

CARI MAKAN

General observations on
building forward better
from COVID-19



PART II
Kita Jaga Kita

About the cover

Use of disposables increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. Disposables enabled medical and humanitarian work, made takeaways a viable alternative to dine-in, and facilitated in-person work. Think of workers with their *plastik ikat tepi* (drink takeaway in side-tied plastic bag) and tiffin carrier or polystyrene lunch box in hand.

The *plastik ikat tepi* represents the trade-off between human needs and environmental costs. There have been many others: cheap gloves come at the cost of substandard workers' housing; movement restrictions reduce virus transmission but impose economic costs and mental and emotional strain. Meanwhile, the tiffin carrier represents solutions that are contextually appropriate, inclusive and community-based, environment-friendly, and informed by local culture and heritage.

Cari Makan explores the difficult choices before us, and how they intersect with social inequalities brought to light by the pandemic. It also sheds light on new or alternative solutions, many of which may already be with us, just awaiting (re)discovery.

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Foreword

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The COVID-19 pandemic has set back progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Globally, between 119 to 124 million people dropped back into extreme poverty in 2020. Key drivers of human development — health, education, and economic opportunities — have been impacted. In Malaysia, over 26,000 lives were lost directly to COVID-19 by the end of September 2021, while the economy contracted by 5.6 percent in 2020. And while movement restrictions and reduced human activity provided a temporary respite for the environment, it has not altered our trajectory of climate change.

Is there, then, any silver lining from this crisis? Yes, but only if we take lessons from this.

Following the COVID-19 crisis, unprecedented levels of cash aid were distributed through welfare and social protection programmes, turning ideas about temporary and universal basic income into real possibilities. We experienced how our health and well-being depended on the health and well-being of the most vulnerable, and recognized the necessity of digital connectivity for all segments of society. The interdependence of health and socio-economic development was made crystal clear. We saw what skies and rivers could look like if we reined in pollution.

If we can learn from this experience and act accordingly, then the COVID-19 pandemic will have been a moment of inflexion, setting off our world onto a different trajectory. To this end, UNDP has been collecting data through the COVID-19 Data Futures Platform and others, and generating insights and recommendations to secure health, protect people, enable economic recovery, develop macro responses, and build social cohesion. UNDP Malaysia is generating actionable intelligence for recovery and building back better.

While we need data and intelligence for informed decision-making, we also need stories to touch our hearts and shape our collective values that form the basis for these decisions. The power of narratives was clearly seen throughout the pandemic, influencing vaccination rates, public willingness to wear masks and maintain physical distancing, and the approach taken towards vaccinating undocumented persons — both native-born and migrants. UNDP launched the Kisah* initiative, exploring the impact of COVID-19 through the eyes of conversation-partners at the front lines of the response to the pandemic.

Cari Makan builds on Kisah, exploring issues of health, work, education, social inclusion, the environment — and more, amid the COVID-19 pandemic, told in human stories. A rich variety of personas embody the intersection of these issues, turning datapoints about the SDGs into relatable human beings and their lived experiences. The publication juxtaposes diary entries, social-media feeds, story-telling, and short analytical pieces — complemented with illustrations — to provide a gripping experience. The writers and production team have put together a narrative about our world, showing not only its present imperfections, but also the hopes and aspirations we share to improve it. I hope that you will discover a vision for sustainable development in the Malaysian context and be inspired to contribute to its realization.

* *Kisah* is a Malay word that means both 'story' and 'to care / to take interest'.



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Cari Makan: The view from the kitchen

Let us rewind to dinner last night. What do you see? The home-cooked dinner, the fast-food delivery, the *tapau* or *bungkus** packet, or the instant cup noodle. It seems very familiar, doesn't it? But, this is not the food you remember from your childhood, nor is it even the food you remember from two years ago. When did you learn to cook like that? When did we come to rely so much on food deliveries or takeaways? When did we become hoarders out of a post-apocalyptic film?

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways in which we *cari makan* (look for food). More significantly, it has also opened up new conversations about how to *cari makan* (earn a living). When COVID-19 hit, many had to make difficult decisions, choosing between life and livelihood: when showing up to work is a health risk, when staying at home presents new challenges, and when jobs are no longer secure — what does it mean to survive, to sustain, and to thrive?

Provocations

Here at UNDP, we continue to wrestle with what it means to 'build forward better' post-COVID-19. Our mission is, in a nutshell, to eradicate poverty and promote human development while protecting the planet. We have been thrust into an increasingly complex, ambiguous, and uncertain world. Past trends are not good predictors of future circumstances. COVID-19 is complex. Its good and bad are blurred. Take health versus economy trade-offs: a lockdown may be good for containing the virus, but it has consequences on the economy. The work from home experience is drastically different for corporate executives and street vendors. Some of us had a Plan B, but many did not. Different communities

* *Tapau* and *bungkus* are the Cantonese and Malay words, respectively, for takeaway.

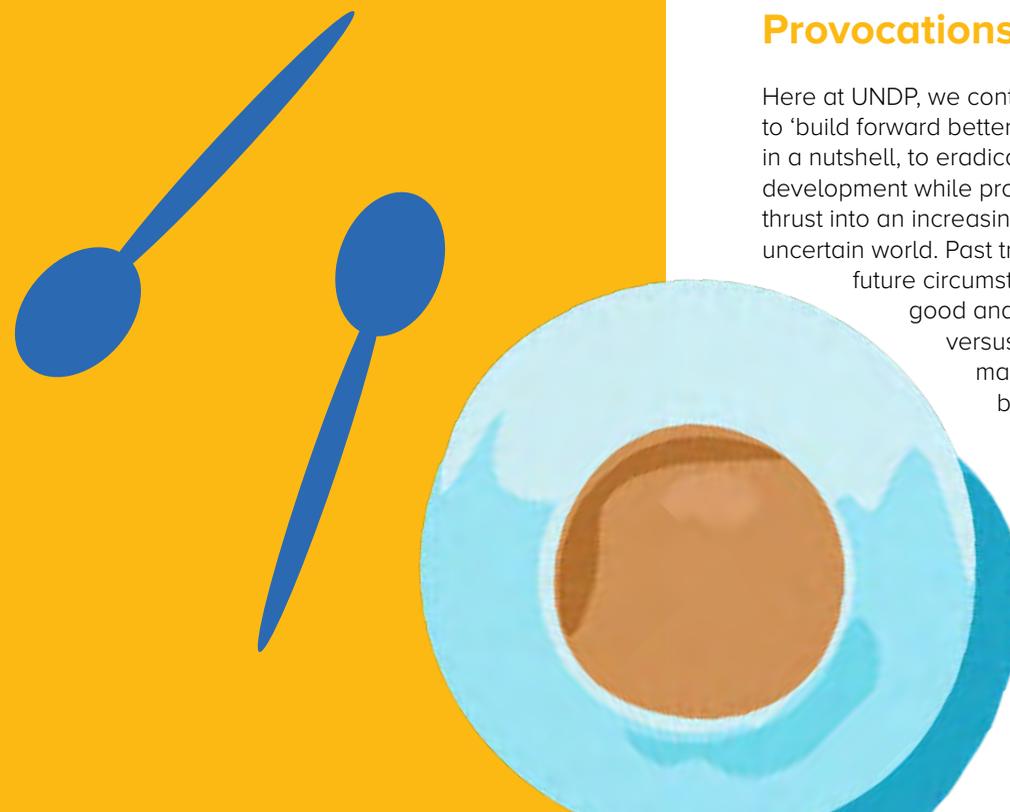
are impacted differently. There is no one policy that addresses the needs of all.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) continue to frame what a just, prosperous, and resilient future should look like. Getting back on track — and accelerating progress — towards the SDGs will entail no less than the exploration of alternative, emerging, and under-the-radar solutions that offer greater social-ecological resilience. Scary as it seems, we must acknowledge that COVID-19 won't be the last — or the worst — global crisis. We cannot just go back to 'normal'. We have to proactively defuse foreseeable crises and build more resilient and less vulnerable societies.

The 'war' we are now waging is not merely against a virus; COVID-19 exposed vulnerabilities and exacerbated complex issues for which there are no textbook solutions or best practices — the crisis is ongoing and, like the virus itself, mutates as it goes along. Even when the 'invader' is finally defeated, collateral damage will remain. *Cari Makan* reflects on whether we, as a country, are well positioned (or not) for that. To this end, we created a document that is not only retrospective and reactive, but prospective and proactive — to better navigate the uncertainty before us.

Process

Cari Makan is not your typical policy document. We took an experimental step in 'incarnating' these issues in persons and personas. To understand the impact of COVID-19 and the policies and responses formulated to combat it, we must explore multiple perspectives. Thus, in these pages you will find stories — fictional ('cooked up' you could say) but based on real people and events, real struggles and lived experiences — that examine how different people seek refuge in crisis, probing the inherent conflict and contradiction between these different viewpoints.



Are these stories subjective? Of course. Knowledge is positional and depends very much on the angle and perspective of the observer¹. We hope these stories will help you explore the nuances behind the complexities, uncertainties, and fragilities brought to light by COVID-19. You will not find easy, straightforward answers in these pages. But by offering a glimpse into how events that occur to 'them' also impact 'us', *Cari Makan* highlights the connections, contradictions, and trade-offs we need to navigate, to build a just and inclusive future.

Some of these stories were told to us; others, we overheard. We have drawn from a variety of data sources: interviews, podcasts, ethnography, social media listening, and even memes, to create these characters and stories.

Interspersed throughout these narratives are various checkpoints to help us take a step back and reflect on the issues highlighted in the stories:

- **Unpacking the system** through system maps that help us explore the interconnections between complex problems;
- **Environmental interludes** reflect on the planetary pressures that are a cost of human development;
- **KISAH Futures stories** take a speculative look at what the future might be if things stayed the same, or if they changed; and
- **Alternatives** — niche or slowly-trending ideas, practices and “weak signals” that may hold a key to improving resilience to future crises.

What is the logic behind this collector's scrapbook of a year with COVID-19? The specifics of the issues described will change. However, if we understand how people and systems respond positively and negatively to disruptions, we can project the future, imagining the impact of different scenarios and disruptive events on various groups of people. Our hope is that this will open a door into more reflexive, foresighted, and inclusive policymaking.

¹ Imagine trying to understand a festival like, say, Thaipusam. Different people have different motivations for observing it. If you wanted to know the “truth,” who do you speak to? If you spoke to a priest, he may give you the official meaning. But is that the truth? You would want to speak to a devotee, and even different devotees may express the meaning of Thaipusam differently — and have different personal reasons and motivations for observing it. A nuanced reading is one that factors in complexity and contradiction, for truth is seldom monolithic and unilateral.

“ Our hope is that this will open a door into more reflexive, foresighted, and inclusive policymaking. ”

Pathways

Stories are our windows to the world, but we only see, and know, in part. The response to COVID-19 is a story with many observers and points of view. The picture becomes more complete (and complex!) the more voices we listen to, for the general observer is every one of us. Our collective perspective — our collective intelligence — is strengthened when we are in this together.

Cari Makan is a collection of bite-sized snippets. Flip, scroll, and find a headline that grabs you. Read it, and chew on it. They may be (very) short stories but they bring our attention to deep, complex, and interconnected issues. Whether you identify with the stories in this volume; agree in principle but have more to add; or disagree because your experience says something else — we invite you to join the conversation. Get in touch with us via www.collective-intelligence.my and/or take action on issues close to your heart: as a starting point, in each chapter we have identified several community-based and non-governmental organizations at the front lines of our most pressing challenges.

Ultimately, *Cari Makan* is only the beginning, a tool we hope will spark conversations, reflection, and action on some of the ‘difficult issues’ in society. We do not know enough. But, we hope to explore and uncover nuances so that our work for change reflects the needs of all, especially the most vulnerable. Let us seek out alternatives to the dominant development paradigms. Let us find and share solutions that are community-based, indigenous, under-the-radar, non-mainstream, or even counter-intuitive. (Sometimes these may be simple things right under our noses.) Let us strive for a far more inclusive society than what we have today, where lives and livelihoods can thrive.

The COVID-19 pandemic is both an ecological and a social phenomenon.

