

Star ESG

ENVIRONMENTAL SOCIAL GOVERNANCE



Addressing Food Security: 100 Days and Beyond

The need for balance between the nation's food imports and self-sufficient production

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100 days to lay future-fit foundation

Securing our food supply and safeguarding our economy



By **CHOW ZHI EN**
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SOCIOECONOMIC and quality-of-life issues are priorities among Malaysians for the unity government to address, according to a recent survey titled *100 Days of Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim's Administration as Prime Minister*.

Under "national issues and citizen's concerns", socioeconomic issues such as cost of living, price of goods and inflation are an overwhelming area of concern for Malaysians.

The survey by research firm O2 Research Malaysia – in collaboration with local media alliance Media in Arms – also tasked respondents to gauge how well they thought the

current federal government handled pressing issues such as natural disasters, economic growth of the country, welfare and health of the people, our economic resilience, and food supply.

For most Malaysians, the immediate effect of rising prices of goods is making basic meals expensive, of which the government has begun addressing through initiatives like Menu Rahmah with collaboration from private sectors.

But what about our food supply in the long run?

Being self-sufficient

Malaysia recorded 26 food items with more than 100% self-sufficiency ratio (SSR) in 2021, compared to 19 in 2020, according to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM).

However, we are still highly dependent on imports for beef and mutton; the import dependency ratio (IDR) for both of these proteins exceeded 50% – with beef at 81.6% and mutton at 89.4%.

The consumption of chicken meat per capita was the highest at 46.1kg per year followed by chicken and duck eggs at 20.8kg a year (or 347 pieces).

When it comes to the most commonly consumed carbohydrate, that is rice, the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries stated that our paddy and rice output meets 70% of the nation's requirements.

In a discussion paper, Khazanah Research Institute deputy director Dr Sarena Che Omar noted that

Malaysia had imported around RM79bil worth of food items in 2021 – double the amount of what it was a decade ago.

Unsurprisingly, this figure has caused a stir with how high our food import bill is and further raises questions on the nation's self-sufficiency levels despite recording over 50% self-sufficiency ratio for rice, poultry, eggs and tropical fruits.

Dr Sarena noted that a low import bill doesn't necessarily mean that we are food secure. We could produce all the food needed to be consumed locally but at what expense? We'd have to clear more land and raze more forests to create agricultural land suited to commonly consumed crops, all at the expense of taxpayers.

Deconstructing food security

Being food secure also means having access and being nutritionally diverse to eradicate malnutrition; simply relying on a single or even a handful of sources can prove to be a bottleneck when shortages arise.

UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) data shows that a whopping 61% of our nutritional intake come from just 12 crops and five animals.

Paradoxically, our current food system which has enabled us to stockpile food may be our downfall.

Economies of scale dictate that we need to maximise yields – causing crop diversity to shrink to single, standardised varieties.

The dangers of relying on single crop varieties are well-documented in history. For instance, between 1845 and 1852, the Irish Potato Famine killed nearly 25% of the population when a potato blight wiped out potato crops across Ireland. The main cause was a disease that affected the potato crop, which accounted for one-third of Ireland's food dependency.

Reliance on a single variety also leaves our crops vulnerable to diseases, pests and a volatile climate brought on by climate change.

Reimagining agriculture

On Feb 9, Economic Affairs minister Rafizi Ramli reiterated that Malaysia should reduce its dependence on food imports by investing in agriculture – a notion supported by the federal government when looking at the revised Budget 2023.

During the first session of Budget 2023, Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim said that Padiberas Nasional Berhad (Bernas) will share its profits from rice imports by contributing 30% of its net profit to paddy farmers.

Parallel to that, the Food Security Policy Action Plan (DSMN Action Plan) 2021-2025 will serve as our guide to strategise on future food systems that are sustainable. The plan covers five core pillars with 15 strategies and 96 initiatives to ensure the sustainability of the country's food supply at all times, especially in the face of unexpected situations.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Food Industries and Bernas are also working on a centralised farm management system to optimise the use of existing resources by increasing the efficiency of the country's rice production activities through the Large-Scale Smart Padi Field (Smart SBB) programme.

The key lies in collaboration between different players. The Smart SBB programme involves not only paddy farmers but also private companies with farmers and rice paddy operators, including land owners – all this is in line with the government's goal of increasing the country's rice self-sufficiency level to 75%.

Despite the fact that the ministry had launched a number of development programmes like the Young AgroPreneur Programme and My Future Agro, there still exists a negative perception of farming as a profession although that is changing with younger generations

taking up urban farming.

"On a futuristic note, there's a chance that the world may be overhauling what we currently understand as agriculture through cellular agriculture and precision fermentation," said Dr Sarena.

"There are technologies being developed around the world, and are in the process of being commercialised large scale. This involves the culturing of meat products such as beef and poultry in laboratories, without having to kill the animal and without needing a lot of our natural resources such as land and fresh water," she added.

Meanwhile, for fisheries, the ministry allocated up to RM150mil for financing facilities under the Vessel Modernisation and Catch Mechanisation Programme – providing more opportunities for local fishermen to upgrade and modernise their vessels in terms of safety and catch quality.

The socioeconomic factor

In agricultural economics and development economics, Bennett's law states that as incomes rise, people eat fewer calorie-dense starchy staple foods and more nutrient-dense meats, oils, sweeteners, fruits and vegetables.

Coinciding with that, Malaysians have experienced diet diversification over the years, stemming from economic growth and rising citizen wealth.

Think about all the salmon, avocado, kale or even chocolate you can find in cafés and restaurants nowadays which probably weren't part of mainstream Malaysian diets until the last 10 years.

However, despite dietary diversification, rice remains the main source of carbohydrate in Malaysia according to Khazanah Research Institute's report *The Status of the Paddy and Rice Industry in Malaysia*.

The paddy and rice industry is still important as the report also found that the most vulnerable consumers are the poor, rural residents and migrants.

Rice accounted for 6.1% of the average household's food and non-alcoholic beverage (F&B) expenditure in 2016 (RM44 monthly). When compared to their respective counterparts, households in the B40 group, rural areas and non-citizens spend a higher proportion of their monthly F&B expenditure on rice.

"It's mainly due to cost-of-living, as poorer households will tend to prioritise cheaper carbohydrates to prevent starvation or hunger, and as a consequence, spend less on fruits, vegetables and meat which are more expensive," Dr Sarena explained.

