

# Faith-based Education for Sustainable Development

A DECADE can pass by in the blink of an eye when we are engrossed in turning an idea into reality.

Ten years ago, then United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan said just that of "sustainable development".

He said: "Our biggest challenge in this new century is to take an idea that seems abstract — sustainable development — and turn it into a reality for all the world's people."

That idea came closer to fruition last week as the United Nations Decade on Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) ended, taking stock of what has been done so far.

The idea no longer seems "abstract" when a myriad of examples was showcased from virtually all over the world. Millions of people, ranging from activists to schoolchildren, from industries to governments, from the young to the old, were involved in translating the idea into reality.

Successes that made an impact convincingly demonstrated the way sustainable development can improve the livelihoods of many, beyond the buzzword "green".

One example is the establishment of Regional Centres of Expertise (RCEs) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

The brainchild of Tokyo-based United Nations University-Institute of Advanced Studies, the first batch of seven pioneering RCEs were set up in 2005, including one at Universiti Sains Malaysia in Penang. To date, there are 129 RCEs around the globe, with two more potentially in Malaysia.

It is difficult to describe the sense of jubilation with so many high points during the two-week celebration of the end of the decade, beginning at the city of Okayama, then Nagoya and climaxing at Aichi-Nagoya with three days of sharing and learning.

For Malaysia, the highlight was the address made by the Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin's address at the launch of the celebration.

Muhyiddin, who is also Education Minister, touched on a broad range of ideas to demonstrate that not only is ESD relevant to today's needs but it also has its roots in many traditional societies before they were tempered by so-called "modern" living with its unsustainable and wasteful ways.

To quote a Minister from Sweden who spoke after Muhyiddin: "If everyone lives like the Swedes, we will need three planets!"

This made Muhyiddin's point on striking a balance between people and planet very well placed. "Striking a balance between the needs of the people and the conservation of the planet in the pursuit of peace and prosperity is pertinent to enhance the quality of life for today and the future generation, encompassing values and ethics."

To drive home the point, he urged that religious and faith-based approaches be acknowledged as a common platform towards ESD.

An example is the Islamic code of living or *al maqasid* as *syariah* to preserve life, intellect, posterity and property as a way of life (*add-din*), which assimilates well into the four pillars of ESD — Environment, Economy, Society and Culture.

For example, "posterity" can be easily expanded to include the future generations who will benefit from a sustainable future while the notion of "property" should encompass the planet proper as entrusted to humankind as a steward to look after it ecologically or otherwise.

Preservation and protection of life refer to that of human beings but not to the exclusion of other species that inhabit Earth, some much longer than the human species.

And "intellect" is the socio-cultural dimensions built upon a knowledge base that informs decisions and policies to ensure a sustainable society of the future.

This is evident from the various Quranic verses that urge humans to reflect on God's creation to realise the wisdom therein, including the inherent idea of balance and sustainability. The wisdom of human co-existence with the ecological environment transcends all forms of spirituality and faith-based principles.

Muhyiddin's suggestion will no doubt open up even further vistas of ESD as it moves into the second decade that will take it closer to the reality of a sustainable future, coupled with the commitment to enhance ESD throughout the education sector, anchoring on higher education institutions as a research and knowledge platform in a collaborative manner.

In this way, a decade from now Malaysia can hold its head high as an example of a sustainable nation that is diverse yet at peace with itself and the world. Let's work on it before another blink of an eye passes by!



**Dzulkipli Abdul Razak** is an honorary professor at University of Nottingham and Chair of Leadership at Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia. Email him at [education@nst.com.my](mailto:education@nst.com.my)