

# 12MP – Getting the **balance** right

**T**HE justification for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Fourth Industrial Revolution (IR4.0) is not necessarily the same. In several instances, SDGs and IR4.0 may take different trajectories.

This was clear at the 2019 World Economic Forum, when renowned environmentalist, Sir David Attenborough, called on the business and corporate community to do more to save the ecology from collapsing. He said "The Garden of Eden is no more" to illustrate dramatically how humans were "dismantling" civilisation.

The world pre-IR was "sustainable" (stable and balanced) and fertile for the emergence and growth of civilisations. Many "eastern" civilisations – namely Indian, Chinese, Persian and Muslim – were at their peak where "balance" (tamas rajas, yin yang, mizan, sejahtera) is the main philosophical underpinning as a way of life which is today supported by the 17 SDGs.

Its overall goal is beyond just

economics but well-balanced by ecological and socio-cultural imperatives. It therefore embraces the five Ps – the planet (ecology), people (socio-cultural), prosperity (economic equality) and partnership (sharing and collaboration) ultimately leading to peace (dignity and justice).

Is IR4.0 "sustainable" as a framework for the 12th Malaysia Plan (12MP)? How much does it (positively) contribute to the five Ps to be aligned with the SDGs, and more importantly translating them into reality. Or the very least, not undermining the SDGs?

To date there is no concrete verdict on this as there has been no discussion attempted to earnestly arrive at convincing conclusions. Rather the issues relating to SDGs were seldom, if at all, addressed when we jumped on the IR4.0 bandwagon post-Davos three years ago.

Similarly, it seemed to be the case at the 12MP Kick-off Conference last week. It was techno-centric while SDGs are

human- and ecological-centric. Somehow the last two aspects were left wanting creating an "imbalance".

We have not significantly moved away from the "old" model and mindset. Thus, the threat remains high, bearing in mind that at the end of the day, it is human civilisation that is at stake, at the risk of being taken over by a so-called digital civilisation (as in the cliché: digitalise or die!). Especially post-"singularity" – a phrase rarely talked about in virtually all IR4.0 discourses: a "missing link" in better realigning SDGs with IR4.0.

It is interesting to note that the minister of economic affairs, who was at the conference, emphasised not merely "economics" as in "economic empowerment" but also "environmental sustainability" and "social re-engineering" concerns.

Although the terms used are different, they do refer to the same 3Ps of prosperity, planet and people. He rightly pointed out that they complement

(balance) each other towards "realising Malaysia's new development model of shared prosperity" (through partnership and peace as the final outcome). He said: "They are also in line with our efforts to attain the sustainable goals by 2030" – SDGs 2016-2030 – whereby 12MP covers an important period from 2021 to 2025. Logically, should the 12MP be poorly constructed due to gaps and biases towards any one aspect, then the SDGs are bound to fail, making the "people" dimension even more vulnerable.

In the weeks ahead, there must be more concerted and conscious effort to closely calibrate the SDGs and IR4.0. Better still take into account Japan's approach to Society 5.0 model in providing a more "humane" alternative to reshape a sustainable future for Malaysia.

*With some four decades of experience in education, the writer believes that "another world is possible". Comments: letters@thesundaily.com*



*"Challenge of  
reshaping a  
sustainable  
future."*