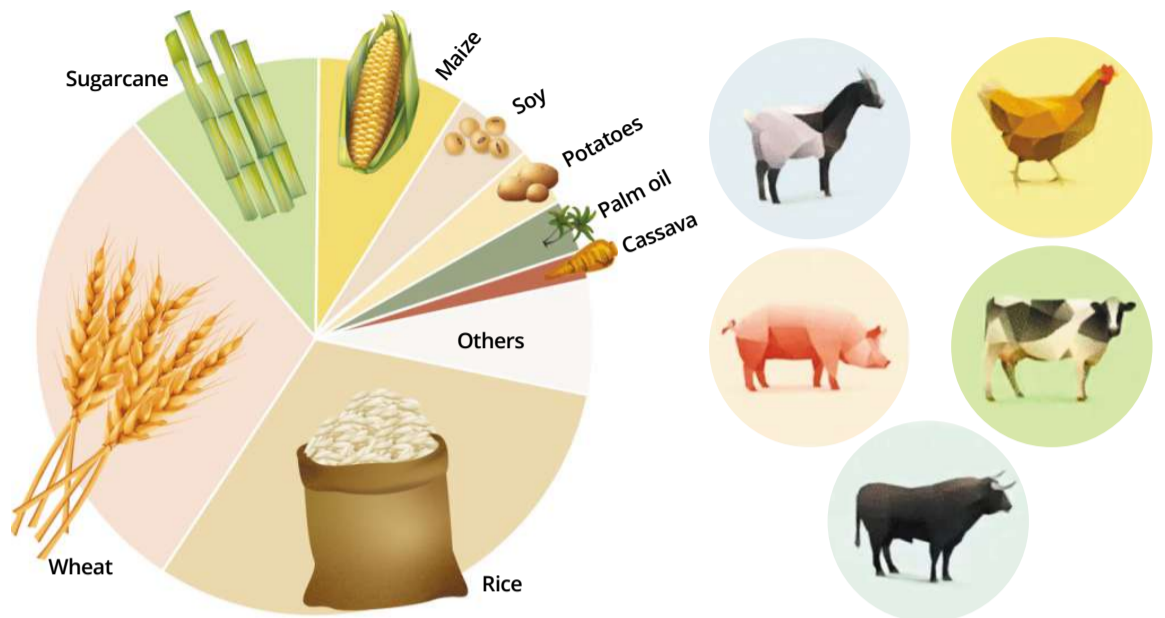
So, while it seems concerning that our food import bill is high, it doesn't tell the full story.

Keep in mind that imports like maize are used for animal feed while "luxury foods" have also seen an increase in import as demand grows with the improving socioeconomic status of the nation.

Ultimately, it is still important to be able to produce our food locally, but it should be done ethically, hygienically and sustainably.

THE ANIMALS AND AND CROPS THAT FEED US

75% of our global food supply come from 12 crops and five animal species



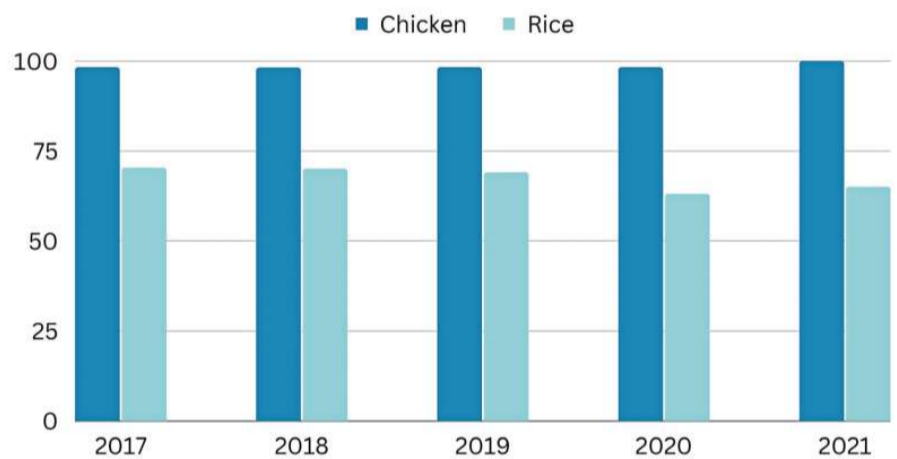
Just three crops (rice, maize, wheat) make up nearly **60%** of calories from plants in the human diet.

14% of our caloric intake of meat come from just five animals.

Food and agriculture data from FAO database

SELF-SUFFICIENCY RATIO %

Ability for production to meet local needs

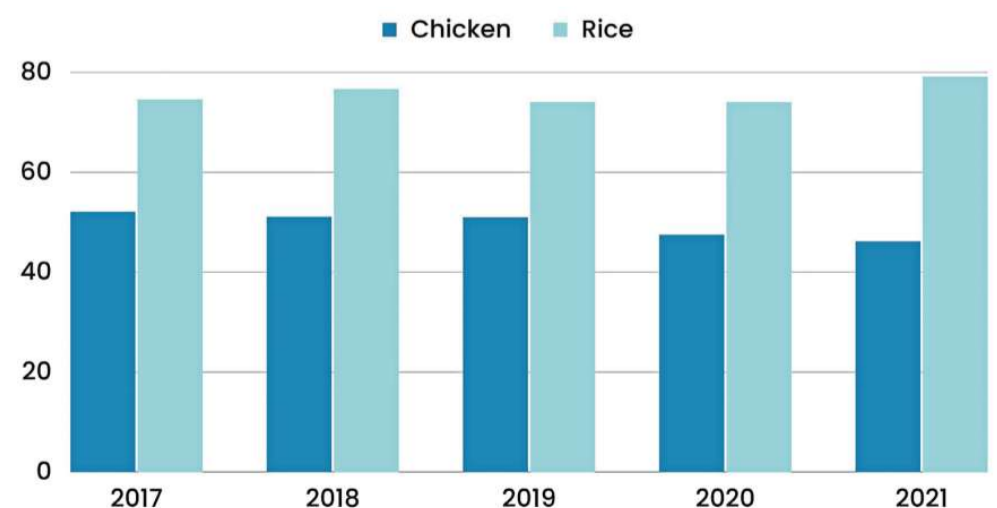


Overall self-sufficiency in food production is rising. It took a dip during pandemic years but is recovering once again when looking at chicken and rice.

Department of Statistics Malaysia

CHICKEN AND RICE CONSUMPTION PER CAPITA

How much is consumed per person annually in kg



Chicken consumption has been decreasing, while rice consumption has been largely unchanged.

Department of Statistics Malaysia

ESG

in the news

- **Berjaya Corp Bhd (BCorp)** has announced the first all-female board among listed companies with Tunku Tun Aminah Sultan Ibrahim Ismail taking over as non-executive chairman.

- **Genetec Technology Bhd** is entering an exciting growth phase with the potential deployment of its battery energy storage system (BESS) and growing demand for electric vehicles (EVs). In a report, CGS-CIMB Research noted Genetec was currently in discussions with a potential customer to deploy over 15-megawatt hour BESS solutions in the second half of 2023.

- **The International Trade and Industry Ministry (Miti)** has approved Tesla's application to import battery electric vehicles (BEV) into Malaysia. In realising this objective, Tesla will establish a head office in Malaysia, introduce Tesla's "experience centres," service centres and establish its "Supercharger" network.

- **CGS-CIMB Securities** has appointed two new members to its executive team, namely, Azizah Mohd Yatim as the new chief executive officer (designate) and Khairi Shahrin Arief Baki as deputy chief executive officer of sales.

- Malaysia stands the chance to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) into its carbon neutral projects with the Asean region doubling down on sustainability commitments, according to HSBC Malaysia. Its head of global banking Christina Cheah told StarBiz the country's persistent drive to develop and upgrade its infrastructure and align it with the region's sustainability targets is opening up wide-ranging opportunities.

- Top industry leaders, including Khazanah Nasional Bhd's chief, have urged Malaysian companies to step up the adoption of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices. Boards of directors, in particular, have a key role in pushing for DEI across various job levels within respective companies. Speaking during a virtual forum organised by The 30% Club Malaysia, Khazanah Nasional managing director Datuk Amirul Feisal Wan Zahir said DEI practices should not be seen as a "nice to have".

"It is central to how an organisation should be. Diversity of thought is necessary for any type of business," he said.

