



Policy Dialogue: Collaborative Approaches to Implementing the United Nations SDG Agenda 13 June 2019

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A policy dialogue involving partners from different sectors – government, academe, corporate – was held on 13 June to find ways of supporting collaboration and cohesive approaches to the implementation of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) agenda. The policy dialogue was organised by the EU Centre in Singapore with its partners from the Jean Monnet SDG Network – the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), Australian National University (ANU), University of Canterbury (UC) and Glasgow University.

The morning opened with a few keynote presentations.

Keynote Presentation #1: Professor Ben Cashore from Yale University

Topic: “Why Does a Good Governance Norm Complex Undermine SDG Implementation?”

The first presentation by Professor Ben Cashore from Yale University raised some creative and provocative ideas to engage in critically thinking about how to implement sustainability goals in the face of acute challenges.

As an introductory note, Professor Cashore asked why new ways for improving global approaches to sustainable development were always being invented and provided an example in the area of sustainable forestry. From no deforestation commitments along supply chains to legality verification along global supply chains and forest law enforcement, governance and grade (FLEGT), each method was designed to be better than the previous one. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for

example, are the latest in a long line developed across history - from the Rio agenda to the Millennium Development goals - a clear manifestation of the assumption that as humans become increasingly intelligent over time, the methods we develop to address the issues are thus progressively superior to the last. Of these methods, Professor Cashore observed that finance and market driven (FMD) government mechanisms dominate in global sustainable development historical trends.

Yet, this assumption seems to appear as a fallacy when contrasted with the reality that the climate crisis is getting increasingly acute, with pervasive impacts on our environment and ecology, despite all the efforts and resources put into it. The UN, as part of its SDGs, talked about the catastrophic species extinction crisis and Professor Cashore emphasised that our planet was about to lose 1 million species. “We are part of the problem and the challenge as members of this planet”. To add more alarming doses into the sobering keynote presentation, a major UN report says that climate change is worse than first thought, and that we only have a window of 11 years to address the challenges before it becomes irreversible.

Professor Cashore has identified a disconnection between a proliferation of interventions and problems they are attempting to solve and in answering why, he put forth the proposition that the good governance norm complex might be the answer: there is an assumption that if you improve the capacity to carry out good governance, these norms of good governance are all synergistic and would lead to improved outputs and livelihoods. However, the norm complex has implicit causal influence as it assumes positive synergies among sub-components such as maintaining law and order, ensuring rule of law, freedom and sustainable development. In contrast, evaluations show that negative interactions is deemed to be a problem with the design of the intervention. The dilemma is then, that there are inherent trade-offs that SDGs cannot simply be “implemented away”.

Professor Cashore offers a solution in that there is a need to be much more explicit about the trade-offs and the “political discussions” that need to take place rather than to rely purely on technical solutions. There is a need to understand how these tradeoffs are to be managed and this requires explicit attention to 4 implicit ways of conceiving a sustainable development problem, also known as the Four Problem Conception. He set out 2 questions as headings in a 2-by-2 table:

- (1) Does utility/economics dominate rationale for action?
- (2) Do management techniques derive from a specific kind of problem?

YES	NO
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	YES	NO
YES	<p>Type 1 (win-win): Tragedies of the commons. Absence of rules means that rationals over-harvest the resource and undermine the resource. E.g.s: fish and timber</p> <p>- Dominant discipline: Economics</p>	<p>Type 3 (win-lose compromise): Solution methods: multi-goal policy analysis which compare & contract interventions on the basis of their impacts on various social and environmental policy goals</p> <p>- Dominant disciplines: Sociology, anthropology, political geography, et cetera</p>
NO	<p>Type 2 (win-lose optimisation): Solution methods: cost-benefit analysis in social welfare economics. Overall, effective in economic development</p> <p>- Dominant discipline: Economics dependent on the outcomes of the cost-benefit analysis</p>	<p>Type 4 (win-lose prioritisation): Solution methods: path dependency analysis. E.g.s of super wicked” problems: massive species extinctions, catastrophic ecological effects of climate change. Critical trick is to develop a technique in line with the problem trying to be solved by placing a “super wicked” problem in a category all by itself, rather than alongside other issues.</p>