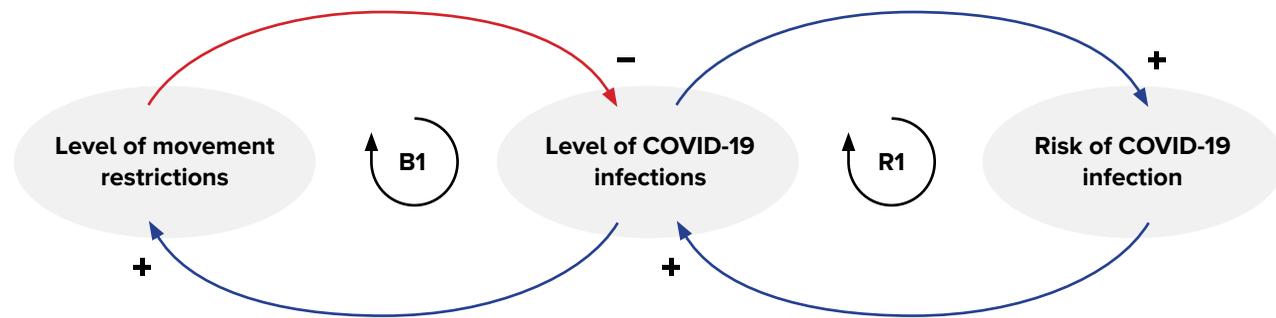
AN INTRODUCTION TO SYSTEMS THINKING

The COVID-19 socio-ecological system and a primer to feedback loops

The COVID-19 pandemic is both an ecological and a social phenomenon. There are biological and physical factors that shape how contagious COVID-19 is. However, the social systems we have created — such as global travel, crowded worker dormitories and prisons, and beliefs about the balance between individual liberty and societal responsibility — shape how the pandemic has spread. Together, these form a socio-ecological system driven by a variety of feedback loops.



The COVID-19 infection-and-containment cycle.



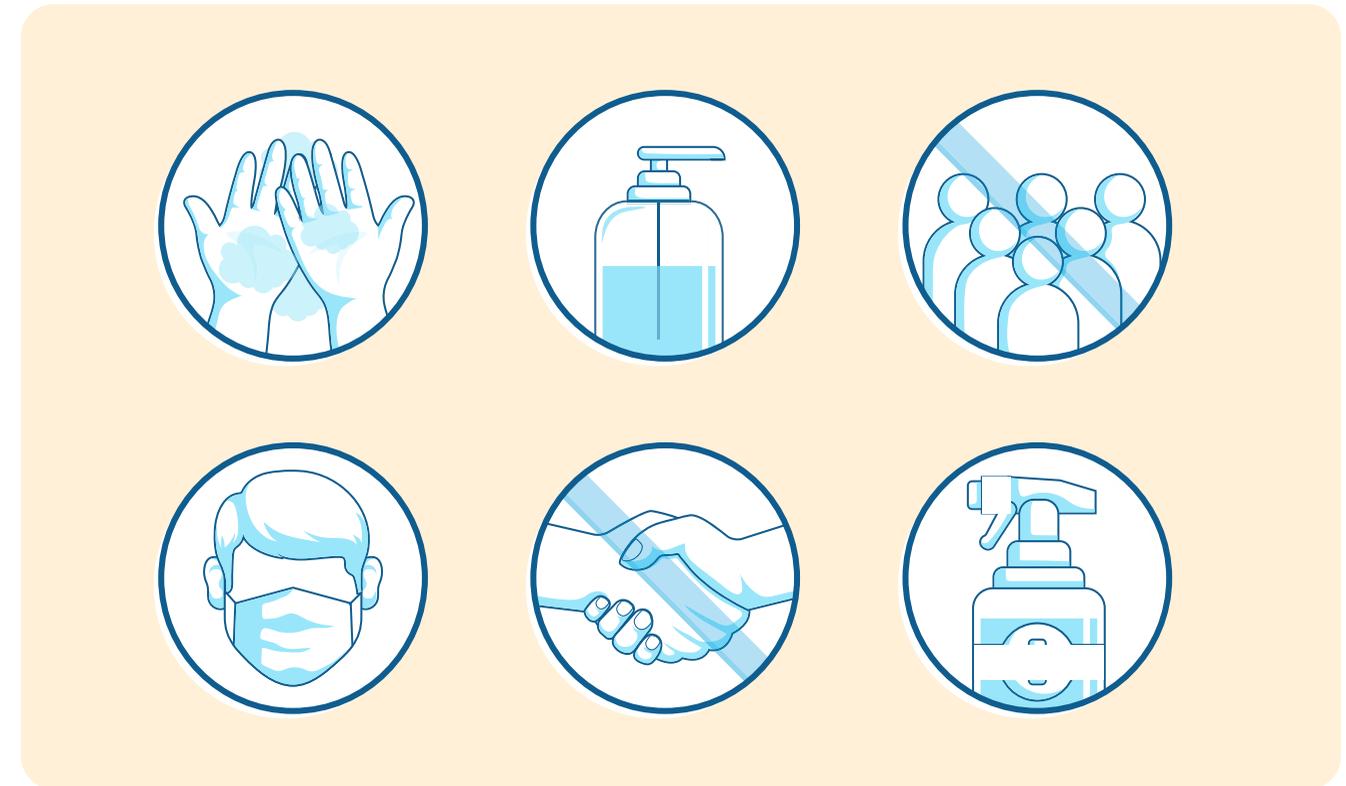
How to read a system map

Causal relationships between driver variables (arrow start) and affected variables (arrow end) are represented with arrows. In positive relationships (indicated by blue arrows and '+' signs), when the driver variable increases or decreases, the affected variable changes in the same direction (i.e., increase in driver variable creates increase in affected variable, and decrease in driver variable creates decrease in affected variable). In negative relationships (indicated by red arrows and '-' signs) when the driver variable increases or decreases, the affected variable changes in the opposite direction (i.e., increase in driver variable creates decrease in affected variable, and decrease in driver variable creates increase in affected variable).

COVID-19 can spread very quickly. A few cases quickly become a few dozen, a few hundred, a few thousand... and more. As the level of COVID-19 infections rise, the risk of new cases also increases because the potential exposure to COVID-19 is higher — and this in turn increases the level of COVID-19 infections. The resulting R1 loop is a **reinforcing feedback loop** that tends to amplify change. This explains the tendency towards exponential, runaway growth in COVID cases.

How might this ecological feedback loop be stopped? Public health professionals have been focused on R_0 , which describes the number of new infections each

patient generates. If R_0 is greater than 1, the feedback loop feeds the spread of the disease; if it is less than 1, the feedback cycle is starved and cases come down. There are two ways to reduce R_0 . The first is to change the ecological system by increasing the number of people immune to COVID-19 so it has less opportunity to spread. Left unchecked, COVID-19 will accomplish this by itself as mass exposure generates some level of immunity in the general population, but at great cost in lives, as well as social and economic disruption. This is why we need a safe and effective vaccine.



The second way to reduce R_0 is to reduce the opportunity for exposure between those infected by COVID-19 and those who do not have immunity. These strategies — such as wearing masks, movement restrictions, and physical distancing — target social systems. Unfortunately, many of these responses also create social and economic costs including livelihoods and connections with family and friends. Therefore, we see these social strategies rise and fall with societal anxiety over the number of COVID-19 cases, and we see the level of COVID-19 infections fall and rise again as we tighten and loosen restrictions and personal behaviours. The resulting B1 loop is a **balancing feedback loop** that tends to resist change and maintain an equilibrium. In January 2021, a newspaper commentator suggested that we might need to behave

as if there were 20,000 new cases each day to keep the number of cases in check. In August 2021, we reached that number.

This model is, of course, a simplification. COVID-19 variants, 'lockdown-fatigue', and other factors complicate reality. Nonetheless, it is a good starting point for thinking about the challenges of containing the pandemic. Indeed, the COVID-19 socio-ecological system does not exist in a vacuum. It shapes and is shaped by other social systems and pre-existing challenges. As we unpack the stories of people impacted by COVID-19 and the resulting socio-economic responses, we will also examine some of the linkages between these systems.

Lau, Alwyn. "We should behave like it is 20,000 cases daily." The Malay Mail, 11 January 2021, www.malaymail.com/news/opinion/2021/01/11/we-should-behave-like-it-is-20000-cases-daily/1939223. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Part II

Kita Jaga Kita

Hands down, one of the most popular slogans of 2020 was #kitajagakita. But who is this *kita* ('us'), really? In this section we take a step back, interrogating the spaces and systems that have been our default engines of growth.

Exploring themes of inclusion vs. exclusion, Chapter 3 brings us on a tour of the city from the perspective of a person experiencing homelessness. Who is part of the narrative of a 'futuristic, developed' city? Who is not? How can we truly achieve the lofty aspirations of 'leaving no one behind'?

Told through the (fictional) social media feed of a factory worker, Chapter 4 analyses how the economic system that drives growth also drives vulnerability — the industries that have enabled us to fight the pandemic have also contributed to and perpetuated it.



Chapter 3

Homme-less:
Searching
for **belonging**
in times of
COVID-19

Homme, the French word for man, or person. Is homelessness a lack of shelter, or is it a lack of belonging?

Section 1: Peter's story



Home? I don't have a home, this is my home *lah*.

Peter welcomed me into his 'living room' — a two-foot by two-foot area next to his 'bed', with a stool.

But I think my home is everywhere.

You mean in KL?

Ya, I love KL, it's a nice city. I started working at a bar here when I was fifteen. I'm quite a good DJ, you know. My boss really liked me. Every night after the bar closed, we got together and he would buy us free drinks. As you know, you meet all kinds of people there. One of the guys introduced me to drugs. I got addicted. One day, the police caught me while I was using it. I was sent to Kajang prison for six months.

What about your family?

I am not close with my family. My parents are divorced, and my brother thinks I'm an embarrassment because of my criminal record. So I decided to come out on my own.

Peter took a sip of hot tea from his thermos.

I still remember the first night of being homeless. I was walking around, and suddenly I saw a group of homeless Chinese men at the Bank, sitting around chatting. They asked me to join them, one of them even shared his *karipap* with me. Since then I keep going back. The Bank area is where I sleep. I like to go there because most of my friends are there. At night it's usually very happening. There are also homeless Indians and Malays there, *Mat Sallehs* and foreigners also got. But I don't really talk to them very much, my *Bahasa* and English no-good *lah*. But we always help each other when we are in trouble.

That's nice.

Ya, I guess I'm lucky. There are many types of homeless people. Some of them, they just beg. Some of us got work here and there *lah*, like me. Some are drug addicts. Some actually got a home, but they just don't want to go back because of family problems. Some are a bit crazy, they already forgot where their family is, or even who they are.

Hmm. What about you? Do you still talk to your family?

I tried to go home, but my family won't accept me. Whenever I go back, they think I'm there to ask for money. So I decided to just stay on the street. I like freedom better, anyway. I can live on my own, with dignity.

I guess that's fair.

Ya, now I work at Uncle Chong's hawker stall, I can take care of myself. I started working there last year. His daughter Sharon is a social worker in a church nearby, and she helped me to get a job as a helper at Uncle Chong's place. I work there from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. and Uncle Chong always gives me a free bowl of *wan tan mee* for lunch.

Ms. Teh, the tour guide lady who always eats at the stall said that the government is doing a good job in rejuvenating the city. Now we have the River of Life project that makes the river very clean and beautiful, with lights and fountains. But it's not so good for us, because we can't go there anymore. Nowadays we can't stay in many tourist spots because police will chase us away.

I took a deep breath, lost in my own thoughts. Ironic that a 'River of Life' would also disrupt life.

[Opposite page]

Peter's home: A tour of KL via a lens of homelessness

Well, where do you go then?

Well, now with COVID-19, not many people are on the street. So we actually have more space to roam. But many of my homeless friends have lost their livelihoods, especially those who don't have a job and rely on charity. Some of them have gone to the shelters provided by Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur (DBKL). The DBKL and police have been coming to ask us to go there. It's good there actually, they provide us with food and mattress. But I'm not sure if we can stay there forever.

That's tough.

Haiya, not so bad lah. We are tough people, and there are others who help us from time to time. Sunday is the best. There is a charity run by a group of young people at Jalan Panggung. I always go there because the food is very delicious. Got *nasi ayam*, *laksa*, one time they even got *cendol*! Sometimes they also give free medical check-ups and free clothes. I got this denim jacket there lah, nice right?

Peter chuckled while showing off his attire.

What about the future? What do you plan to do?

Huh? Of course I want to be rich lah!

His cheeky facial expression betrayed him. Of course he is not serious.

Well, I would like to have a nice place to stay, if I have money I want to open a cafe. Maybe I can help my other homeless friends. It will be good to do both!

You have a big heart, Peter.

Aiya... I'm late for work!

Peter stood up hastily, methodically folded his bed and tucked it into the far-right corner, out of sight.

Come, come... you walk with me... Let me show you around the area.

Sure!

I left with Peter, still bewildered by this unlikely friendship that I had just struck up.