- **Sunview Group Bhd's** wholly owned subsidiary, Fabulous Sunview Sdn Bhd, has tied-up with Kulim Technology Park Corp Sdn Bhd (KTPC) to develop rooftop and large-scale solar photovoltaic (PV) projects at Kulim Hi-Tech Park (KHTP).

- **G Capital Bhd's** 70%-owned subsidiary, Solarcity Malaysia Sdn Bhd, has signed a supplemental solar power purchase agreement (SPPA) with Federal Packages Sdn Bhd.

In a filing with Bursa Malaysia, G Capital noted in the SPPA, Solarcity and Federal Packages agreed to revise the capacity of the facility to 4,500 kwp from 5,500 kwp previously. Under the deal, Solarcity will design, construct, install, own, operate and maintain a solar photovoltaic energy generating system at the premises of Federal Packages in Penang.

- **Bank Muamalat Malaysia Berhad (Bank Muamalat)** and Malakoff Corporation Berhad (Malakoff) announced their strategic collaboration to promote environmental, social and governance (ESG) initiatives in Malaysia. The collaboration will focus on financing programmes for renewable energy (RE) —

specifically solar photovoltaic system, battery energy storage system and electric vehicle chargers to support the growth and development of sustainable energy solutions in the country.

The programme will provide financing options for businesses and individuals looking to adopt RE, helping to reduce the country's carbon footprint and support the transition to a more sustainable future.

- **Kumpulan Perangsang Selangor (KPS) Bhd** has entered into a memorandum of understanding with Worldwide Holding Bhd, Dynac Sdn Bhd and Majulia Sdn Bhd, collectively referred to as consortium, to explore the possibility of negotiating and entering into a long-term corporate green power agreement. The consortium has submitted a solar plant application to the Energy Commission, the result of which will be known by June this year, KPS said in a filing with Bursa Malaysia.

- Fixing Malaysia's finances and economy begins with governance, honesty and sincerity, Economy Minister Rafizi Ramli says. In his keynote address at the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) Malaysia stakeholders' appreciation reception 2023, Rafizi said accountants hold the trust and responsibility to ensure fair and reliable financial reporting and disclosures as well as compliance with fundamental principles to prevent irregularities.

- While **Petroleum Nasional Bhd (PETRONAS)** would remain cautious on the near-term outlook, PETRONAS president and group CEO Tengku Muhammad Taufik Tengku Aziz reaffirmed the group's commitment to undertake more capital investments over the next five years.

According to Tengku Muhammad Taufik, the group aims to scale up investments in the core business, while investing in clean energy to future-proof its portfolio.

PETRONAS will be ramping up its exploration programme in the next five years, with a "renewed focus" in Malaysia.

According to Tengku Muhammad Taufik, PETRONAS is becoming increasingly selective in terms of its upstream plays as the group seeks "faster runway to hydrocarbons" and achieve optimal costs.

"We have also committed up to 20% of our annual capex into decarbonisation and energy transition for the next five years. The trajectory of renewable energy spending will grow," said Tengku Muhammad Taufik.

The government may introduce comprehensive changes to green technology tax incentives in Budget 2024.

The under-secretary of the Finance Ministry Datuk Che Nazli Jaapar said the current green technology tax incentives will expire at the end of this year.

"We are thinking of doing comprehensive changes or an enhancement of the incentives. That is why we preferred not to announce it under Budget 2023 in February and consider announcing it in October this year," she said during a Budget 2023 seminar.

- **Bank Pembangunan Malaysia Bhd (BPMB)** won the "Special Merit Award for Sustainable Energy Financing for DFI and Others" at the recent National Energy Awards 2022.

The awards, organised by the NRECC recognised BPMB for its focused efforts in promoting sustainable energy financing.

- Sarawak has the potential to create carbon sinks from its permanent forest, promote carbon sequestration and undertake tree planting schemes for carbon credits, says Premier Datuk Patinggi Abang Johari Tun Openg.

The initiative can provide the state with a new source of revenue ranging from RM315mil to RM1.04bil annually, he said.

"This new approach to forest management represents a shift from traditional revenue-generating logging of merchantable timber to a more sustainable, long-term approach to prioritise conservation, reforestation and regeneration.

"In doing so, we are aligning ourselves with global efforts to mitigate the effects of climate change and global warming while also supporting the sustainable new development goals," he said at the opening of Asia Carbon Conference 2023.

- Bursa Malaysia Bhd's subsidiary, the **Bursa Carbon Exchange (BCX)**, has carried out the nation's inaugural carbon credit auction. In a statement, the stock exchange operator said the auction, which was carried out electronically on March 16, saw a participation of 15 buyers from various industries purchasing a total of 150,000 Verra-registered carbon credits.

- **RHB Bank Bhd** is stepping up its efforts in the sustainability space as one of its key focuses for this year, according to RHB Bank Bhd group managing director and CEO Mohd Rashid Mohamad.

"From a sustainability standpoint, environmental, social and governance (ESG) remains at the forefront of our businesses and in everything we do. And we intend to intensify our efforts in promoting sustainable practices amongst our customers, employees and other key stakeholders," he told StarBiz. As of December 2022, he said the bank had achieved more than RM14bil in sustainable financial services, which exceeded its year-to-date target by more than 60%.

- **Malakoff Corp Bhd** has signed several agreements including a heads of agreement (HOA) and a number of shareholder subscription agreements following a planned participation in a renewable energy (RE) project in Kelantan.

They are for the three upcoming hydroelectric plants namely the Kemubu small hydropower plant (SHP), Kuala Geris SHP and Serasa SHP, which have an installed capacity of 29 megawatts (MW), 25MW and 30MW respectively at Kuala Krai, Kelantan.

- **Bursa Malaysia Bhd** has developed a platform to serve as a national repository for public-listed companies' environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosures. The centralised sustainability platform, which is jointly developed with the London Stock Exchange Group, will enable listed companies to reinforce their ESG disclosures and accelerate swift adoption of their supply chain carbon emissions.

Bursa Malaysia chief executive officer (CEO) Datuk Muhamad Umar Swift said the platform would enable Malaysian corporates to meet regulatory requirements, facilitate greater transparency and consistency in sustainability disclosures, while providing wider access to green financing products.

Letters & opinions

WITH reference to the StarECG Dec 30 issue, the "Small acts > Big impact" section suggested "Simple ways to be more sustainable" and how to reduce energy consumption.

I am pleased to read matters on electrical education and information. I am also happy that Tenaga Nasional (TNB) has recently broached the subject of energy literacy.

Addressing this is timely as it allows consumers like me to better understand TNB's role. I most certainly welcome the move to help TNB's consumers become better energy users.

TNB can help consumers:

- understand its role and introduce the services it provides
- read electric meters to help monitor monthly usage
- achieve sustainability via TNB's services.

It is time that TNB spreads its knowledge to help consumers become wise energy users.

Yours truly,
M. Kaur

TNB replies

Dear M. Kaur,

As a national utility corporation that strives to ensure secure and reliable energy to the rakyat, TNB continues to address the energy trilemma, namely the challenge of ensuring energy security, affordability and sustainability.

To reduce dependency on fossil fuels, TNB will be phasing out and replacing coal plants, to embrace new green technologies, where new gas-fired power plants will be developed, with a future hydrogen technology as an alternative to gas.

This is part of TNB's Net Zero Emission 2050 aspiration, in line with Malaysia's agenda of dealing with climate change. Consumers can do their part by consuming electricity wisely and avoiding wastage.