Professor Cashore gave an example of a Type 3 conception from the province of Newfoundland located in his home country of Canada. Scientists had informed the government that the resource was being over-harvested and the government went into dialogue with different stakeholders from the indigenous circles and environmentalists to scientists and academics and eventually came to a compromise that was not in line with the science at all, leading to a collapse of the fisheries. This is why a Type 4 win/lose prioritisation is important where there is no choice involved in a trading-off for “super wicked” problems such as environmental tragedies exemplified by massive species extinctions and the catastrophic ecological effects of climate change.

There has been an Implicit Policy Conception Drift away from Type 4 conceptions towards Type 2 and Type 3 conceptions. In proposing a solution to overcome the policy drift, Professor Cashore was not arguing that the SDGs implementation must embrace Type 4 problem solving, but that if policymakers want to address these “super wicked” problems, then a path dependency analysis is a better candidate than a cost-benefit analysis.

An emphasis on type 4 interventions may uncover hidden policy baskets that could greatly improve anticipatory policy design and we must allow organisations such as the UN and Davos as well as our own individual and collective efforts to narrow the gap between our collective discourse and the interventions pursued.

Professor Cashore's talk was a challenge to re-conceptualise better the nature of the problems we are thinking about and engaging with and to recognise the assumptions that underpin the way sustainable development problems are viewed.

Keynote Presentation #2: Professor Zenaida Reyes from Philippine Normal University

Topic: SDGs Goal 4: Education, The Philippine Experience

Professor Zenaida Reyes provided a concise case study on what Philippines is doing on the national level pertaining to Goal #4 of the UN SDGs, namely quality education which is seen as an important part of social and cultural development. The Philippines is ranked 93rd among 157 countries in 2017 and 4th in ASEAN with a net primary enrolment rate of 95.7%. Any university programmes or projects funded by the government need to address at least one of the SDGs.

Professor Reyes shared that while the process of data collection is quite strong with partnerships that provide feedback to the governmental departments in charge of implementing the SDGs, this type of reporting is compartmentalised and the data gathering led by government agencies is still very slow. Professor Reyes also shared that the data collected from the Philippine Statistical Project is disaggregated by sex by 84% and this is because there is a law that 5% of the total budget of every government agency must be allocated to programmes for gender development. However, Professor Reyes shared a concern that the people in the ministries and departments to which such a budget is allocated must first have knowledge of how to develop gender equality, otherwise this results in a situation where this funding is spent on social activities such as Zumba and yoga rather than crucial skills and empowerment activities. While the Philippines is one of the top 10 countries on indicators for gender & development, economic development does not seem to have trickled down to the micro communities as many Filipinos you may ask today will qualify themselves as poor.

Generally, Professor Reyes observed that while the government is able to operationalise the SDGs, there are some gaps in terms of how to develop in a holistic manner. For instance, under goal 4b, there must be a certain volume of scholarships available for tertiary education which the Philippines appeared not to be on track to hit the target. The Department of Education has separate commissions for higher education and technical & vocational institutes. Furthermore, this is only the second year in which free tertiary education has been instituted in 120 state universities and

colleges. However, there are thousands of private tertiary institutes to which this program does not extend. Furthermore, at Professor Reyes's home institution of Philippine Normal University aims to have 100% of their faculty at the doctorate level in their respective specialisations and model the way for other universities in the country. In 2016, faculty with Masters degrees qualifications only stood at 40.37% and faculty with doctorate qualifications an even more dismal rate of 13.32%.