Glossary

lah – a colloquial expression in Malaysian English, that has Malay, Cantonese, and Tamil roots. It is typically used at the end of a sentence to modify its tone; depending on the context, 'lah' can soften the sentence, make it harsher, or emphasize a point.

ya – slang for "Yes," a laid-back way to answer in the affirmative

aiya – an expression with Chinese roots, used to express annoyance, pain, or surprise

karipap – a pastry filled with curried potatoes, and sometimes meat

Mat Salleh – a Malay term used as a colloquial expression to refer to white people

Bahasa – Bahasa Malaysia, the national language of Malaysia

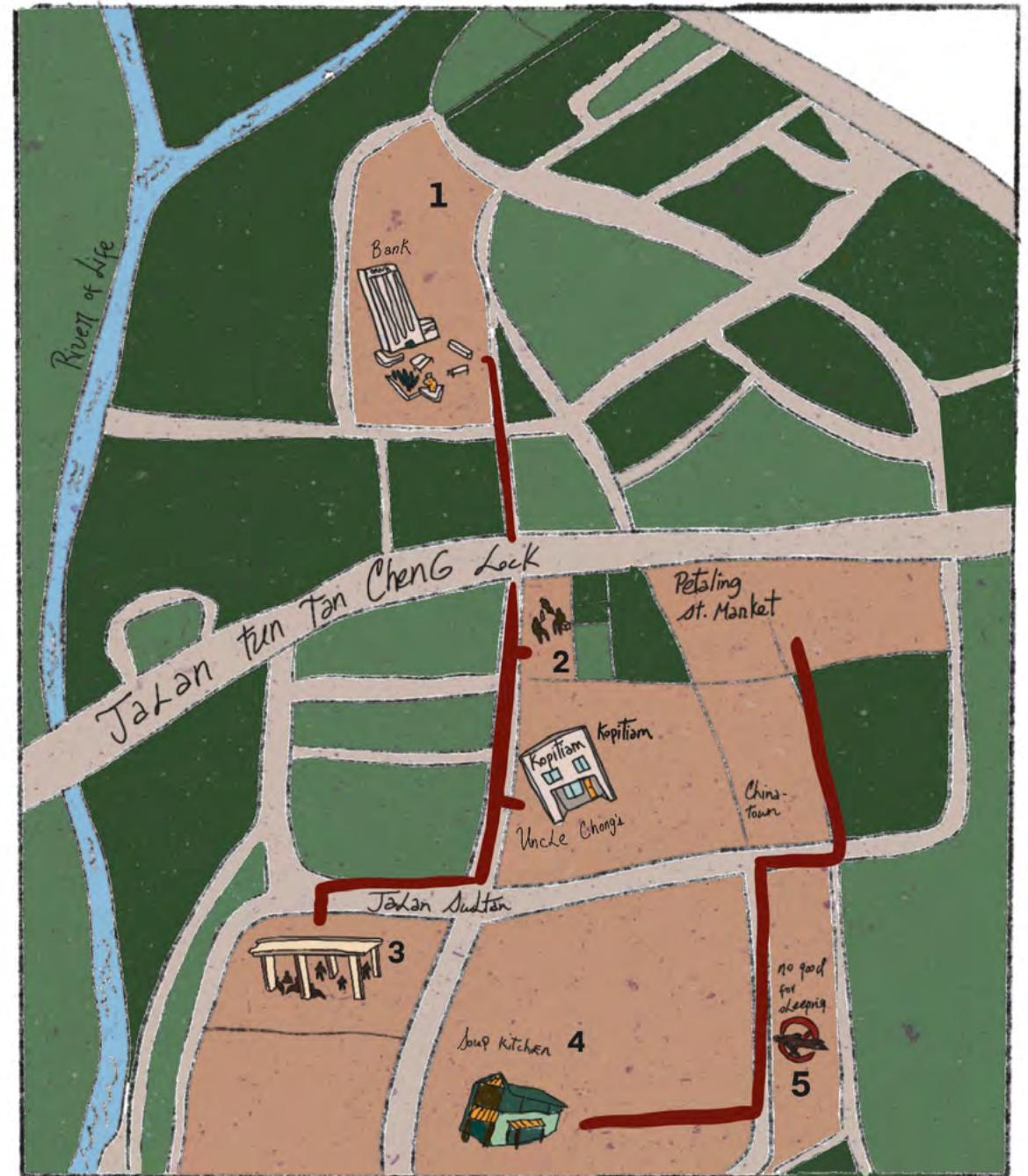
wan tan mee – a type of dumpling noodle

Dewan Bandaraya Kuala Lumpur – Kuala Lumpur City Hall

nasi ayam – chicken rice

laksa – a spicy noodle soup with many local variants across Malaysia

cendol – a shaved-ice dessert with rice flour jelly, coconut milk, palm sugar, and other toppings



1. Bank
- large homeless group (predominantly Chinese, Malay)

2. Smoke site
- homeless veterans (friend group, always smoking when in there)

3. Under bridge
- medium homeless group (mixed, OA, migrants)

4. Soup Kitchen

5. No longer good for sleeping

Newsflash

140 homeless people in downtown KL rounded up. New Straits Times, 24 January 2021, www.nst.com.my/news/nation/2021/01/660079/140-homeless-people-downtown-kl-rounded. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Penang is building its first transit center for the homeless set to operate in 2022. Penang Foodie, 19 February 2021, www.penangfoodie.com/penang-first-transit-center-homeless-2022. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Zuraida: New people's housing project to be rebranded Rumah Malaysia starting this year. The Star, 19 February 2021, www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/02/19/zuraida-new-people039s-housing-project-to-be-rebranded-rumah-malaysia-starting-this-year. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Cubicles installed at DBKL homeless shelter in social distancing boost. The Malay Mail, 7 April 2020, www.malaymail.com/news/malaysia/2020/04/07/cubicles-installed-at-dbkl-homeless-shelter-in-social-distancing-boost-vide/1854237. Accessed 1 October 2021.

800 homeless people in KL will be given suitable jobs with fixed income after MCO ends. SAYS, 11 April 2020, www.says.com/my/news/suitable-jobs-with-fixed-income-for-800-homeless-currently-housed-by-dbkl-after-mco-ends. Accessed 1 October 2021.

FT Minister: KL's homeless will be given jobs after MCO. The Star, 11 April 2020, www.thestartv.com/v/ft-minister-kl-s-homeless-will-be-given-jobs-after-mco. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Homeless foreigners well taken care of at DBKL shelters. The Malaysian Insight, 13 April 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=3eUJplkV2fU. Accessed 1 October 2021.

3.03

Inclusive placemaking — who does this city belong to?

Placemaking is a concept that has recently gained ground in Malaysia. Essentially, it denotes a collaborative approach to revitalizing existing public spaces to benefit communities, as opposed to a vendor-driven, profit-maximizing model to urban planning. The placemaking process is about everyone coming together, letting ideas flourish to create an enduring environment for a collective purpose.

Even so, urban rejuvenation efforts still inevitably create exclusion for certain segments of society. Because 'homeless people' are seen by city dwellers as undesirable and because homelessness is a 'problem' to be rid of, the absence of homeless people has sometimes been seen as the yardstick for success of urban renewal — without regard for how it is achieved.

This ignores the multifaceted nature of homelessness, and the human factors that shape it. Public spaces play a critical role for the homeless, especially during COVID-19. The city is where they come for food, shelter, and financial means to survive. While most of us seek refuge at home, those who experience homelessness have nowhere to go. The public space is their home after all.

The issue of homelessness requires a rethinking of policy interventions. In search of more sustainable solutions, some cities have experimented with a place-based approach to solve homelessness. In a placemaking project in Atlanta, social workers are placed in a park frequented by the homeless population. A multifunctional mobile game cart offering not only games, but also information, power outlets, and other amenities is placed in the park to be used by all and is administered by a case worker who acts as a 'Trust Agent', i.e., someone that is supposed to give a positive and supportive vibe rather than act as a figure of authority. By building trust, the case worker can then point persons in need to assistance, job opportunities, shelters, and more.

Madison, Elena. "How an Atlanta park is connecting people to housing through place-based social service provision." The Brookings Institution, 26 August 2020, www.brookings.edu/blog/the-avenue/2020/08/26/how-an-atlanta-park-is-connecting-people-to-housing-through-place-based-social-service-provision. Accessed 1 October 2021.

Alternatives: Shelters and social housing in the city

Kuala Lumpur is ironically plagued by two contradictory problems: homelessness, and empty buildings. It is a young, lively city that seems to be constantly changing, with new property development sprucing up all the time.

Unfortunately, due to their high price tags, many of these properties are out of bounds for most working-class Malaysians, never mind the homeless.

Meanwhile, it is estimated that the occupancy rate for offices in KL was at a record low, at 69.1 percent in the second half of 2020. Even if the economy bounces back after the worst of COVID-19, the occupancy rate will likely remain suppressed due to mushrooming construction, especially when megaprojects such as TRX and Merdeka 118 are completed. Office supply is projected to increase by 11.6 percent between the second half of 2020 and 2022.

KL is also experiencing a hollowing out as fewer people can afford to live in the city centre. This phenomenon was plain to see during movement restrictions when most people were confined to within 10 km of their homes. According to a baseline study conducted by Think City, close to 55,000 people work within downtown KL's historic core (Masjid Jamek area), but only about 11,000 live there.

What if some of the old buildings in town could be repurposed as social housing for the homeless and the needy? In recent years urban planners and architects have been experimenting with communal living and micro-housing, building small units — complemented with communal living spaces — near city centres. DBKL has started a pilot micro-housing project, offering single Malaysian youth between the ages of 18 and 35 and earning less than RM2,000 per month a home to rent for just RM100 per month.

Clearly, a readjustment in the way we think about shelters is in order. After all, the line between having a home and being homeless is thin. With high property prices and a gloomy economic outlook, many risk losing their jobs and becoming the new poor and homeless. Ensuring a strong social safety net is the first step to ensure no one will lose the roof over their head.

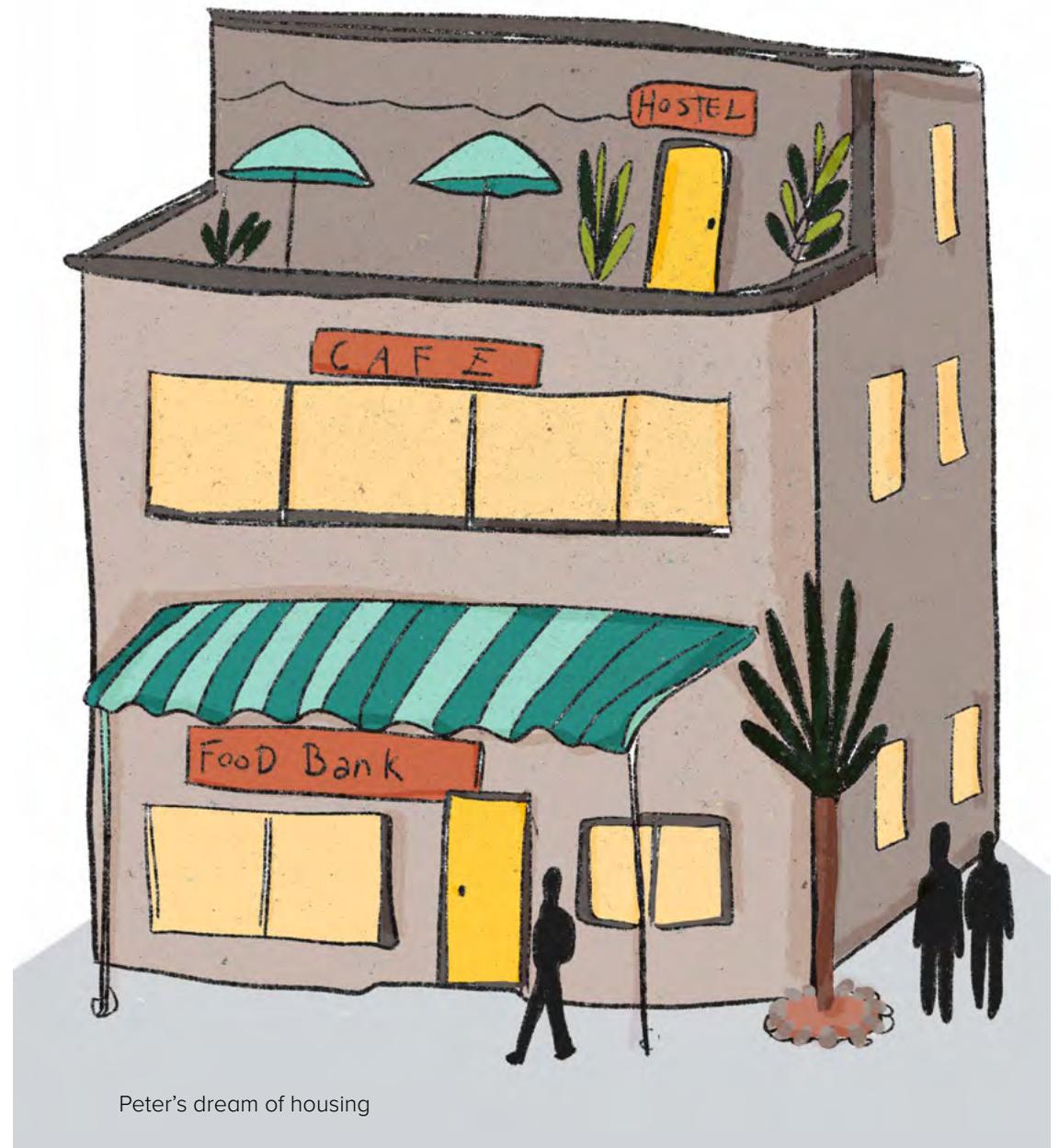
For a shelter to succeed, it ought to make homeless persons feel 'at home'. Les Brown, director of policy for the Chicago Coalition for the Homeless goes further and opined that for an individual to break out of the cycle of homelessness, they need a sense of purpose. That is why his shelter, Growing Home, offers homeless persons and formerly incarcerated individuals training and job opportunities at its non-profit organic agriculture business.