Since 2020 TNB has worked with the Ministry of Natural Resources, Energy and Climate Change (NRECC), Energy Commission (EC) and Sustainable Energy Development Authority Malaysia (SEDA Malaysia) have embarked on the Malaysia Energy Literacy Program (MELP).

MELP will educate Malaysians on the importance of energy and their role in energy management so that they can become more aware of energy-related topics.

With the smart meter rollout in 2016, consumers can make energy-efficient choices towards a greener, more sustainable energy future.

Coupled with the myTNB portal and mobile app, they can monitor daily consumption patterns in ringgit or kilowatt-hours (kWh) and set a monthly budgetary limit via the app's Energy Budget feature.

They can also manage accounts, monitor energy consumption, pay bills, submit applications or enquiries for assistance, among other things.

For more energy efficiency tips follow the TNB Careline on Facebook, or visit www.tnb.com.my/ for more on smart meters, how to be more energy efficient and reducing carbon footprint.

ESG opportunities

ESG Specialist – National Instruments, Penang

Job entails collecting, managing and reporting on quantitative and qualitative ESG data within the company to support responses to ESG-related frameworks and corporate reporting.

The person will be working with internal stakeholders and vendors to identify and analyse gaps in company's reporting

They will conduct limited research on ESG topics and manage select related internal engagement and education.

Head of Sustainability – UEM Sunrise Berhad, KL

To work with a team and stakeholders to monitor the organisation's environmental impact and advocates for ways to improve it.

The role oversees the overall mission, execution and efficacy of the sustainability agenda, quality assurance (QA) and occupational, safety and health (OSH) areas.

International Women's Day



By YAP LENG KUEN



Michele Kytte Lim

President and CEO
Institute of Corporate Directors Malaysia (ICDM)

Growing awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion

Greater focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) has resulted in many policies and initiatives being put in place to push the development of women in leadership roles.

Under the Malaysian Corporate Code on Governance 2021, it is recommended that all boards should comprise at least 30% women directors. A review of the participation of women in senior management should also be conducted.

Boards should disclose in their annual reports, their company policies on gender diversity for the board and senior management.

Bursa Malaysia's main market listing requirements makes it mandatory for public-listed companies (PLCs) to disclose the company's policy on board composition.

As part of the efforts to empower women in leadership, the Securities Commission, under the revised Budget 2023, will run or roll out a special training programme to enhance skills, identify and increase the number of qualified women to be appointed as board members.

Board diversity should not be confined to just gender but cover multiple dimensions – age, background, ethnicity, experience and independence.

ICDM had successfully placed 27 women directors in 2022, with several first-time female directors on public-listed companies.

ICDM programmes are mindful of mitigating biases, and aim to cater to different needs, to ensure that all boards and directors, including women directors, can build their capacity.

As of March this year, ICDM has a membership base of 1,113 individual members, with 35% comprising female members.

Through the Board and Directors Effectiveness Evaluation, ICDM can support organisations in ensuring that their board composition is balanced, such as in the placement of women directors, and equipped to address any risks in relation to ESG matters.

Most of the required board skill sets (that usually reside with female candidates) are in human resources, marketing, innovation and sustainability, according to the Malaysian Board Practices Review report by ICDM in collaboration with Russell Reynolds Associates.

Yet only 8% of the respondents' organisations sourced independently for their board members, despite knowing of the required skillsets.

ICDM can support organisations to make strategic, diverse and competency-based nominations of new board members.

Among the Securities Commission's corporate governance strategic priorities, the aim is to strengthen board leadership and ESG governance fitness on boards, which includes accelerating the participation of women on boards.

ICDM has been appointed the service provider for delivering the Mandatory Leading for Impact Programme, Malaysia's newly-introduced mandatory onboarding programme on sustainability for companies listed on Bursa Malaysia.



Abinaya Mohan

Advocacy director
Women's Aid Organization (WAO)

Understanding the role of equity

Understanding the role of equity in achieving gender equality should be a core part of the social and governance of any organisation.

Equity, which looks into targeted needs, acknowledges the different requirements and experiences of women and men, in developing programmes to help employees within organisations.

For example, to support mothers and families, some organisations may have childcare subsidies or even centres at their workplaces.

Organisers of upskilling workshops and training for women should consider the specific needs for childcare support, digital access, registration costs and travel.

Single mothers and/or survivors of violence have little or no financial support, travel or childcare assistance.

The Power Up initiative by the WAO focuses on upskilling and providing training to help survivors who may have to re-enter the workforce, build their own businesses or access the WAO childcare centre.

The initiatives focus on empowering women who leave abusive situations to rebuild their lives.

WAO is focused on embracing equity, through efforts to make the budget gender responsive, that addresses the needs and interests of different groups of citizens.

The Level Up programme enables corporations to promote gender equality in the workplace.



Liza Liew

Manager, Client and Consulting Services
LeadWomen

Aligning with the social pillar of ESG

The theme for this year's International Women's Day on #EmbraceEquity aligns well with the social pillar of Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) factors.

It is about ensuring that the playing field is equal so that opportunities are given to the best individual.

To create a more inclusive society, LeadWomen has engaged discussions around women domestic migrant workers and their working rights, women's role in peace development and tackling anti-terrorism, women's role in creating marketing campaigns as well as women in film.

These topics may be quite distant from the typical corporate "social" issues; it is important to elevate them within the private sector to increase awareness and encourage collaboration, so that all can thrive in an inclusive society.

Within corporate Malaysia, LeadWomen – a social enterprise focused on creating inclusive and equitable workplaces – is collaborating with the UN Women for Asia and the Pacific, to raise awareness on Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS).

Under a set of seven guiding principles to develop a sustainable and holistic gender strategy, WEP covers areas on leadership, workplace, community, as well as transparency and reporting.

After two years of raising awareness, LeadWomen plans to launch an implementation training programme for Change Makers in driving Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in the workplace.

This will involve the development of gender-inclusive policies, which includes implementing an anti-sexual harassment roadmap, employer-supported care and developing overall inclusive leadership skills.

To encourage more women to take up leadership roles at all levels, LeadWomen's signature leadership programmes are targeted at first-time people leaders, high potential senior leaders and aspiring or current board directors.

LeadWomen is working with organisations that are committed to championing Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, where there are already existing commitment and action plans from those in agriculture (palm oil), energy and utilities, financial institutions, construction and engineering.

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Food of the future

A continuation on cell-grown meats

By CHOW ZHI EN
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IN OUR January issue of StarESG, we explored the tip of the iceberg on cultivated meat alternatives and how they could prove to be a solution to agri-agrochemical emissions, declining biodiversity and food insecurity.

While the prices of fish have always fluctuated with the monsoon season and weather, the effects of climate change are directly affecting our supply of fresh seafood as the seas become more hazardous for fishermen.

There's also the environmental concern that traditional fishing methods can induce – whether it's overfishing or ocean-trawling.

New technologies have emerged with this, specifically the cultivation of seafood through stem cells.

This is exactly what Wildtype has done in San Francisco, with their cultivated salmon.

A new frontier of 'cultivated meat'

Technically speaking, the technology that goes into creating cultivated meat is the same that exists in healthcare and medicine – that is using stem cells.

"We both saw the need to have a new source of animal protein for our planet and at the time (2016), Impossible Foods was just getting started with their (plant-based) burger in the US," said Wildtype co-founder Justin Kolbeck.