Professor Reyes concluded her talk by saying that community engagement programmes are on the rise and that there are some positive indicators of progress, whereby traditionally male dominated occupations or skills such as in the welding sector are now getting higher female participation.

Keynote Presentation #3: Ms Shweta Shukla, Director, Communications & External Affairs from Unilever

Topic: Advancing SDGS through Collaboration

Ms Shweta Shukla eloquently provided a corporate perspective on how Unilever attempts to bring the SDGs into action and emphasised that the key word was collaboration. With a turnover of US\$58 billion serving 2.5 billion people through over 400 brands located in 190 countries, Unilever is also a leader in the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and a Globe Scan sustainability leader.

Unilever's sustainability vision began with its founder William Lever in 1885, who adopted the slogan "making cleanliness commonplace" in Victorian slums as improving hygiene would make good business sense as well as improve the livelihoods of his consumers. However, the company cannot stop there as the world faces bigger challenges. Hence, the company adopted a simple but clear purpose last year to "make sustainable living commonplace". It has a sustainable living plan with 3 pillars, namely improving health & well-being for more than 1 billion people, reducing their environmental impact by half and enhancing the livelihood of millions. With around 3 million indirect employees including farmers and suppliers of products, Unilever committed itself to aligning its business goals to SDGs by mapping materiality issues to these. While there seems to be an emphasis on some goals over others, Ms Shukla said Unilever picks its priorities so that they are at least doing something even if they cannot achieve everything. Unilever does not shy away from measuring its impact on the SDGs using business parameters to ensure that these are not just boxes to be ticked. In sharing some of this data, 70% of sustainable living brands under the Unilever umbrella are growing 46% faster than those brands without a sustainability-driven purpose. Unilever is also being more stringent and careful about the businesses that they acquire. Due to its commitment to sustainability which is a value shared with many in the millennial generation, Unilever has become the 2018 Graduate employer of

choice in the fast-moving consumer goods sector. Moreover, Unilever estimates that by reducing its energy use, they have also saved significantly in the ballpark figure of around 600 million euros.

Ms Shukla ended her engaging presentation and fresh perspective with case studies that show how Unilever implements these business goals and put theories into action, through videos from programmes done in the Philippines and Vietnam - in Baseco, programme to create value from waste by providing slum-dwellers with coupons to purchase Unilever products from stores to incentivise sachet waste collection; and in Vietnam, improving health and hygiene in village communities with the aim to roll out 1000 such “perfect villages” by end-2020. Closer to home in Singapore, Ben & Jerry’s runs a programme for migrant workers while brands such as Lifebuoy conduct hygiene talks in schools.

Keynote Presentation #4: Mr Bruno Julien-Malvy, Head of the Trade and Economic Section, Delegation of the EU to Singapore

Topic: Together to achieve the SDGs

Mr Bruno Julien-Malvy, began his presentation with an overview of the concluded and ongoing FTA negotiations that the EU has with ASEAN countries. He provided numerous statistics on the EU’s commitment to help ASEAN integrate in line with the SDGs. The EU has allocated 250 million euros (SGD\$400 million) to diversified programmes concerning economic integration, higher education and student mobility covering the 17 sustainable development goals. One such programme goes by the acronym of E-READI, or Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument, which has USD\$20 million allocated to 5 pillars, namely economic and trade connectivity, economic and climate change, science and research, human rights, gender equality and safe migration. E-READI involves 27 ASEAN bodies and entities and 14 EU Bodies and entities, and supports policy dialogue on areas of EU-ASEAN joint interest, as well as providing support to ASEAN regional integration and community building and exchange of experiences across EU-ASEAN networks.

For the security pillar, under the EU-ASEAN Migration & border management programme II, the EU has provided expertise on security & border management through Interpol and both the EU and ASEAN have co-operated on transnational crime and human trafficking.