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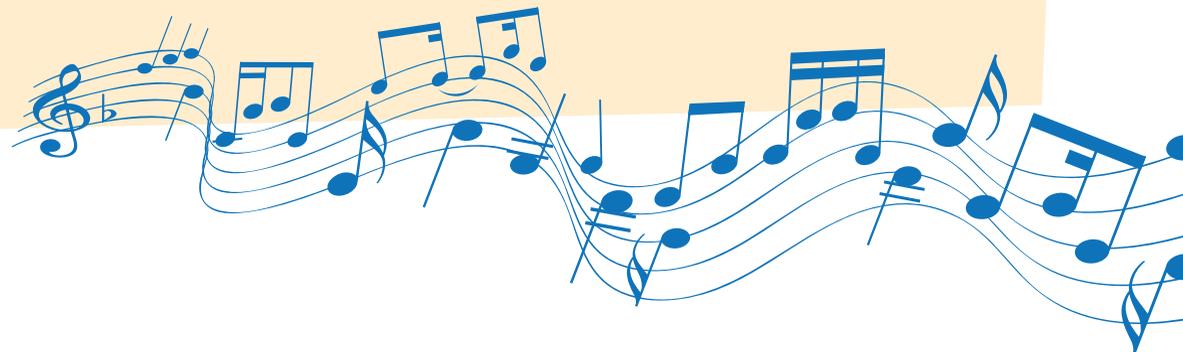
Who does this city really belong to? Perhaps the rich and the landowners come to mind. Ironically, when cities were emptied due to lockdown, one group of people stayed on in the city centre — the homeless. Most of us 'use' the city, but they 'belong' there.



Peter's dream of housing

Kita Jaga Kita — the power of empathy, the communal identity

<i>Laungkan suaraku memanggilmu</i>	(I shout out to you)
<i>Bersama lalu jalan berliku</i>	(Join me on the winding road)
<i>Walaupun tiada yang bersudi</i>	(Even if no one is willing)
<i>Ku akan tetap berjuang sendiri</i>	(I will keep fighting alone)
<i>Sentiasa!</i>	(Always!)
<i>Kita jaga kita!</i>	(We take care of us!)
<i>Mereka tiada masa untuk kita</i>	(They don't have time for us)
<i>Cuma kita berjasa untuk kita</i>	(Only we serve each other)
<i>Mereka tak tahu rasa hati kita</i>	(They don't know the feeling in our hearts)
<i>Sama-sama kita</i>	(We are together)
<i>Kita jaga kita!</i>	(We take care of us!)
<i>Kita jaga kita!</i>	(We take care of us!)



The theme song for the beloved local animation, *Ejen Ali*, became the unlikely rallying cry for Malaysians in face of this prolonged pandemic. The protectiveness of *Ejen Ali* towards his friends symbolizes the bond that Malaysians share with each other. We were all in the same boat, versus COVID-19, and that has brought us closer together. Many Malaysians rose to the challenge and became Good Samaritans in the times of need.

Cindy was one of them. After losing her job as a tour guide due to the pandemic, she teamed up with her god-brother to start Petaling Street Community Care at his coffee shop. They welcomed people in the streets to their coffee shop, where they can find respite and enjoy a cup of coffee together. “It’s not just about giving them food, but also making them feel like they belong,” said Cindy. “Everybody is equal here.” Cindy went to great lengths to make everyone feel at home. Not only can people in the community come and go at any time for meals, but they also get to eat with proper cutlery and must clean up after themselves. Cindy also encourages the homeless to contribute any symbolic amount for the food they receive, even as little as ten cents. Losing her job has made her empathize with the hardships faced by others, which motivated her to help those in need.

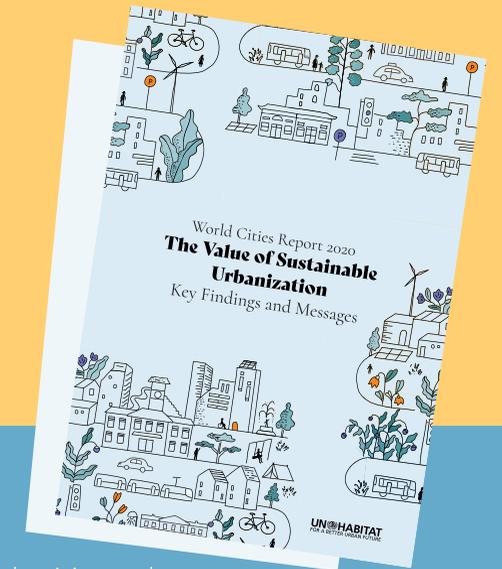
When the community organizers at Dapur Jalanan Kuala Lumpur (DJKL) learnt about the MCO, they were torn between protecting their own safety, and serving the community that they have come to know as friends. It was something a teammate said that tipped the balance: “There are mouths for us to feed.” Not able to bear the thought of deserting the community, they decided to keep the stove on. As a result, many of the organizers of DJKL found themselves having to juggle between their day job and their voluntary work, retreating from food distribution sessions to attend to urgent work matters, often behind the truck that they use to serve food. Some, however, relished this mission as they themselves had lost their jobs due to the MCO. “From the start, our philosophy is clear. We are sharing, not giving. That is why we never refer to them as ‘homeless’, but as ‘guests,’” said one of the organizers.

The risks of COVID-19 and the movement restrictions compelled them to readjust their procedures, reducing the number of volunteers and ensuring that those who came for food observed social distancing in queue. Due to high demand, DJKL had to increase the food prepared from the usual 200 packets, up to a peak of 600 packets. The number of people visiting started to dwindle after a while, as more NGOs resumed serving food to unhoused persons while the Community Welfare Department also increased their shelter services. The number of persons experiencing homelessness increased during the pandemic and these NGOs were crucial in offering a lifeline to these communities during this difficult period.

Some NGOs working with unhoused communities in Kuala Lumpur

- **Dapur Jalanan Kuala Lumpur** www.facebook.com/dapurjalanankl
- **Kechara Soup Kitchen** www.kechara.com/soup-kitchen
- **Petaling Street Community Care** www.facebook.com/Petaling-Street-Community-Care-%E8%8C%A8%E5%9C%BA%E8%A1%97%E5%85%B3%E6%80%80-102293248373314

World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization



The world we live in has been transformed in a manner not witnessed in recent times. The coronavirus pandemic has triggered what arguably is the worst public health crisis in a century and the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression. In a rapidly urbanizing and globalized world, cities have been the epicentres of COVID-19. The virus has spread to virtually all parts of the world; first, among globally connected cities, and now, through community transmission and from the city to the countryside.

The World Cities Report 2020 shows that the intrinsic value of sustainable urbanization can and should be harnessed for the well-being of all. The Report provides evidence and policy analysis of the value of urbanization from an economic, social and environmental perspective, including the unquantifiable value that gives cities their unique character. It also explores the role of innovation and technology, local governments, targeted investments and the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda in fostering the value of sustainable urbanization.

The World Cities Report 2020 convincingly affirms that well-planned, managed, and financed cities and towns create value that can be harnessed to build resilient cities that can bounce back from the devastating impacts of pandemics, improve the quality of life of all residents, and can be leveraged in the fight against poverty, inequality, unemployment, climate change and other pressing global challenges.

As the world enters the Decade of Action to deliver the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, the policy recommendations in this Report will be beneficial to governments at all levels, enabling them to deliver programmes and strategies that enhance the value of sustainable urbanization, and in the process, contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals through the effective implementation of the New Urban Agenda.

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Photo courtesy of DJKL



Explore a soup kitchen's transformation during COVID-19 and the first Movement Control Order (MCO), as they continued to serve the urban poor. In conversation with Dapur Jalanan Kuala Lumpur.

collective-intelligence.my/reading/kisah

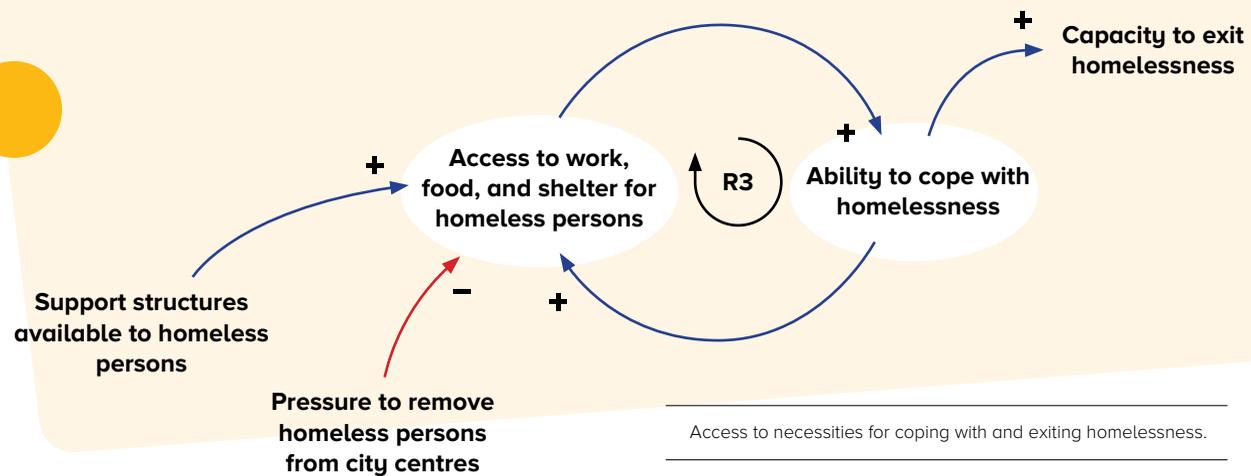
Produced in partnership with



Unpacking the system: COVID-19 and homelessness

See pp.3-5 for an explanation of causal relationships and reinforcing and balancing feedback loops.

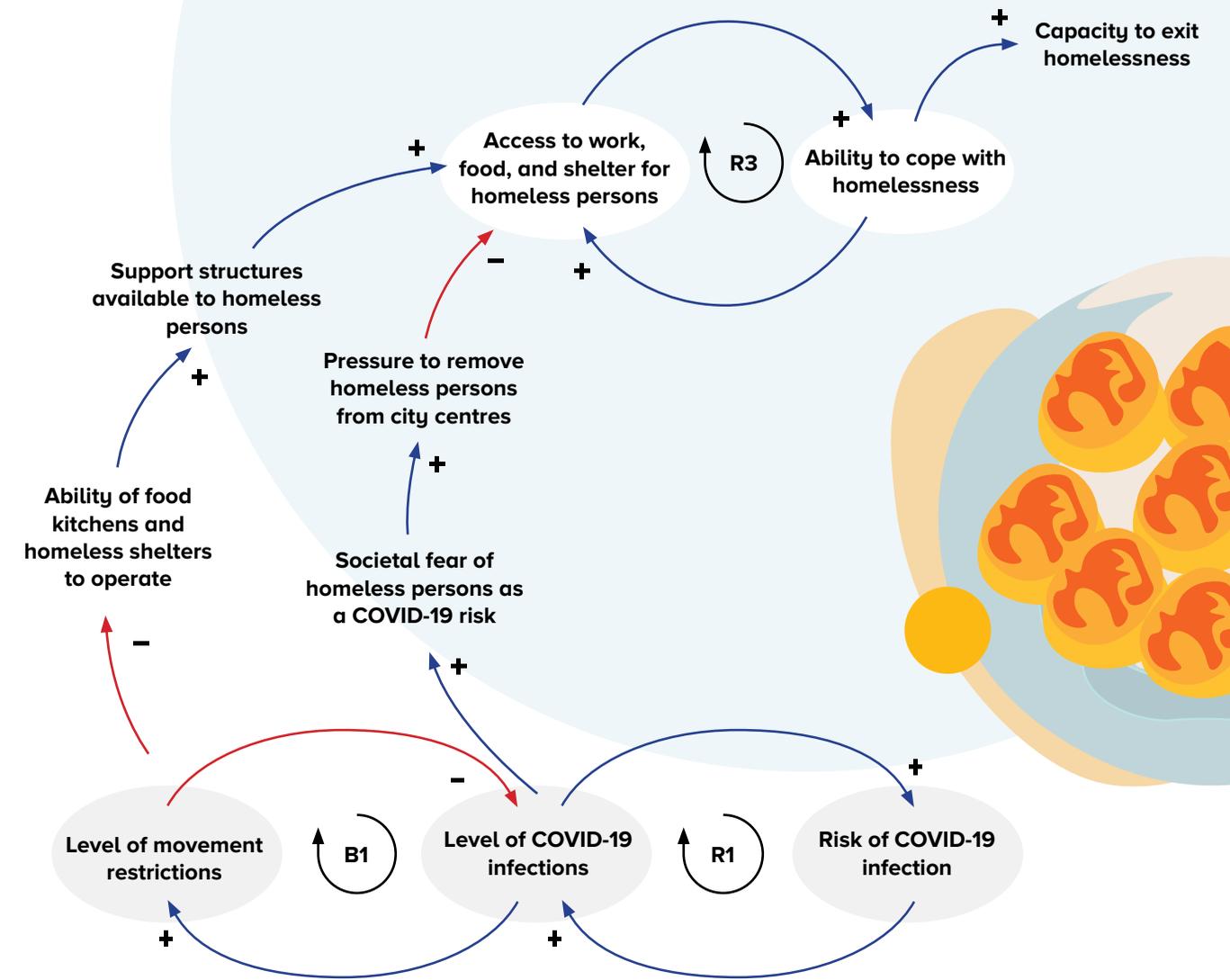
Homelessness creates obstacles to accessing regular work, food, shelter, and other necessities. These are essential not only for coping with homelessness, but for developing the capacity to exit homelessness (R3 loop). Homeless persons are more resilient than many realise, and they develop local knowledge and networks that help them access these necessities.