"It was interesting but neither of us had experience in plant-based foods.

"Aryé (Elfenbein) had been working every day on growing functioning heart tissue in the lab with cardiomyocytes," he said.

Elfenbein had completed his studies with a MD Ph.D prior to founding Wildtype with Kolbeck.

"It was his idea to apply this technology to meat. We're not the first company to do this. There are other companies experimenting with chicken, beef and even foie gras but none really focused on fish and seafood."

These cells start off undifferentiated and have the unique intrinsic capacity to "self-renew", which means they can divide and develop (in a process called differentiation) into different types of cells with the right environmental cues.

"One of the biggest hurdles when we started off was creating a (fish) cell line that was healthy and robust enough to support the growth in large quantities. That process alone took a few years to get right.

"Then, we had to figure out what to feed these fish cells and train them to grow in a controlled environment. We also had to make bigger tanks, customised to fit our needs.

"After all that, the real fun began. When all that was done, we were left with a 'mush' of cells which didn't look like meat," Kolbeck continued.

So "form" was the next hurdle for Wildtype. "We developed scaffolds to give the product

structure and shape. And now we're working on getting the cells to do more in that matrix; to grow more densely and transform with more muscle and fat-like qualities."

So far, Wildtype has managed to produce a salmon product that tastes and looks almost like its wild counterpart.

'Cleaner' than wild-caught

The UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) found that of the "158mil tonnes of aquatic foods available for human consumption in 2019, Asia accounted for 72% of the total while its population represented 60% of the world population."

For all the seafood that we eat, there's growing concern on indirect consumption of contaminants such as microplastics and mercury from seafood despite it being a healthier protein compared to red meat.



Wildtype founders Aryé Elfenbein (left) and Justin Kolbeck have been working together since 2016 to produce cultivated salmon. - Photo by WILDTYPE

Over the course of a few months, Wildtype salmon cells grow in a bioreactor, free from contaminants which works twofold – harvestable salmon all year and is free from pollutants.

"Through this, we could potentially have fresh salmon readily available year-round instead of seasonally," said Kolbeck.

However, the main challenge today is in its feasibility to be produced en masse.

There is hope though; if and when cell-grown meats become commercially available, the price of the technology will drop as will the production cost.

Malaysians might just see cultivated meat in our supermarkets in the near future.



Wildtype salmon nigiri topped with finger lime. - Photo by WILDTYPE

Tax incentives power rising demand for zero emission cars

More public EV charging points to be installed

By THOMAS HUONG
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With government tax incentives, more public battery charging points for battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and accessibly priced new models, the adoption of such zero emission cars is expected to rise quickly in Malaysia in the next few years.

According to Malaysian Automotive Association (MAA) data, a total of 2,631 EVs were sold in Malaysia in 2022 – a tiny fraction of the automotive total industry volume (TIV) in the country, which hit a record high of 720,658 units last year.

Still, MAA's data does not include EVs imported via parallel channels or the grey market.

In December 2022, Road Transport Department director-general Datuk Zailani Hashim had said about 10,000 BEVs are registered in Malaysia.

Datuk Thiruchandran Thiruchelvam from Charge N Go Sdn Bhd, a local EV charge point operator, told The Star that the next 10 years would see a total transformation of the transport industry, in terms of electrification.

"It is not just a couple of fancy EVs coming (into the country). Besides climate change, the primary driver for vehicle electrification is the falling prices of the EV battery," he said.

Thiruchandran said in the last 10 years, prices of EV batteries have dropped by around 90% – resulting in EVs getting closer to reaching price parity with cars powered by internal combustion engines (ICE).

"Studies are forecasting that between 2025 and 2030, EVs will be as cheap as the ICE cars. Initially, price parity will be achieved for compact cars but by 2030, EVs may be

cheaper than ICE cars in all segments including larger vehicles," he said.

However, an international research paper published in March 2023 on Nature Communications (www.nature.com) pointed out that a recent surge in prices of lithium, cobalt, nickel, and manganese, four critical materials in EV batteries, could significantly impact production costs, and thus, hinder EV uptake.

The research paper, entitled "China's electric vehicle and climate ambitions jeopardised by surging critical material prices", noted that higher prices for EVs would make ICE cars more economically attractive.

"The long-term supply and demand analysis of these critical materials suggests persistent and deepening shortage of their supply. According to the International Energy Agency, at least 30 times as much lithium, nickel, and other key minerals would be required by the EV industry by 2040 to meet global climate targets, which far outstrips the committed mine production of these minerals," said the researchers.

Regarding range anxiety for EV owners, especially on long-distance trips where EV charging points would be lacking on road stretches, Thiruchandran pointed out that many EVs offer a 300km to 400km range nowadays.

"Statistics show that the average Malaysian driver records about 2,000km per month. While the public EV charging infrastructure is still in the early stages, EV drivers should be able to charge their cars on long-distance trips, with some planning ahead," he said.

Ministry of International Trade and Industry's (MITI) industrial development division senior director Datuk Hanafi Sakri had

recently said the country currently has 900 EV charging points, and this is expected to grow to 4,000 charging points this year.

International Trade and Industry Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz also noted that by 2025, the government aims to provide 10,000 public charging facilities comprising 9,000 units of alternate current type and 1,000 units of direct current type.

Still, Thiruchandran noted that unlike those staying in landed properties, high-rise residents would have issues charging their EVs.

"This is something that needs to be addressed, if we want to encourage EV adoption.

Given the growing numbers of EVs, of course we need to build more charging points," said Thiruchandran.

Meanwhile, as seen in Japan and the European Union, government rollout of financial incentives such as purchase subsidies and tax sweeteners are critical for pushing BEV adoption.

The revised Budget 2023, tabled in

February, had proposed that duty exemptions for fully imported and locally-assembled EVs be extended till end-2025 and end-2027 respectively.

Also, import tax exemption for components used in local assembly of EVs would be extended by two years to end-2027.

Under Budget 2023, EV charging equipment manufacturers get 100% income tax exemption for assessment years 2023 to 2032, as well as 100% investment tax allowance for five years.

Also, companies that rent EVs get tax deductions (maximum eligible rental amount is RM300,000).

Meanwhile, Petronas' clean energy solutions unit Gentari will provide 500 units of EV charging facilities throughout the country, while national utility Tenaga Nasional Bhd will install EV charging facilities at 70 focal locations.

As for the high prices of BEVs which are mainly offered by premium and luxury marques, the arrival of more China-made models may be a game changer.

The fourth quarter of 2023 may see the arrival of BYD's B-segment all-electric Dolphin compact five-door hatchback, with 2023 prices in China ranging from 116,800 yuan (RM76,165) to 136,800 yuan (RM89,208).

The Dolphin (up to 401km on a full charge) could see strong demand here if it is priced below RM100,000.



BYD's B-segment all-electric Dolphin compact five-door hatchback



Biodiversity for food security

Tropical Rainforest Conservation and Research Centre (TRCRC): A M'sian NGO dedicated to the conservation of rare and endangered tree species

By ADRIHANI RASHID

AS the planet warms, the need for biodiversity in food crops will become increasingly important as we search for strains and varieties that are able to tolerate the heat, can grow in different environments and can fend off the different pests and diseases that a warmer planet may bring.



This information is mostly contained in the genotypes of wild varieties and strains of our favourite foods. We are being forced to look past the few crops that are globally relied on for human consumption and start planning for a future where these existing crops may become less viable.

