloud server. The integration with technology will help us to efficiently manage the garden through the Internet and can benefit the data analytics from sensors function as double loop feedback for the benefit of the growth of the plant. A model of this smart IoT based edible garden integrates with rain harvesting is currently in the process of setting up at Mizan Park, USIM, the living lab for sustainable development initiatives related to SDG11. We also collaborate with a company that produces electric scooter and electric food truck to promote a clean vehicle concept based on green technology to the campus as shown on the photos below.



Conclusion

It has been about 6 months since the hub was initiated. Year 2019 is the year we plan to focus on creating awareness with campaigns such as OASIS project to reduce plastic bottles, initial work on Green Campus, strengthening community engagement programs that have long been a tradition among students and staff, food bank programs such as Free Food, Foodbank Siswa, Souq Hurrah program and free market with the local NGOs. These campaigns highlighted the benefits of this act in terms of spiritual aspect as well as social and environmental aspects such as the amount of oxygen we can contribute to the environment, every tree we plant which is a living thing will give the spiritual satisfaction of the human soul and make us good people not only to humans but also to the planet. Everything we do motivated by nurturing our virtue ethics

leads to value-driven sustainable development. It makes everybody happy including the Creator whom will be very pleased. Educating on the values of the SDGs is much more fulfilling rather than just regulations without moral and ethically conscious minds which exert the actions with full sense of responsibility.

Acknowledgement

We would like to thank the committee members of the Sustainable Development Initiative in USIM Dialogue 2019, Landscape Unit, Facility Development and Management Department, USIM and Agrosiswa Students Club for their cooperation and commitment to share this vision of a greener environment and working together to save the planet.

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