Homeless persons are often drawn to city centres because of the confluence of opportunities there that enable survival. Support structures such as food kitchens, job training, and informal work opportunities also tend to be concentrated there. However, city centres also tend to be centres of commercial, social, and political activities; other users of city centres often consider homeless persons as ‘undesirables’ or see them as threats to health and safety and want them removed. When homeless persons are moved, however, the local knowledge and networks they have developed are disrupted, their ability to cope with and perhaps exit homelessness is threatened.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the challenges posed by homelessness in several ways. Movement restrictions have curtailed the activities of many civil society organizations that provide support to homeless persons in one way or another. Homeless persons have also been perceived as a COVID-19 risk, and many have been placed in various quarantine centres and shelters. Various job-training and job-placement initiatives were announced for these persons, but the effectiveness of these programmes is not yet known. Meanwhile, the economic impacts of the pandemic may well move more persons into a state of homelessness.

How the COVID-19 pandemic disrupts access to necessities for homeless persons.



Combating homelessness — during a pandemic or under ‘normal’ circumstances — is not an easy task, but it can be done. Effective action requires us to, among other things, understand how homeless persons navigate their world, develop solutions that make sense through their lenses, and create the space for them to live and advance in our cities.

Cycles of incarceration

Is drug addiction a crime or an illness? Malaysia has one of the strictest anti-drug laws in the world. Under the Dangerous Drugs Act, possession of 200 grams or more of cannabis or 15 grams or more of heroin or morphine is presumed to be trafficking of drugs, a crime that carries a death sentence. In 2018, nearly three-quarters of the 1,281 people facing the death row were convicted of drug crimes.

Those found possessing smaller quantities of drugs can be fined or jailed, and 60 percent of our prison population are drug-related offenders. Many of them, unsurprisingly, have an addiction issue, and many are recurring offenders that go in and out of prisons.

This has led to calls for drug decriminalization for small possession and to start treating drug addicts as patients instead of as criminals. This would help ease the overcrowding situation in Malaysian prisons, which has contributed to several COVID-19 clusters. With prisons exceeding their capacity by 40 percent, it is impossible for inmates to practise social distancing. Prisons around the world are facing the same problems and many countries have opted to release the non-violent, minor offenders to reduce crowding and COVID-19 risk.

In Malaysia, while the Prison Department has identified 11,018 minor offenders sentenced to less than a year of imprisonment for its Release on License programme, not many actual releases have been reported. Conversely, the Malaysian Government has considered building more prisons, including converting some of the now-defunct National Service campsites, and using the power invested by the Emergency Ordinance to seize private buildings as temporary detention centres. However, this solution will not only fail to curb the spread of the COVID-19 virus, but is also expensive and unsustainable.

In a way, COVID-19 has highlighted the existing problems of our prison system and calls us to consider whether incarceration is the answer to all crimes. We know that prisons are tied to poverty, with inmates often stuck in the vicious cycle of imprisonment. It might be time to revisit criminal justice policies and consider alternatives to imprisonments and non-custodial measures. This would require a mindset shift of the concept of 'justice' from one that focuses on retribution and punishment to one that emphasizes rehabilitation and restoration. How we decide to resolve this problem will certainly lead us down different development pathways.

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KitajagaKita

(a KISAH Futures story)

By Mohd Farez bin Mustapha

I felt a slight burn in my lungs after taking in the fresh morning air outside the prison gates. “Over here!” called out my sister, waiting outside her driverless rickshaw. After fifteen years and two kids, she hasn’t changed much apart from her greying hair. “It’s so good to see you, *Along*.” I bowed gently.

“I’m just glad it’s finally over, *Adik*. Come on, I know you can’t wait to see *Mak*,” she said while keying in our next destination on her foldable tablet. As we stepped into the rickshaw I nodded with a smile, acknowledging her usual ability to read my mind.

Back when *Mak* was juggling jobs to make ends meet, *Along* tried her best to keep her little teenage brother out of trouble. To me she was such a nosy nuisance; always one step ahead of whatever mischievous plans I had. In hindsight, perhaps my time in prison was for the best. She got her chance to live her own life, and being in solitude helped me to find peace within my rebellious self.

The electric rickshaw wasn’t the quickest mode of transport, so it was safe to stick my neck outside for a better look. Not much had changed about Kuala Lumpur, though it now looked a bit deserted. Since the Uprising, people moved away to places that were more affordable and less crowded. Naturally other towns began to grow, and this city was not as attractive as it used to be. *Along* said since there was a labour shortage, employers don’t mind hiring even ex-convicts for decent job openings; though I didn’t get her joke about it being harder for ex-politicians. An old cellmate once suggested I should try head up north where there was plenty of trade-related jobs near the new Thai Canal.

As we reached the city centre, *Along* pointed to one of the old office towers with a refurbishment sign at its entrance. Apparently her current house was getting too cramped for her husband’s consultancy business and the teenage kids wanted more privacy. “They suggested this place as a suitable home-office.”

I gave a puzzled look. “Who?”

I immediately regretted that question as my lecturer-sister went on a history lesson on how people-powered data and self-learning algorithms have been helping everyone. “Oh, you’ll find out all about it later,” she cut her story short after noticing my distracted gaze at delivery drones flying over the clear blue skies.

Our ride slowed to a halt once we reached the cemetery gates. *Along* immediately went to scan in her pre-booked visiting time slot to release the gate locks. *Mak* was one of the many pandemic casualties, and the regret of being helpless during her final moments still hurt to this day. “I miss her too,” said a teary *Along* as we approached *Mak*’s grave. I could sense her guilt of not being the dependable big sister after *Mak*’s passing.

“You’ve done your best. She will be happy with how we turned out today,” I consoled her. We both said our prayers and promised *Mak* another visit soon.

After stepping outside the gates, *Along* handed me an envelope. “*Adik*, you know I can’t be there for you all the time, but I think they can help you with starting over.” Inside was a silver coloured tablet, with an onion-looking panel to scan my thumbprint.

“*Bawang*?” I chuckled at the resemblance as I glimpsed through the daily list of recommendations of a new future displayed on my tablet screen.

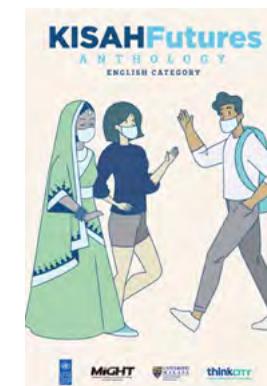
First recommendation today: A complimentary welcome-back lunch for two at an old dining haunt. Tomorrow: Computer retraining lessons from a former schoolmate.

I have a strong feeling I’m going to be just fine, *Along*.

Glossary

Along – eldest sibling
Mak – mother

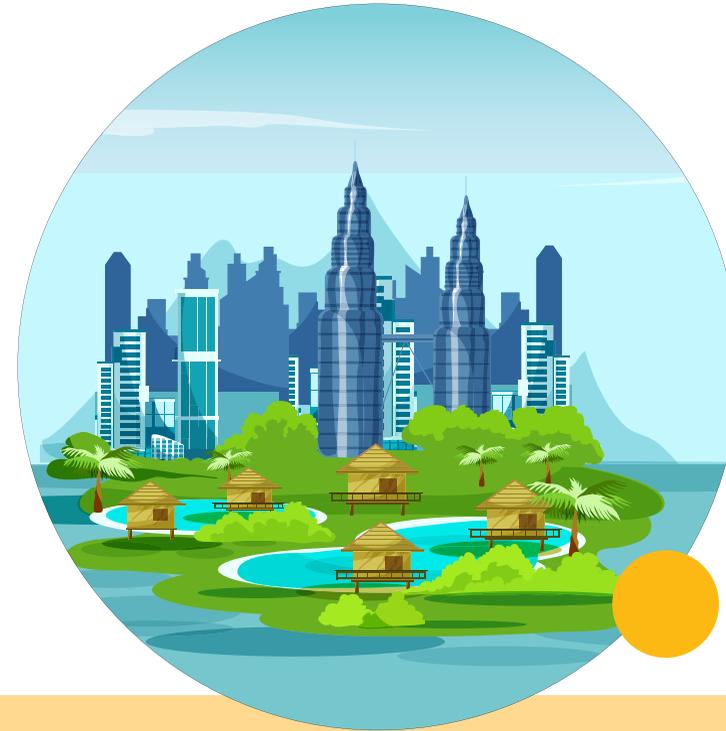
Adik – younger sibling
Bawang – onion



This story is part of the *KISAH Futures Anthology*, a collection of stories of post-COVID-19 Malaysian futures, told (mostly) by youth. Read the book here:

my.undp.org/content/malaysia/en/home/library/kisah-futures-anthology.html

Environmental interlude: Environment recovery and the Movement Control Order



The drastic slowdown of economic activity, especially from factory shutdowns and reduced travel during the early weeks of the Movement Control Order (MCO), provided a picture of what the environment could look like if we had a lighter footprint. Urban residents saw bluer skies and experienced a reduction in air pollutant emissions, while changes in river quality were visually apparent not only to riverside residents but even to Google Maps users. These physical improvements were accompanied by changes in the behaviour of wildlife, such as regular sightings of dolphins and turtles laying eggs at Port Dickson's beaches in Negeri Sembilan.

These environmental benefits also have important consequences for health. The World Health Organization estimates that in Malaysia, air pollution caused 6,251 deaths in 2012, accounting for one out of every nine deaths. During the MCO, healthy air pollution index readings were recorded as key air pollutants such as sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, and particulate matter below 2.5 microns in diameter dropped by 27 to 70 percent. These pollutants affect respiratory systems, aggravating conditions like asthma and contributing to heart conditions in the long term.

However, these improvements in environmental conditions are being reversed as the nation and the world head into economic recovery and activities resume. We already see heavy traffic on the roads and manufacturers, construction sites, and many businesses are back in full operation, attempting to recuperate losses due to the MCO. This is a global challenge. Nations across the world experienced a sharp reduction in air pollution levels as human activities were curbed to prevent COVID-19 transmissions, but pollution has rebounded as economic activity resumes. For example, cities including Beijing, Cape Town, Los Angeles, Madrid, Melbourne, and New York have seen air pollution levels rebound and exceed pre-lockdown levels. As lockdowns lift, emissions from industries, transportation, and energy power plants have been amplified in search of restoring GDP growth. Indeed, the reduced economic activity did little to improve global greenhouse gas emissions.

While there are many cases of environmental pollution rebounding, there is also real effort for and investment in green recovery. In Pakistan, thousands of people who lost their jobs due to COVID-19 have been given the opportunity to earn from planting saplings —

mulberry and acacia trees as a green recovery initiative; likewise, Ethiopia aims to plant five billion seedlings in hopes to amplify its forest cover by 2030. Such initiatives might seem ambitious but actually have precedent: in 2019, Ethiopia planted 350 million trees in one day to combat deforestation. France has allocated one-third of its recovery funds for green economy initiatives, ranging from green infrastructure to incentives for better farming practices, increasing the adoption of environmental protection and conservation practices while also creating job opportunities. Likewise, Malaysia is committing to green recovery practices, allocating funds specifically for the sustainable development agenda for the first time in Budget 2021; this will see the continuation of the Green Technology Financing Scheme, strengthen environment enforcement activities, allocate funds for state governments for biodiversity, preserve mangrove swamps, and more.

The cessation of human activity enforced by the pandemic was never going to be a permanent solution to our environmental challenges. Rather, it showed us what a world less pressured by us could look like. It is a world we need to work towards by decoupling our economic activity from environmental degradation and learning to live within our planet's means.