As it stands, about 103 species account for 90% of the world's food crops. This lack of diversity makes our food production systems more vulnerable to the pressures of climate change, pests and diseases.

Currently, scientists are looking to the wild and previously unfavourable species to protect the food industry — wild cacao for chocolate, wild berries, as well as Liberica coffee. However, if we continue on our current path of deforestation and monocultures, we may well soon run out of these wilder variants and their potential for adaptation.

We need our forests and their repository of

biodiversity to secure food production for the future of mankind. Biodiversity is the building block of healthy and nutritious diets for the global population, and yet, we are witnessing an unprecedented loss of biodiversity, with recent assessments by the Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services estimating that up to 1,000,000 species are threatened with extinction.

However, many industrial agricultural practices rely on standardisation of biological processes, utilising monocultures rather than embracing biodiversity. These practices can often lead to dire consequences.

To put things into perspective, let's consider the case of the Gros Michele banana, or as we know it, pisang ambon. Until the 1950s, the Gros Michele was the main variety of banana grown throughout the world, cultivated in huge plantations all across Central America. These plantations were largely monocultures, fields of a single type of crop, which made them susceptible to pests and diseases.

Eventually, the pests and diseases did come, in the form of the Panama disease, a soil-borne fungus that eventually wiped out the commercial Gros Michele plantations and nearly drove the Gros Michele to extinction. By relying on a single cultivar, the banana industry was left vulnerable to this banana wilt, as any single threat could wipe out the entire plantations.

Unfortunately, it seems that we have yet to

learn our lesson. Shortly after the Gros Michele was nearly wiped out, the industry turned to a different cultivar, the Cavendish. The Cavendish now makes up 99% of all banana exports and cannot reproduce sexually, so all plants are essentially clones — therefore making them equally vulnerable to diseases.

We are now experiencing banana *deja vu* — banana wilt is back and could wipe out the Cavendish, along with all the jobs that are associated with this 25 billion dollar industry. There are plans to fight it, which include CRISPR technology, global concerted efforts and billions more dollars.

This cautionary tale comes up all across the agriculture industry (take for example the Irish Potato Famine of the 1800s). This means that it affects nearly all of our favourite foods and drinks — 60% of wild coffee species are threatened with extinction — and corn is facing serious genetic erosion which will reduce yields. While these industrial agricultural practices promise efficiency and improved yields, time and time again we have seen that these are unsustainable practices if they are not coupled with an understanding and utilisation of biodiversity to ensure continued soil fertility and a resilience against the many challenges that climate change will bring. These practices are often collectively referred to as conservation agriculture, which is a farming system that

Top: The TRLC Banun nursery houses a collection of wild fruit species, dipterocarp species, and other native tree species that are all essential to the restoration of a functioning forest ecosystem.

Bottom: The TRLC Merisuli team works on the entire process of rainforest restoration — from seed surveys, nursery management, tree planting, to maintenance and census of the planted trees.

promotes maintenance of a permanent soil cover, minimum soil disturbance and diversification of plant species.

Nevertheless, protecting our forests and the wildness they contain, is essential to ensuring that we have food to eat in the future. Our forests protect our crops in more ways than one — through ecosystem services that provide a healthy soil and water cycle; by mitigating the increasingly drastic impacts of climate change; and of course, by providing the genetic material for the crops themselves. Without them, we will be vulnerable to shortages in food supply, which are already becoming apparent today.

Everyone has a role to play in protecting the forests and the gene pools they house. You can protect biodiversity by embracing more diverse mixes of native plant, fruit and tree species in your own backyard, or using your purchasing power to support businesses that operate in an ecologically sustainable manner. We at TRCRC urge each and every one of you to do your part.



Proving oil palm plantations are sustainable

MPOGCF aims to show the world that palm oil plantations are ESG-friendly

By ERIC QUAH
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THE palm oil industry has always received much flak for its role in deforestation around the world.

The oil palm fruit yields a high-quality oil that has become the preferred cooking oil in developing countries.

And while it is not the cooking oil of choice in developed nations, it is however heavily used to manufacture packaged products, such as lipsticks, soaps, detergents and even confectionaries, to name a few.

As it is cheaply produced and offers a greater yield at a lower cost of production, compared to other vegetable oils, it has become a popular crop in many developing tropical countries.

That is where misconceptions of deforestation stem and questions on its sustainability surface.

Domestically, to show that palm oil is indeed sustainable and to improve the image of the industry, the Malaysian government established the Malaysian Palm Oil Wildlife Conservation Fund (MPOWCF) in 2006 that was managed by the Malaysian Palm Oil Council (MPOC).

This became a foundation in 2020, with a new name: the Malaysian Palm Oil Green Conservation Foundation (MPOGCF).

"Although we were incorporated back in 2020, we only started operationally in 2021 at the height of the pandemic," shared MPOGCF general manager Zamakhshari Muhamad.

Its formation established five main objectives for all its activities: first, the reforestation of degraded forest areas; second is to encourage and promote biodiversity conservation initiatives and best sustainability practices in Malaysia's oil palm plantations; third is to further explore research on conservation; fourth involves working with NGOs in carrying out various conservation programmes; and the fifth is promoting the sustainability of the palm oil industry.

Active participation

As a foundation, MPOGCF runs various impact-based conservation programmes that demonstrate to the world that the Malaysian palm oil industry can indeed be sustainable.

Zamakhshari gave an example of the Orangutan Habitat Rehabilitation Project, which was initiated via the foundation's 1-Million Tree Planting Programme.

The project aims to rehabilitate a 2,500-hectare forest area in Lower Kawaq, Ulu Segama Forest Reserve, Lahad Datu, Sabah that was

degraded due to logging and forest fires.

This 10-year project was made in collaboration with the Sabah State Forestry Department and began in 2020.

Besides providing a natural habitat for orangutans and fulfilling the environmental pillar, it also generates employment opportunities for local indigenous residents such as tree planters, tree maintainers and tree sapling suppliers, satisfying the social pillar.

"Another noteworthy programme is a collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Protection and National Parks (Perhilitan) in the 'Save the Malayan Tiger Campaign,'" he said.

"We aim to increase the Malayan Tiger population by ex-situ breeding, with the aim of producing five cubs that will later be reintroduced into their original habitat."

Another programme that involves conservation is the Borneo Elephant Sanctuary (BES), where MPOGCF partnered with the Sabah Wildlife Department (SWD) to support the rehabilitation of rescued elephants while providing mitigation measures in reducing human-elephant conflicts in Sabah.

"We have also collaborated with SWD and Sabah Softwoods to prepare an elephant corridor, to



reduce the likelihood of elephants wandering into the plantation areas," he added.

Harmonious coexistence

Zamakhshari also added that although there are many individual programmes that have been carried out by individual plantation companies, some even in

collaboration with Perhilitan and the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), there are times when human-wildlife conflicts do occur with devastating effect.

"We try to educate the public and the plantation owners that in dealing with wildlife, we have to coexist together." He pointed out that MPOGCF's approach of "Living Together in Harmony" sets out to raise public awareness on endangered wildlife by promoting human-wildlife coexistence.

"Oil palm plantations can play a role in human-wildlife coexistence by not causing harm or any loss of habitations and respecting their premises, while prioritising wildlife movement when developing plantations," he said.