ARISE Plus is another project which aims to develop the ASEAN single market and its production base, combining regional support and country-level interventions with a funding of 85 million euros from 2017 to 2022. As a result of this project, one of its fruits is a computerised customs management transit system to allow private companies to move goods from one country to another, lowering costs for traders. The EU also

provides support to the ASEAN Secretariat and there are currently 2 EU agents working at the ASEAN Secretariat. In practice, the EU thus supports a number of working groups in ASEAN that regularly meet to provide technical expertise.

To improve the livelihoods and food security of smallholder farmers & rural producers, the ASEAN Farmers Organisations' Support Programme was implemented and it reached a total of 26 national and 1,076 subnational farmers' organisations, with 15 million euros allocated from 2015 to 2019 for creating new markets for these farmers.

To address goal 4 of Quality Education, the EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region aims to harmonise higher education in ASEAN and the quality of ASEAN higher education institutions, promote mutual recognition as well as student mobility through credit transfer systems and pilot scholarships.

Ending off on the area of climate change, environment and disaster management, Mr Julien-Malvy said that the EU tries to assist with already existing initiatives rather than beginning everything from scratch. Hence, some of the programmes to which the EU has provided assistance include:

- Sustainable use of peatlands & haze mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA)
- protecting national parks in the ASEAN region
- Supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) - 10 million euros from 2018 to 2022

Finally, the EU has committed 25.5 million euros from 2018 to 2023 to realise women migrant workers' rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region.

Panel Discussion 1

Following the keynote presentations, a brief impromptu panel discussion was convened with the four keynote speakers. In response to a question on engaging communities on issues of gender inequality and mental health, Professor Reyes highlighted the need to engage multiple stakeholders at the grassroots level and across different sectors to take part in collective action, citing the Philippine Magna Carta of Women as a product of such action.

A question was also raised on the importance of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in achieving the SDGs. Both Professor Reyes and Professor Cashore affirmed the role and opportunity for SMEs to contribute to achieving the SDGs. Mr Julien-Malvy outlined the initiatives undertaken by the EU to help SMEs integrate into the ASEAN economy and other markets, while Ms Shukla shared Unilever's work in supporting social enterprises.

Rounding up the discussion was a question raised on ASEAN's role in EU-ASEAN collaborations on the SDGs. Mr Julien-Malvy spoke of the immense value of having ASEAN academics and researchers in Europe, briefly discussing plans to build on this momentum with joint projects involving researchers from both blocs. Ms Shukla added that ASEAN presented multiple trends that were both challenges and opportunities for the private sector – young demographic, rising urban migration and consumption habits.

Panel Discussion 2

The second panel discussion began with researchers from the Jean Monnet Network (JMN) partners presenting their areas of research contributing to the broader theme of The Role of the EU in implementing SDGs in the Asia-Pacific.

Role of the EU

University of Canterbury Senior Research Fellow Dr Mathew Doidge opened with an overview of the EU as a global development leader. He emphasised the experimental and collaborative nature of the EU and its influence on the EU's development policy framework. Engagement with issues of development had been deeply embedded in the EU's DNA and the frameworks are subject to constant evolution, shaped and framed by ongoing debates on development and under-development. He rounded up his presentation with two key questions on the role of the EU in forming and implementing the SDGs:

- 1) Can the EU draw on its history of experimentation, problem-solving and collaboration in contributing to the SDGs
- 2) Would its contribution to the SDGs result in transformational change or would it only be minor tinkering?

During the subsequent panel discussion, a question was raised on ensuring the EU's commitment and role in development. Dr Doidge acknowledged that there was still progress to be made and if the EU were to leverage its DNA of collaboration and experimentation, and view the SDGs as transformative as opposed to "box-ticking", they would be able to see a transformational agenda. Mr Julien-Malvy also added that the EU was the largest contributor of developmental aid globally.