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Section 2: A day on Jalan Petaling

“Hello Uncle Chong, good morning.”

“Hello Peter, how are you? Slept well or not?”

“Ok *lah*, like that *lor*. Now CMCO period, not many people come to city centre, we the homeless people got more space to use *lah*, can sleep anywhere I like,” chuckled Peter as he hurried away to attend to his chores.

“Boss, give me one *wan tan mee*, please.” a familiar voice came from afar.

“Ok, coming right up. How’s your business Ms. Teh?”

“Not so good *lah* uncle. My tour guide company really suffered this year. No tourists, no money *lah*. Everybody work from home, but for me susah *lah*,” Ms. Teh lamented as she dragged the nearest chair and sat herself down at her usual spot.

“*Haiya*, this year everyone also susah *lah*. My hawker stall also closed for so many months, luckily I have my son and daughter to support me, plus the BPN Government gave, can get by *lah*. Now business still ok, at least I can hire Peter again. *Kesian* him also.”

“I hope things get better soon. They say they found the vaccine already, but our Government needs to go fight and convince the producers to sell it to us.”

“Can work one or not? I heard they can change our genes or something. I’m scared,” mused Uncle Chong while putting down a bowl of fresh, hot *wan tan mee* on the table. “*Haiya*, got vaccine also die, no vaccine also die.”

“No *lah* Uncle Chong, it’s safe. Don’t believe everything you see online. Nowadays a lot of fake news! You better take care of yourself *ah*, you meet so many people everyday and with your age, you are in high-risk group already you know.”

Uncle Chong sighed. “What to do, my backache is quite bad, my daughter asked me to go X-ray at hospital but so troublesome *lah*, nowadays with the SOP and all the extra forms need to fill up.”

“No need to work already *lah* Uncle Chong, just ask your kids to support you *lah*.”

“*Siao ah*, they are only employees ok, not rich *taukeh*s. Times are bad now, I don’t want to be a burden to them.”

“It’s true Uncle Chong, we need to take care of each other during this difficult time. *Kita Jaga Kita mah!* I have an idea: why don’t I find some sponsors for you to cook for the homeless. We can help people like Peter, and you get more business also. Win-win!”

“Good idea! You are the best *lah*, Ms. Teh.”



Glossary

lah – a colloquial expression in Malaysian English, typically used at the end of a sentence. Depending on the context, ‘lah’ can soften the sentence, make it harsher, or emphasize a point.

lor – an expression with Chinese roots, used to express acceptance or resignation

CMCO – Conditional Movement Control Order

wan tan mee – a type of dumpling noodle

susah – difficult

BPN – a one-off cash assistance payment to B40 (Bottom 40% of the Malaysian household income group) and M40 (Middle 40% of the Malaysian household income group) households

kesian – pity

haiya – an expression with Chinese roots, used to express annoyance, pain, or surprise.

siao ah – an expression with Chinese roots, which means crazy

*taukeh*s – businessmen

Kita Jaga Kita – we take care of us

Universal Basic Income, yay or nay?

Expenditure		Earnings	
February 2020			
Ingredients (for business) Noodle Minced meat Vegetables Wan Tan Skin Eggs Soya Sauce Sesame Sauce	MYR 250 per day x 26 = MYR 6,500	Stall business!	One bowl of Wan Tan Mee: MYR5 Average sales: 100 bowls per day Days open: 26 Gross income: MYR 13,000
Stall Rental	MYR50 per day x 26 = MYR1,300		
Peter's salary	MYR1,000		
Cooking gas and others	MYR300		
House Rental	MYR700	Total Earnings	MYR3,900
Grocery (food and sundry)	MYR 150 x 4 = MYR600	Allowances from children:	MYR1,000
Fuel for motorbike	MYR100		
Utilities (Water, Electricity & Phone)	MYR200		
Weekend Kopitiam session with friends	MYR30 x 4 = MYR120		
Medicine (for high blood pressure)	MYR200		
Insurance	MYR300		
Gift for granddaughter's birthday	MYR100		
Motorbike repair & maintenance	MYR150		

Newspaper and ciga-rettes	MYR20 x 30 days = MYR600	Total income:	MYR4,900
Total spending:	MYR3100	Savings:	MYR1,800
April 2020			
Ingredients	MYR20	Stall business	Closed
Stall Rental (penalty)	MYR500	Earnings:	-MYR500
Salary	MYR20	BPM	MYR1600
House Rental Weekend	MYR700	Allowances from children	MYR1000
Kopitiam session with friends	0		
Grocery (food and sundry)	MYR800		
Fuel for motorbikes	MYR30		
Medical	MYR200		
Insurance	MYR300		
Utilities	MYR250		
Newspaper & ciga-rettes	MYR600		
Total spending:	MYR3,380	Total Income:	MYR2,600
		Savings used:	MYR780
June 2020			
Ingredients (for business) Noodle Minced meat Vegetables Wan Tan Skin Eggs Soya Sauce Sesame Sauce	MYR 150 per day x 26 = MYR 3,900	Stall business	One bowl of Wan Tan Mee: MYR5 Average sales: 50 bowls per day Days open: 26 Gross income: MYR 7,800
Stall Rental	MYR1,300		

Peter's salary	MYR1,000		
Cooking gas and others	MYR200		
House Rental	MYR700		
Grocery (food and sundry)	MYR600		
Fuel for motorbike	MYR100		
Utilities (Water, Electricity & Phone)	MYR200		
Weekend Kapitiam session with friends	MYR120		
Medicine (for high blood pressure)	MYR200		
Insurance	MYR300		
Newspaper and cigaretttes	MYR600		
Total spending:	MYR2,820		
		Total Earnings:	MYR1,400
		BPN	MYR1,600
		Allowances from children:	MYR1,000
		Total income:	MYR4,000
		Savings:	MYR1,180

Uncle Chong's monthly expenses

Universal Basic Income (UBI), a 17th-century idea, is once again at the forefront of policy debates. Proponents of UBI believe it to be an appropriate response to cushion the economic impact caused by COVID-19, as it guarantees a decent standard of living for all and access to basic needs such as food and shelter. Since it is unconditional for all, UBI is arguably easier to administer than targeted aid. Opponents of UBI, however, think that it might suppress wages, or worse, discourage work. Apart from the question of financing it, there is also the issue of distrust of governments' ability to equitably and effectively dispense such a huge amount of cash.

Related to this debate is the issue of poverty. According to 2019 statistics, 5.6 percent of Malaysian households (about 400,000) live below the absolute poverty line, i.e., with only RM2,208 per month, while about 17 percent of households (about 1.2 million) live in relative poverty on less than RM3,000 per month, that is half the median income. This group is especially vulnerable to shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which can send them into absolute poverty.

In 2018, Bank Negara Malaysia introduced the concept of Living Wage and set it at RM2,700 for a single individual and RM6,500 for a couple with two children living in Kuala Lumpur. Above and beyond the basic needs that define the poverty line, a living wage also provides for meaningful participation in society, the opportunity for personal and family development, and freedom from severe financial stress. According to the report, 27 percent of KL households are living below the living wage. The living wage is more than double the current minimum wage, and about RM300 more than the Malaysian median wage (RM2,442) in 2019.

Meanwhile, the social protection system has also been hard pressed to cater for an increasingly informal workforce, a trend accelerated by COVID-19. As workers shift from job to job, employment benefits will no longer be tied down to one place of employment. In the future, many may also be displaced by automation. There is an urgent need to rethink our social safety nets to ensure the welfare of all workers.

UNDP has advocated for a temporary basic income (TBI) for the world's poorest 2.7 billion in 132 countries. This unconditional emergency transfer has proven to be an effective way to mitigate the effects of crises such

as COVID-19 and made up for income loss, especially for low-income households that lack access to social assistance or insurance coverage. It proposed three policy options:

- Top-ups on existing average incomes in each country up to a vulnerability threshold;
- Lump-sum transfers that are sensitive to cross-country differences in the median standard of living; or,
- Lump-sum transfers that are uniform regardless of country.

In the long run, some form of basic income can also help an impending problem: aging. As we become an aging population, a strong social safety net for the elderly will be crucial. With suppressed wages and ballooning cost of living, many lack sufficient retirement savings. The Employees' Provident Fund (EPF) has shown that 32 percent of contributors have less than RM5,000 in their Account 1.

Ultimately, the UBI conversation — whether we agree with the idea or not — invites us to revisit our notion of livelihoods, jobs, and dignity. We must do so, for all our sakes.

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Chapter 4

The frontliners

Section 1: Aisyah's Facebook page

February 1, 2020:
Hi, just started work today.. My factory is the best.. My boss is a good person and colleagues are friendly.

March 15, 2020:
This is scary....

April 5, 2020:
I had to work overtime again today.. many orders, have to rush.. very tired from seven straight days of work.. but it's alright, I'm grateful to have work... have heard that many other factory workers have been fired..

May 4, 2020:
That's great! I didn't get because I'm not a Malaysian citizen.. buy me dinner later!

Aisyah

Aisyah February 1, 2020
Hi, Aisyah baru mula kerja hari ye.. Kilang Aisyah best je.. Bos orangnya baik, kawan2 pun mesra.
Moved to Malaysia
February 1, 2020

Aisyah February 3, 2020
My new home...

Aisyah March 15, 2020
Ish.. menakutnya..
BREAKING NEWS
14,500 M'sians at 'tabligh' gathering, 40 test positive for Covid-19

Aisyah April 5, 2020
Aisyah harini kena OT lagi.. banyak tempahan, kena rushing.. penatnyeeee dah kerja terus 7 hari.. tapi takpe la Aisyah syukur ada kerja lagi... banyak pekerja kilang lain yang dah dibuang kerja dengarnya..

Yanti April 10, 2020
#TGIF

Hafiz May 4, 2020
Queuing up to get my BPN!

Aisyah
bagusnya.. Aisyah tak dapat sebab Aisyah bukan orang Malaysia.. nanti Abang belanja ya..

Aisyah May 24, 2020
Salam Idul Fitri kepada semua.. Sorry Aisyah tak boleh balik Raya tahun ni..

Aisyah July 16, 2020
US bans surgical glove imports from top maker over forced labor concerns

Aisyah August 31, 2020
Akhirnya dapat keluar... Lepak kat KLCC dengan geng..

Aisyah November 7, 2020
PKP lagi? Bagi Aisyah sama je.. masih bekerja.. janji jangan kena COVID sudah lah..

Yanti November 22, 2020
hati2 ya **Aisyah**
Glove manufacturer in Malaysia reports COVID-19 outbreak at four factories

Aisyah November 24, 2020
Aisyah dapat covid.. :(nanti akan masuk hospital.. doalah yang terbaik bagi Aisyah..

News Daily December 8, 2020
World's Largest Rubber Glove Maker Posts Record Profit
December 8, 2020

Aisyah December 10, 2020
Alhamdulillah.. Aisyah sudah sembuh. Terima kasih doktor & kakak jururawat ini yang jaga saya.

May 24, 2020:
Eid greetings to everyone.. Sorry I can't return to celebrate this year..

August 31, 2020:
Finally got to go out... Hung out at KLCC with the gang..

November 7, 2020:
MCO again? It's all the same to me.. still working.. it's enough just to not get COVID..

November 22, 2020:
Be careful, Aisyah!

November 24, 2020:
I got COVID.. :(will be admitted to hospital.. pray for the best for me..

December 10, 2020:
Praise be to God... I have recovered. Thanks to the doctors and nurses who took care of me.

Protecting our (other) frontliners, the factory workers

If confronting COVID-19 is a war, then the factories producing gloves, personal protective equipment (PPE), face masks, and all the other essential equipment that will keep us safe from the virus, are the proverbial military industries. And their workers are frontliners in this battle against COVID-19.

Ironically, the unseen heroes producing the much needed 'weapons' to combat the pandemic, are not protected themselves. As of January 2021, 6,934 cases had been reported from the Teratai cluster — linked to a glove factory — accounting for about 4.3 percent of the then total cases in Malaysia.

This is in contrast with the fortune that these companies that manufacture gloves and other protective equipment have made. Malaysia supplies around 60 percent of medical gloves worldwide, and this year has been a boom year. Top Glove, one of the biggest glove companies, reported a twenty-fold jump in their net profit, recording RM2.38 billion (US\$585.49 million) for the September-November period compared with RM111.4 million a year ago. Revenue also rose 294 percent to RM4.76 billion.

This windfall — along with the sudden spike in share value — also indirectly benefits Malaysia's economy and society. Their profits increase tax revenues and create job opportunities. In fact, the Employees' Provident Fund, the country's largest pension fund, was until recently a substantial holder of Top Glove. Some of the companies have also contributed to vaccine funds.

These benefits should not make us look away from the struggle of the factory workers. Malaysia, home to at least two million migrant workers that comprise around 15 percent of the total workforce, has not had the best record on migrant workers conditions. As many reports, exposés and interviews have made clear, many migrant workers

in Malaysia work in harsh conditions, are trapped in debt bondage, and are restricted in both movement and rights to redress.