Human-wildlife coexistence in oil palm plantations is achieved when a balanced or a negotiated compromise on how to exist together between humans and wildlife is considered, implemented and enforced.

This brings in the balanced principles upon which sustainability is built and sustainable development is achieved, which are the three "P's" of sustainability.

The triple bottom line's balance approach considers the right balance between people (social responsibility), the planet (environmental responsibility) and profit (economic profitability).

"Living Together in Harmony" was rolled out as a concept by MPOGCF in early August last year through "The Other Malaysians" out-of-home billboard campaign which featured the three flagship species mentioned.

In progressing ahead

Although the foundation has two years to gain its footing, it has already laid out plans for the future.

Among others, these include creating guidelines to help oil palm smallholders and estate owners manage biodiversity in a sustainable and environmentally-responsible manner, encouraging smallholder plantations to nurture a local barn owl population as a biological control against rat pests, and rehabilitating palm oil plantations to return to their natural state to improve ecological biodiversity.

"We will continue to ramp up our biodiversity and wildlife conservation efforts to improve the image of the palm oil industry and in proving that the industry is sustainable," said Zamakhshari.

He said the foundation will also ensure its key programmes are more visible and to further press the message that the palm oil industry is sustainable, in order to seal the relations with stakeholders at home and abroad.

"We are always looking at critical areas related to green conservation in the industry, to the short, medium and long-term protection and preservation, in addition to managing and conserving the country's natural heritage," he concluded.



Zamakhshari: "We will continue to ramp up our biodiversity and wildlife conservation efforts to improve the image of the palm oil industry and in proving that the industry is sustainable."

By busting misconceptions, MPOGCF demonstrates that the palm oil industry is environmentally friendly.

A guide for SMEs to kickstart your ESG journey

As our world and climate change, environmental, social and governance (ESG) have become more pertinent. Companies in different sectors are future-proofing their businesses by investing in ESG. Many businesses start their ESG journey by changing their internal operations, but the end goal is to incorporate ESG into corporate strategy.

Compiled by HO JIA WEN
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Greening your company



Firstly, assess your business, the operations and the structure of your company. ESG can be implemented in many parts of your business operations, in your supply chains, hiring and management of facilities.

Gather information on the areas your company could be improved in. For instance, what existing policies are there, any metrics of key performance indicators used and the waste management system. With the data, figure out areas targeted for improvement with ESG practices.

In your assessment stage, you can:

- Survey your customers and consumers to gauge their concerns about ESG.
- Identify and communicate with stakeholders who will be involved in your ESG strategy.
- Review the gathered information to establish a baseline for your business' current ESG position.

Green certification

Set realistic and achievable ESG goals for your company. Investors and customers are placing an increasing priority on ESG practices, and implementing ESG will help differentiate and attract them to your business. Obtaining sustainability certification is a marketable and achievable goal.



Industry standard certifications

- **MyHIJAU Mark:** Malaysia's official green recognition for products and services meeting local and international environmental standards. An initiative by the Malaysian Green Technology and Climate Change Centre (MGTC) and endorsed by the government of Malaysia.
- **GreenRE:** A leading green building certification by Malaysia's Real Estate and Housing Developers Association (REHDA). It recognises green buildings with six pillars of sustainability.
- **Forest Stewardship Council:** An international and respected forest certification, it is credited to products coming from well-managed forests. Products made from rubber, wood, textiles and paper can be certified.



Green funding

Malaysian financial institutions are offering green financing solutions to assist SMEs in adopting ESG.

- **Bank Negara Malaysia:**

- **Low Carbon Transition Facility Fund**

Open to SMEs in all sectors who aim to change business operations toward low carbon operations. This includes improving energy efficiency, using more sustainable materials for production and gaining sustainability certifications.

- **HSBC:**

- **Green Loans and Financing**

Loans and financing to fully or partially finance green projects, such as renewable energy, green buildings, sustainable water and waste management.

- **CIMB:**

- **GreenBizReady**

For SMEs starting their sustainability journey. Solutions include sustainability-linked financing, sustainability service providers, training and capacity building, certification and advisory services and business matching.

- **SME Renewable Energy Financing**

Green financing for SMEs to purchase solar photovoltaic (PV) systems with industrial hire purchase facility. Up to 100% financing is available, and the maximum facility amount is capped at RM1 mil.

- **UOB:**

- **Transition Financing**

Companies in the energy or fossil fuel-intensive sectors can apply for UOB Transition Financing for energy transition. The financing solutions are for transition activities - improving operational efficiency, changing to lower carbon fuels, implementing carbon capture technologies and using carbon offsets.

- **Green Financing Framework for Circular Economy**

Financing for businesses in the circular economy, where they reduce, reuse and recycle waste materials. And also reuse, repair and remanufacture an old product into a new one with a different functionality.



Go green, go digital

Shifting business operations digitally would help businesses run more efficiently and also to identify ESG needs. Data analysis can be made available in companies internal systems, developing ESG data that supports sustainable investment decisions.

Additionally, digitisation enables companies to develop customised services and products, assisted by the data captured by digital systems. Additional costs to consumers and risky environmental consequences can be avoided.



SMEs should get serious about ESG

By YAP LENG KUEN

Some small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) are already reporting on various aspects of their environmental, social and governance (ESG) and sustainability indicators.

But they should look into doing it better. Increased ESG compliance and reporting is not so much about spending more money but collection of data and getting guidance as well as information on how to benchmark their businesses.

SMEs must accept that this new wave on ESG is here to stay.

"Top management has to get started; choose this path or risk not being in business or not being able to raise funds for their initial public offerings," said Global ESG Monitor (GEM) co-founder Michael Diegelmann.

They should build a taskforce, decide on what is material for their company, build a strategy and report on their progress in ESG and sustainability matters.

"It may be small steps but they should start

their journey; demonstrate their steps and goals with a time horizon," added GEM co-founder and head of research, Ariane Hofstetter.

The time horizon can be based on a closer future than 2050, the year for net zero carbon emissions.

In view of the growing importance of this area to SMEs, the researchers are also looking into helping SMEs gain more information on how they can further improve in their ESG reporting.

Currently, GEM's study on transparency in non-financial reporting is based on the ESG and sustainability reporting in the 30 companies on the benchmark FBMKLCI companies.

The GEM Malaysia Regional Report was launched in Kuala Lumpur on March 21, at the inaugural Thought Leadership Platform 'Sustainability Perspectives,' by Perspective Strategies in partnership with GEM, an independent research initiative dedicated to investigating ESG transparency.

Findings indicate that the companies had fallen behind in the transparency of their non-financial reporting, scoring an average of 54 out of 100 points.

Within these companies on the FBMKLCI, areas of reporting that can be improved include:

- > Supply chains; in order that stakeholders can understand the risks deriving from



GEM co-founder Ariane Hofstetter.

Global ESG Monitor (GEM) co-founder Michael Diegelmann.

Perspective Strategies founder and principal partner/GEM regional partner Andy See.

supply chains, more detailed description on supply chains is needed, such as geographic location or types of suppliers engaged.

> More detailed background information on their materiality analysis of factors likely to affect their financial condition; examples - specifying the year of data collection and describing how they collected the data.

More comprehensive information on their stakeholder mapping process, such as details on how they determine which stakeholder groups they engage with.

This enhances transparency and helps stakeholders better understand how companies are identifying and prioritizing sustainability issues.