New Agenda for Global Transformation

Researcher at the EU Centre at RMIT Dr Emma Shortis briefly outlined the formation and focus of the SDGs, as well as the Asia-Pacific approach to implementing the SDGs. Citing target 13a (implementing the UNFCCC) as an example, Dr Shortis outlined the key challenges in implementing the SDGs - a preoccupation with indicators and measures – harkening back to Professor Cashore's presentation, financing, engaging

high-income countries, localising the SDGs and managing the complexity and scale of the project. For the JMN partners, a fundamental challenge was in understanding what the transformational agenda of the SDG looked like. Instead of being caught up in measures and indicators, Dr Shortis advocated a focus on the 'planetary agenda', adopting a mind-set that sought to understand what a 'transformed world' would look like.

Localising the SDGs: the case study of Laos

RMIT Associate Professor Robbie Guevara discussed the importance of localising the SDGs, using the case study of fostering non-formal education (NFE) in Laos. Professor Guevara began by stressing the importance of transforming the way in which we communicate and engage vis-à-vis achieving the global transformation agenda. He then identified a key gap in discussions of SDG Goal 4 (providing quality education: it typically assumed and centred on formal education. However, he argued that SDG4 was about 'life-long learning' – a tenet which was encapsulated in Laos' Education Sector Plan (2016 – 2020). Professor Guevara used the case of non-formal education (NFE) in Laos to highlight the importance of taking a place-based approach to implementing SDG4 and the need to include stakeholders in the grassroots level to ensure the sustainability of such projects. The results of this approach was the establishment of an online community of trainers, a local, regional and cross-sector cascade of involvement, localisation of the curriculum to the Laotian context, cross-theme partnerships and reciprocal learning between formal and non-formal education platforms.

Making a transformational leap

The panel discussion was nicely rounded up with a question from the floor on the key learning recommendations that would help in making the transformational leap discussed by the speakers. Professor Guevara spoke of the need to ask the right questions in tackling the necessary issues and to work with people and institutions willing to commit to partnerships and collaborative endeavours. Dr Shortis stressed the importance of people and social movements, citing historical cases of collective voices bringing about decisive and transformative change.

Closing Keynote

Director of the International Policy Division at the Ministry of the Environment and Water Resources Mr Hazri Hassan concluded the fruitful discussions and presentations by taking stock of the world's progress in achieving the SDGs. While strides had been made in areas of labour productivity, global unemployment and in the adoption of sustainable practice, Mr Hassan noted that there is still a substantial way to go in achieving the SDGs. Mr Hassan cited the rising problem of hunger amongst

disadvantaged and marginalised communities as a result of climate change, conflict and pollution and stressed the need to inject a sense of urgency in meeting the SDGs in time for 2030.

Mr Hassan subsequently spoke of Singapore's approach and contributions toward the achievement of the SDGs. He broadly outlined Singapore's key focus in sustainable development: 1) ensuring a competitive economy attractive to investment and enterprise; 2) maintaining a sustainable environment; 3) creating an inclusive society. Singapore placed people at the heart of development policies by investing heavily in education and life-long learning to maximise its human capital and took a pragmatic approach by balancing environmental and economic considerations in its policies.

To achieve this, Mr Hassan sketched out 3 pillars essential to Singapore's approach to the SDGs. Firstly, Singapore took an integrated approach and engaged in long-term strategic planning, exemplified by Singapore's 'Water Story'. In times of high water stress, Singapore had consistently sought to ensure water security and continues to invest in new technologies to diversify water sources in order to meet future challenges. Secondly, Singapore invests in research and development (R&D) and innovative solutions to meet its challenges, as highlighted by Singapore's investment in the food and agriculture sector to leverage science and technology to grow more with less. Lastly, Singapore continually looked to forge partnerships, both locally and internationally, to meet the challenges of achieving the SDGs.

Mr Hassan rounded up the dialogue by stressing the need to change existing production and consumption patterns so as to effectively meet the SDGs. He concluded that sustainable development is a never-ending journey and needs a comprehensive, partner-based approach.