COVID-19 has highlighted the predicament of migrant workers, where their cramped, unhygienic housing arrangements have made it difficult to contain the spread of the virus. Most importantly, COVID-19 has shown us how we are connected, as a society. We can no longer turn a blind eye to their fate because we have a share in it.

It is hardly an exaggeration to say that some parts of the Malaysian economy are significantly sustained by migrant workers, with various industries overly reliant on cheap imported labour. But is cheap labour really cheap? The hidden costs have been borne by the workers themselves. If they are treated fairly, it might cost companies more, making this business model no longer cost-efficient.

A restructuring of our economic system, along with adoption of automation and technology that helps increase productivity while treating and paying workers better, is sorely needed. The government could step in to provide grants to help companies automate, while putting in place safeguards for workers' welfare. Technological transformation is never easy nor cheap, but it will be good for both the economy and for workers in the long run.

As the ultimate beneficiary of their contributions, we have a stake in ensuring the welfare of migrant workers. The announcement by the Malaysian Government that migrant workers — including those who are undocumented — would receive vaccines for free was much welcomed. However, subsequent exercises to arrest undocumented migrants undermined this promise. We need to take care of the workers who are an instrumental part of our society. After all, we are only as strong as our weakest link.



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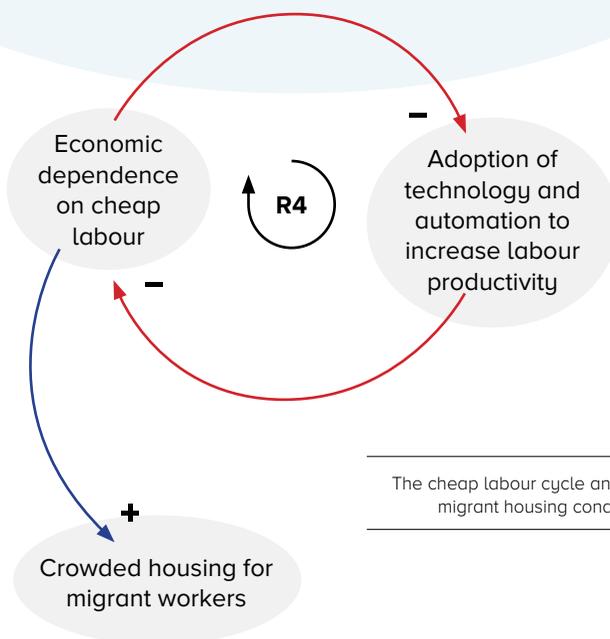
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Unpacking the system: COVID-19 and migrant housing

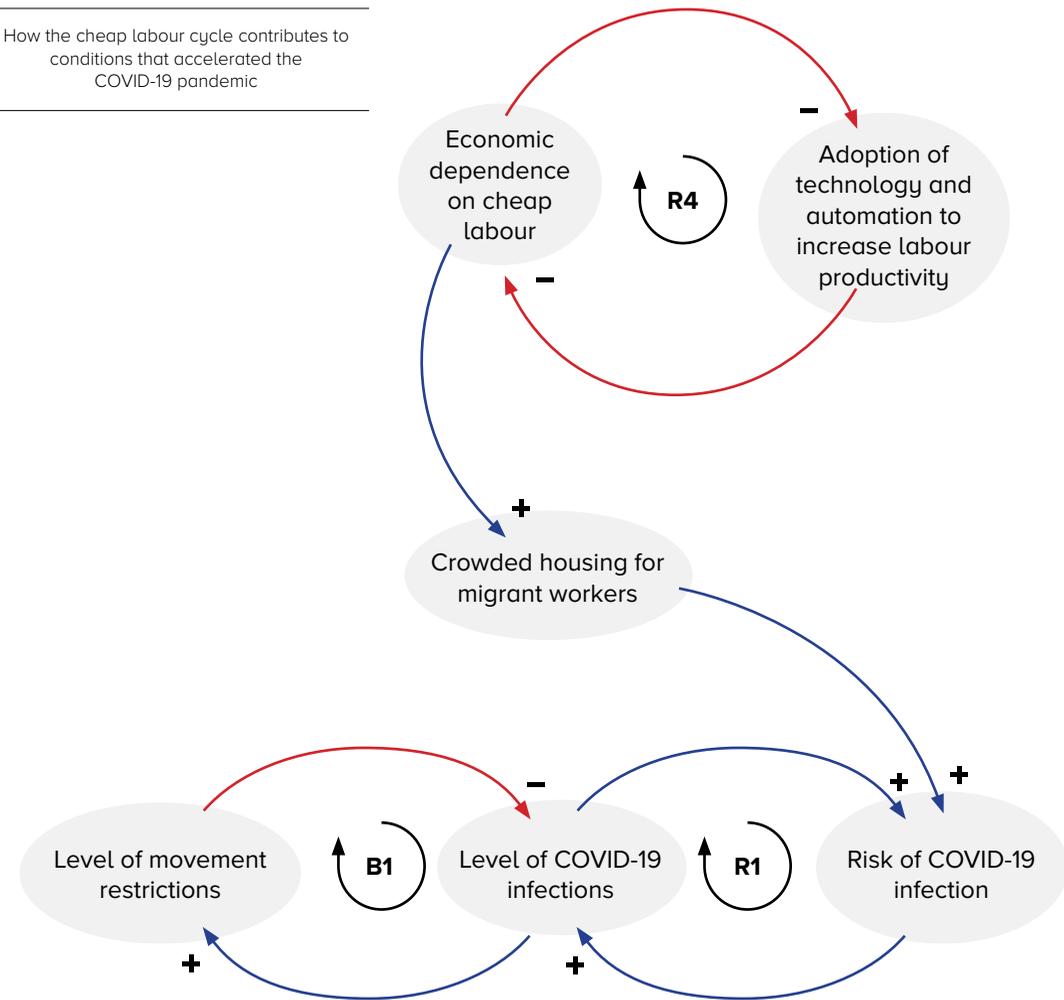
See pp.3-5 for an explanation of causal relationships and reinforcing and balancing feedback loops.

Malaysia has a long-standing dependence on cheap migrant labour. While adoption of technology and automation has long been advocated to increase productivity, economic dependence on cheap labour has been an obstacle to implementation, creating a chicken-and-egg problem (R4 loop). Migrant workers have been a substantial source of cheap labour, and one means of keeping the costs of migrant labour low has been to house them in cramped dormitories or even makeshift shelters. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, there have been concerns about migrant workers as a source and reservoir of communicable disease such as tuberculosis. While migrant workers who are brought in illegally — and are thus unscreened for diseases — are a problem, crowded and poorly ventilated living conditions also contribute to this problem.



The cheap labour cycle and effects on migrant housing conditions.

How the cheap labour cycle contributes to conditions that accelerated the COVID-19 pandemic



Unfortunately, the rise in cases among migrant workers has created hostility toward them among certain segments of society — whereas it is the business practices creating poor housing conditions that deserve scrutiny. In the short term, unskilled and low-skilled workers must be properly protected. In the longer term, we need to improve labour productivity while distributing the benefits equitably.

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Above All Else

(a KISAH Futures story)

By Jacie Tan Cheng Hwee



Kuala Lumpur is not what it used to be.

Sometimes, Din wished he had been born just a few years earlier, just so he could experience the country's former economic capital in its heyday. Back when there were still such things as economic capitals. When cities were where prosperity reigned, not languished.

But Din had been born 29 years ago, in the exact year when the virus reached his nation's shores. His earliest memory was of his mother leaving, because his father hadn't been prudent enough to buy a rural plot of land before the real estate there skyrocketed to unimaginable prices. When a contact-transmitted virus remains at large with no vaccine or cure, the last place you want to be is somewhere as close-quartered as KL.

And so the wealthy left. To newly-built housing areas, all marketed as having ample amounts of space, because space was a key commodity in a world where distancing was a necessity. They fitted their homes with high-speed Internet and continued with their jobs that never required them to set foot outdoors.

Din wasn't so lucky. He was one of the *orang luar*, who still lived in an apartment in the city and made his living outside of his dwelling. He did the odd jobs that couldn't be done over Zoom, because as much as the *orang dalam* pretended that their COVID-proof lifestyles were the yardstick of normal, it couldn't be sustained without people like Din.

Still, Din felt no animosity for the *orang dalam*. After all, every sen he earned was so he could be one step closer to becoming one of them. He didn't even mind the gigs that required him to quarantine in a holding centre for two weeks before entering the home of an *orang dalam*; they offered a glimpse into the kind of life he was aiming for.

This was why he was here at a beautiful three-storey house in Kampar, Perak, with another *orang luar* workman named Lau, patching up the leaking ceiling belonging to a lady named Mrs. Jaish.

Later, when asked about the incident, Din would say it happened too quickly to register. One minute Lau was on his ladder, smoothing out plaster on the ceiling of the dining hall. A heartbeat later, Mrs. Jaish's three-year-old son had appeared out of nowhere, running at full speed towards Lau's ladder. Din gave a shout of warning and Lau scrambled down in haste, but then —

The unthinkable happened. Lau's hand clamped down on the little boy's bare arm, just as his three-ply mask slipped down past his nose. And Mrs. Jaish walked in and saw it all.

"The direct contact was an accident," said a tired Din to the COVID division officer on his laptop screen. "Lau was protecting himself from injury."

The officer looked unimpressed. "It is a crime for *orang luar* to touch *orang dalam*, or be unmasked in their vicinity. Mr. Lau is guilty of both."

"Yes, but," — Din rubbed his face in frustration. "We quarantined before entering Mrs. Jaish's house. Lau posed no risk of infection!"

"In the eyes of the law, it doesn't matter."

Din spoke without thinking. "Then the law is wrong!"

There was a beat of silence. "Mr. Din," the older woman said. "May I remind you what else is written in the law?"

Din repeated the words that had been drilled into him and every Malaysian since birth. "Above all else," he whispered, "health before self."

The officer nodded. "We have come this far as a nation because that is our priority," she reminded him. "If we were to make exceptions and excuses, we would all be lost to COVID-19 by now. Surely, as a law-abiding citizen, you agree with this?"

Din swallowed. "Yes, ma'am." Something made him blurt out further, "But Lau will face prison for his crime."

A dismissive wave of the hand. "Only for a few weeks."

"That's long enough, isn't it?" Din didn't say the unspoken words. *Long enough for Lau to risk catching the virus in there.*

The officer caught Din's gaze firmly through the webcam. "Above all else, Mr. Din."

And the screen went black.

Glossary

orang luar – outsider

orang dalam – insider

sen – cents (One Malaysian ringgit is equivalent to 100 sen)



This story is part of the *KISAH Futures Anthology*, a collection of stories of post-COVID-19 Malaysian futures, told (mostly) by youth. Read the book here:

my.undp.org/content/malaysia/en/home/library/kisah-futures-anthology.html

Section 2:

Sangeetha's
Diary

25 Nov 2020

Hello diary, it has been a while. I can't remember the last time I lifted a pen to put my thoughts together. Between work and family, writing has become a luxury these days.

I have always enjoyed the excitement that comes with life as a nurse. I know there will be surprises every day, that I will go to work each day without knowing what I will deal with.

But today, I feel like I'm on the brink of breaking down.

This really bubbly girl came into hospital yesterday, along with 20 others from the same factory. They are already the third batch this week. The numbers are not showing any signs of going down, and I'm worried that the hospital will not be able to cope anymore. We are already almost operating at breaking point.

It just really saddens me that people like Aisyah are put in danger to produce the equipment that protects me while I do my job. These gloves and PPE are literally the only things between me and the virus. I'm scared, but I need to be strong for my patients and for my family.

I'm also angry. Since January this year, we have been fighting this invisible enemy. We were doing such a good job, bringing it down to single digits. But one mistake, and now we are three digits, and the number is increasing.

COVID-19 is a real life-changer. Never throughout my nursing career have I seen such a crisis. Even with the vaccines, it's still a long journey to make sure they are affordable and accessible for all of us. We need to vaccinate at least 80 percent of our population to reach herd immunity.*

I'm burnt out, this is already the third day on night shift. This long-drawn battle on COVID-19 is taking a toll on me. I haven't been able to spend quality time with the kids for many months, and I miss them very much. Even though we still live together, I have decided not to go near them for fear of infection. Praba's work schedule is becoming even more irregular and longer, with all the patrolling duty. I'm so glad that Ma agreed to come and take care of the household. Muru has been a great help in taking care of his younger siblings too, making sure they are all set up for their online classes, Ma would have been hopeless with technology. He himself is having his SPM trial exam next week.

This COVID-19 virus has really ravaged our country and the world. I guess we will all have to adapt to the 'new normal', but for now there is no end in sight. I really don't know if I can do it anymore. But do I have a choice? I guess the best option is just to hope for the best and soldier on.