> Formulas to calculate Scope 2 indirect emissions; it should be stated if they are location or market-based - two methods of reporting emissions related to electricity consumption.

> Scope 3 direct and indirect emissions; more detailed information is required.

> Women on board representation; besides gender, age and ethnicity, there should be more details to demonstrate the effectiveness of an inclusive work culture.

Environmental considerations; there should be more detailed reporting on water and waste management.

GEM is the only survey

analysing the ESG and sustainability reporting of companies; it was started three years ago, analysing companies in Germany, Europe, the US and Australia.

Companies on the FBMKLCI were chosen for analysis as Malaysia, being a growth economy, presents opportunities for engagement with people who want to make a change in the ESG and sustainability field.

Companies with high scores include Tenaga Nasional, Press Metal, Petronas Carigali and RHB Bank.

"We are bringing GEM to Malaysia to help companies rise to the occasion to benchmark themselves against global peers; they will have also more tools of analysis to use as they join the wave in taking ESG and sustainability reporting seriously," said Perspective Strategies founder and principal partner/GEM regional partner, Andy See.

While enhancing understanding on ESG and sustainability reporting among FBMKLCI companies, the survey helps the public to discuss quality ESG reporting while making their investment decisions.

As Malaysian companies grow on the global ranks, they also see room for improvement and areas in ESG transparency that require critical action.

Change is happening and sustainability is now a global issue; Malaysian companies, big and small, should buckle up to face a future of ESG and sustainability challenges.



Exploring intersectionality through a diverse workforce

AS we come to the end of the month of March, we recall this year's International Women's Day (IWD) theme of #EmbraceEquity.

In tandem with IWD 2023, Star Media Group hosted a webinar (part of the StarESG Academy series) to explore frameworks for the transformation of businesses towards a diversified, equitable and inclusive (DEI) workforce.

For businesses, DEI can lay out fair reward and talent management processes which can in turn enhance retention, employee satisfaction and increase productivity.

The webinar consisted of panelists TalentCorp Women Programmes deputy vice president Dinatra Mohd Saat, Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs (IDEAS) chief executive officer Dr Tricia Yeoh Su-Wern, Thoughts in Gear (TIG) chief executive officer Margie Ong and Nestlé MYSG HR director Mitzie Antonio.

GKH ESG Consulting Services country manager Kavita Subramaniam was the moderator.

During this session, participants got a glimpse into what DEI means for their company and the positive impacts it brings. The panelists also shared their experiences on how to empower employee-led business resource groups, how to motivate talent leaders, recognising identity biases, cultivating equitable systems and they also explored communication strategies for DEI policies.

"This (DEI) is not only a human resource matter - it cuts across and should be enshrined in all business operations and processes," shared Dinatra in her overview of where DEI stands in the environmental, social and governance (ESG) context.

"DEI is meant to address or eliminate discrimination. It started in the 1960s in the United States through affirmative action to fight for the rights of the Black community in the workforce.

"Since then it has progressed to fight for equality for all, including equal opportunity to benefits, opportunities and access to

resources," she added.

Participants also got the opportunity to share their thoughts and questions with the panel for insights, with some being concerned about the practicalities of implementing DEI policies.

That said, the webinar also helped explain different blind spots businesses can have in adopting DEI. Simply having representation of different groups of people doesn't mean there is meaningful adoption of DEI - businesses also need policies and practices that create an equitable environment.

The government is also in the midst of developing the National Action Plan on Business and Human Rights (NAPBHR) and is expected to launch it by this year. The NAPBHR will cover areas of environment, governance and labour to protect human rights, uphold corporate responsibility to respect human rights, and give access to victims for judicial and non-judicial remedies in disputes.

Dr Yeoh said that formal or national guidelines can speed up



DEI frameworks should create preferential treatment for certain groups, but instead it should give all groups equal opportunities of access to supplement meritocracy.

the adoption of DEI for businesses; if multinational companies and government-linked companies have to abide by certain stipulations, then smaller, independent companies will follow suit.

She noted that the reason why most conversations surrounding DEI focuses on gender is because Malaysia still hasn't achieved parity in the gender participation rate in the workforce when looking at regional statistics, especially when

women return from maternity leave.

DEI is more than just gender. Part and parcel of a diversified, equitable and inclusive workforce also includes persons with disabilities, marginalised ethnic groups, geographical representation and even age.

Stay up-to-date with the latest trends with the next webinar from StarESG Academy happening in April titled 'ESG Sustainability Reporting Workshop'.

SMALL ACTS > BIG IMPACTS

4 top tips for an eco-friendly Aidilfitri

Compiled by HO JIA WEN
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Hari Raya Aidilfitri, one of the biggest yearly celebrations, is around the corner. Starting after a month-long Ramadan, Hari Raya is a joyful season marked by long drives back home and boisterous open houses. For this Raya, here are some tips to ease your conscious effort to celebrate sustainability and reduce your carbon footprint.

Sustainable corporate gifts

Make Raya corporate gifts sustainable by changing the way you gift. Support local businesses by buying corporate Raya gifts that are locally made and sustainable. You can choose gifts that are plant-based, biodegradable or even upcycled.

Some ideas you can try out include customised notebooks made from pineapple leaves, soap made from repurposed oil, and candles made from beeswax. Not only are these gifts unique, but they are also environmentally friendly.

Avoid disposables

There are many bazaars during Ramadan that sell a wide variety of delicious food for buka puasa. Save on disposable packaging and cutlery by bringing your own reusable containers when you shop at the bazaar.

Reusable containers like glassware are more durable too; you can avoid curry spilling over or hot food being contaminated by harmful chemicals from plastic packaging.

When attending an open house, it's also a good idea to bring along your containers. If there is any leftover food, you can use your containers to pack it home. This saves hassle for the host and

also reduces food waste. If you have no other options then it's better to get biodegradable plates or cutlery.

Rather than purchasing cartons or canned drinks, which generate paper and aluminium waste, you can make your own drinks too. Drinks can be made easily with juice concentrate mixed with water and ice and poured into a beverage dispenser. These homemade drinks can be healthier and also show your hospitality.



Redecorate with a mini-makeover

Getting bored of the old same look that your living room has? Give your home a mini-makeover. You could revamp your house with new furniture and decorations but instead of buying new furniture, explore fresh ways to maximise the space in your home by rearranging some of your existing furniture.

A fresh coat of paint also does wonders in giving your home a facelift. If you do decide to buy furniture, consider getting secondhand furniture and saving the furniture from the landfill. Sometimes thrift shopping will score you vintage finds or surprisingly high quality furniture at a

fraction of the retail selling price. Your house may be thrown into a frenzy of cleaning to prepare for the coming Hari Raya so maybe it's time to declutter your house and donate some of your unused items.

If you come across glass or plastic bottles, old newspapers, or non-functioning electronic devices while spring cleaning, make sure to recycle them at your local recycling centre. For old clothes, books or toys, you can donate them to charities and non-profit organisations. But, be a good sport and only donate hand-me-downs that are in good or decent condition.



Gift homemade cookies

Homemade cookies can be a great personalised and eco-friendly gift for your family and friends. Instead of buying cookies, which come in more plastic jars and packaging, you can bake cookies yourself. Bake sustainably by baking in larger batches so that you can save electricity, and reduce waste by using reusable baking mats and piping bags. The freshly-made cookies can be stored in last year's cookie containers. For a touch of Raya decoration, you could even cut out designs of green packets from the previous year and paste them onto the jar.