



PROGRAMME REPORT

SOCIAL POLICYMAKING FOR SHARED PROSPERITY

A Policy Leadership Workshop

19 - 21 February 2020

Razak School of Government





Programme Report: Social Policymaking for Shared Prosperity A Policy Leadership Workshop

It almost feels like the world is now divided into two timelines – before COVID-19 and now. We are yet to experience what after COVID-19 is as vaccine discovery remains in progress. What the global pandemic has brought to life is the discussion of the new normal and how it is changing our established ways of living. With many required to stay at home due to the contagious nature of this virus, millions around the world have had been laid off or are required to take unpaid leave, leaving individuals, families, and communities in economic vulnerability as their source of livelihoods are taken away. The outbreak unleashed immense pressure for governments to identify how best to address the impact on health, economic and social aspects of societies.

Right on cue, social policy experts and social protection proponents have voiced out their views and shared insights on how best to navigate this unprecedented challenge, often pointing out on the importance of addressing equity and promoting social dimensions in policymaking and implementation. Enhancing social policies and social protection is seen as the right way forward considering that social policy is a multidisciplinary approach to address social needs throughout one's life. These needs include health, shelter, and education, which is addressed through a set of guidelines, principles, legislation or set activities. Often, social policy is assumed to be actions designed to promote welfare by the government. While this is descriptive of what social policy is, it does not promote a wholesome picture due to the complexity of welfare and how governments promote it in various ways, depending on how other policies, such as economic, health or education policy, are in place.

Malaysia has had its national social policy tabled and approved in 2003, focusing on value-based social development that strives to enhance individuals' capacity in achieving social cohesion and stability, national resilience, and community wellbeing. Fast forward to 2019, the Shared Prosperity Vision was announced as a collective effort to provide a decent standard of living to all Malaysians by 2030. In this pursuit, policymakers have a very important role to play by equipping themselves with the skills and tools to realise the vision. For a start, policymakers must recognise that all policies and programmes implemented has social dimensions embedded in it.

Before COVID-19 was declared a global pandemic, the Razak School of Government collaborated with Social Wellbeing Research Centre at the University of Malaya and Employees Provident Fund to implement a short programme tailored for emerging leaders in the public service. The learning programme, held on 19 – 21 February 2020 in Putrajaya, is a combination of imparting theoretical knowledge on social policymaking and allowing the opportunity for practical application, especially in translating data and knowledge into evidence-based policies.



The two and a half-day programme emphasised on understanding equity and how it can be achieved through social policy. The keynote address by the then Deputy Minister of Economic Affairs, YB Senator Dr Radzi Md Jidin, provided the contextual setting of why the Shared Prosperity Vision was identified and how it came into being. It then followed by sessions delivered by social policy experts, led by Dr Amjad Rabi, who is currently the Visiting Fellow at the Social Wellbeing Research Centre, and Emeritus Professor Dr Norma Mansor, the Executive Director at the aforementioned centre based in University of Malaya.



One of the first paradigm shifts required is acknowledging that income level cannot be the main variable to determine access to goods and services. This is considering that the disadvantaged often become invisible in this variable due to non-income determinants that influence individual's ability to access goods and services such as gender, social status, and geographical location, among others. By identifying the disadvantaged circumstances and analysing their non-income determinants, policymakers can address the root causes for inequality, subsequently ensuring that appropriate programmes can be designed and implemented.

It is through this recognition that a stronger equity approach can take place in social policy. However, the challenge does not stop there as promoting this view requires advocating decisionmakers for national policies and budget that truly responds to vulnerable groups. This is possible by ensuring that rights are integrated into national development frameworks and legislations, with all reflected and transparent in budget allocations. Equally crucial to advocacy is broad-based partnerships as it helps provide multi-dimensional monitoring and analysis of budgets and policies, enhancing accountability and allowing opportunity to improve further.





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One of the ways to contextualise learnings is through seeing it from a sectoral lens. Considering that the key to economic growth is sustained growth in labour supply and productivity, the focus on special presentations was on human capital and education from multilateral agencies who often must work with various stakeholders attempting to resolve wicked problems. UNICEF Malaysia's Education Specialist, Azlina Kamal shared views on "Achieving Shared Prosperity through Education, followed by Achim Schmillen from World Bank Malaysia's insights on "Human Capital and Malaysia's Path to Developed Nation Status".

Participants of this programme, who came from various ministries, departments, and agencies, then had the opportunity to apply learning through a Policy-thon. "—thons" are used across technology sector and increasingly so in the policymaking context to generate interdisciplinary, innovative, and participatory solutions to major challenges. Derived from the word marathon, it is a time-restricted competition (between 24 hours to 72 hours) to create a policy mix to tackle a socioeconomic issue facing the nation or a community. For this Policy-thon, participants had two of RSOG's alumni – YBr. Dr Haji Megat Sany bin Megat Ahmad Supian (Director at the Kedah State Development Office) and Puan Farah Adura Hamidi (Deputy Director-General at the Governance, Integrity, Anti-Corruption Centre, Prime Minister's Department) to engage with as mentors, along with the social policy experts. They had less than 24 hours to come up with solutions with social dimensions to a real-life existing problem, presenting it in a limited timeframe (10 minutes). While this policy challenge may derive from the word marathon, the task they had to undertake is akin to completing a triathlon.



It appears that the ideals and themes shared in the programme before COVID-19 remain highly relatable, relevant, and much needed, especially in our current circumstances. Parallels from 1918 flu pandemic is often cited in the current coronavirus situation and how it changed the way healthcare and access to medicine was organised, among others. The impact of this pandemic has undeniably devastated many segments of society with families unable to say a final farewell to their loved ones, households losing sources of income, and students readjusting their modes of learning. All it took was a virus, smaller than a bacterium, to alter how we have lived. Relooking how we can live in the new normal in pursuit of the Shared Prosperity Vision 2030 poses a challenge, but it certainly remains an opportunity to restructure society for the better.

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