Time to sleep, we live to fight another day.

* Malaysia reached the target of 80 percent of its adult population being fully vaccinated on 21 September 2021.



Investing in our healthcare practitioners



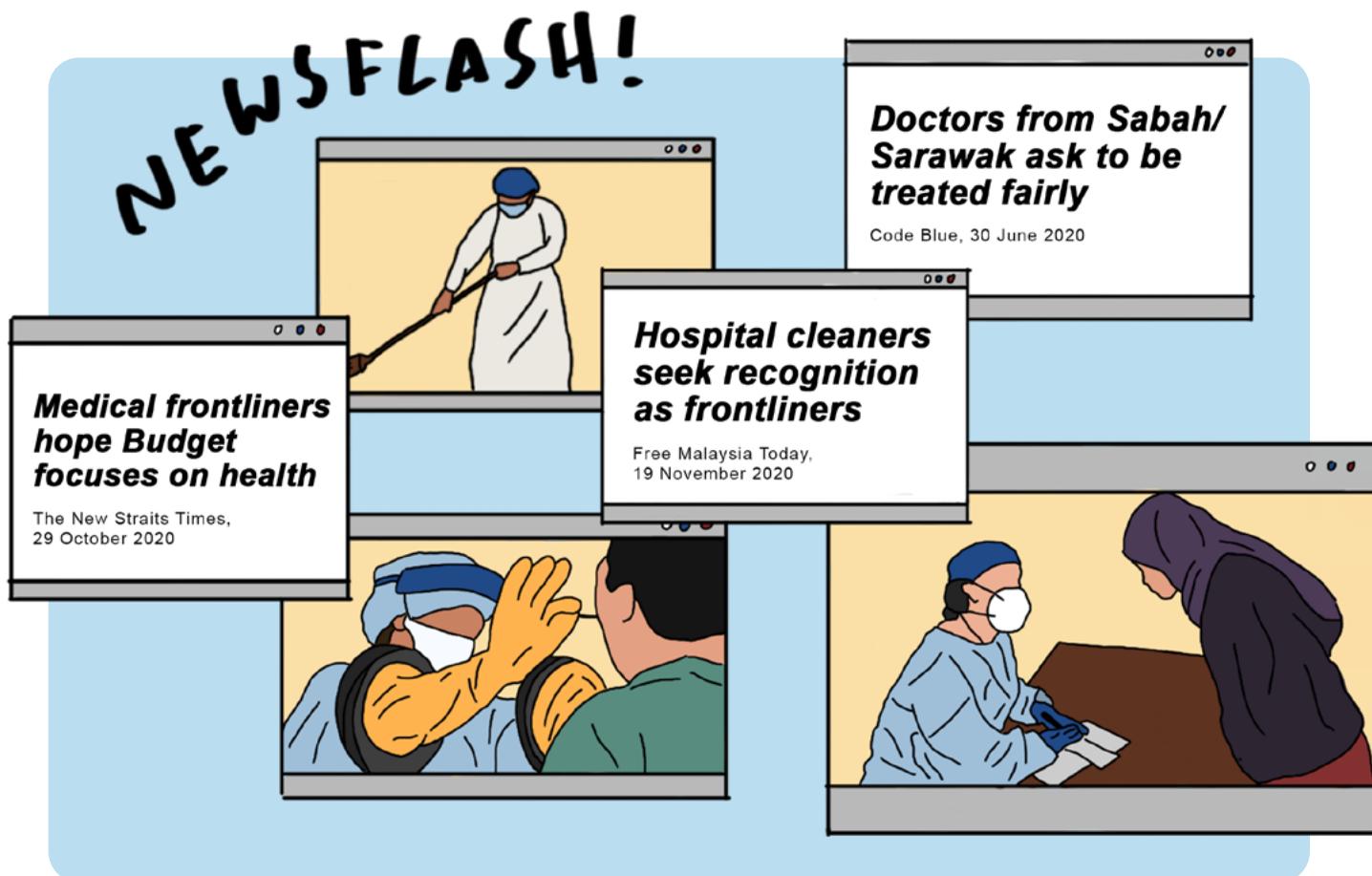
This pandemic is taking a toll on our mental health. Many of us face uncertainty, anxiety and loneliness as we are locked away at home. Helplines set up by the Health Ministry and NGOs such as Befrienders Kuala Lumpur and Mercy Malaysia have been buzzing with callers seeking psychosocial support during this difficult time. For our healthcare professionals (HCPs), who cannot stay at home, these worries are even more intense. Overworked and underpaid, they are burnt out with long hours, separated from their families, and anxious about the risks they face. As of February 2021, there had been 4,800 COVID-19 cases among Malaysian healthcare workers. Indeed, two percent of COVID-19 cases in Malaysia so far are healthcare workers.

The uphill challenge of combating COVID-19 is made even more challenging by the strained resources in hospitals, especially when numbers climbed. Many have even resorted to the press to voice their grievances anonymously, citing the lack of basic amenities and support.

Apart from having adequate resources to ensure their safety, such as PPE and training on occupational health and safety measures, these medical practitioners also need support to ensure their emotional and mental well-being. Many professional groups have urged hospitals to adopt a zero-violence policy and provide adequate mental health services and family support to HCPs. The World Health Organization (WHO) has published a five-step guide to better protect health workers.

Meanwhile, many junior doctors face career uncertainty. Although the Public Services Department of Malaysia has approved 10,675 permanent posts, only 5,984 of these had been created as of September 2020. As contract staff, junior doctors enjoy very few career progression opportunities, fewer benefits than permanent doctors, and risk unemployment after their two-year contract ends. In 2020, only about 15 percent of these contract doctors have been offered permanent positions.

To respond to the increasing needs in the healthcare sector due to COVID-19, the government has taken steps to recruit 3,000 contract nurses and medical officers and has called for volunteers to support frontline workers. This is useful to alleviate the immediate burden faced by HCPs and has arguably helped moderate the unemployment figures due to job losses caused by COVID-19, but this is only a temporary measure.



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Some NGOs that have been helping on mental health issues

- **Befrienders** www.befrienders.org.my
- **Humankind #Talian Buddy Bear** www.humankind.my
- **Mercy Malaysia** www.mercy.org.my
- **Relate Malaysia** www.relate.com.my/relate-for-moh-frontliners

Some NGOs that have been helping our frontliners

- **Bantu Hero Kami** www.sedunia.me/campaigns/bantu-hero-kami-fundraising-for-icu-equipment-1/about
- **IMAM Response & Relief Team (IMARET)** www.facebook.com/imamresponseandrelief
- **Jaringan Pekerja Kontrak Kerajaan** www.facebook.com/Jaringan-Pekerja-Kontrak-Kerajaan-JPKK-9534640114854826
- **Malaysian Health Coalition** www.myhealthcoalition.org
- **Rumah Kita – PPE for Frontliners** www.100percentproject.org/en/rumahkita

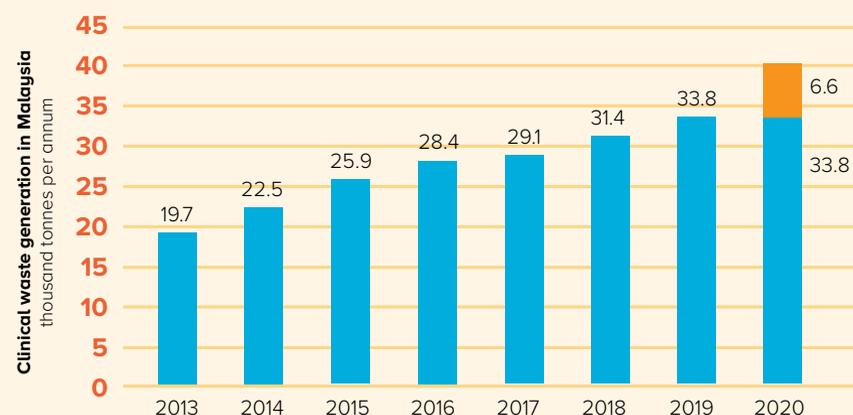
Environmental interlude: Clinical waste from face masks and other PPE

Face masks, gloves, and other personal protective equipment (PPE) are essential gear for protecting ourselves and one another from the COVID-19 pandemic. Face masks sharply reduce the release of virus-carrying aerosols while speaking and breathing; therefore, the Government has mandated the use of face masks in public spaces to curb the spread of the virus. PPE usage for frontliners, especially healthcare workers who handle COVID-19 patients, has increased as well. One unintended consequence is that at least 10 million single-use face masks are now used and disposed each day in Malaysia, along with other single-use PPE, exacerbating the pre-existing waste challenge.

Used PPE from personal use is treated as ordinary solid waste and can be disposed accordingly. Used PPE from hospitals and clinics need to be treated as clinical waste, potentially contaminated by active pharmaceutical agents or infectious disease. Clinical waste must be

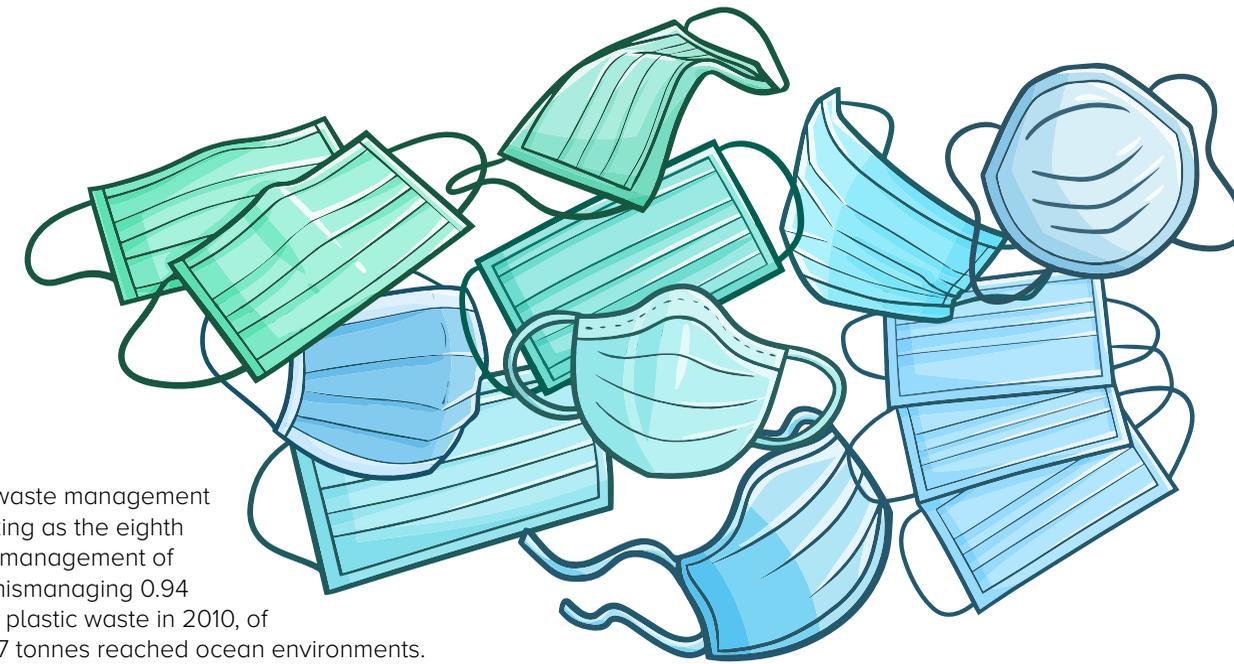
sterilized before further disposal, and the process must be approved and licensed by the Department of Environment, Malaysia. Both categories of waste are being generated at a rapid rate.

Most solid waste, including treated clinical waste, in Malaysia ends up in landfills. In 2019, Malaysia generated 3.11 million tonnes of solid waste, including 33.8 thousand tonnes of clinical waste. In 2020, clinical waste production increased by an estimated 6.6 thousand tonnes, 20 percent more than the previous year, due to COVID-19 (see chart below). Moreover, an estimated 86 tonnes of face masks are being disposed of daily during the COVID-19 pandemic, or about 31.4 thousand tonnes per year. Non-PPE waste has also increased, with solid waste generation from residential areas increasing by 20 to 30 percent during the implementation of the first MCO in March 2020.



Clinical waste generation in Malaysia. 2013-2019 data from Department of Environment (DoE) Malaysia Environment Quality Reports; 2020 estimate from DoE statement to the Dewan Rakyat.

- Clinical waste generation
- Clinical waste attributed to COVID-19 in 2020



Malaysia faces waste management challenges, ranking as the eighth worst country in management of plastic wastes, mismanaging 0.94 million tonnes of plastic waste in 2010, of which 0.14 to 0.37 tonnes reached ocean environments. While we do not yet know how well we are managing PPE waste or the impacts it will have, macaques in Kuala Lumpur have been spotted nibbling on mask straps. Face masks that end up in the ocean can lead to choking turtles and dolphins and damaging corals via entanglement. Improper disposal could also contribute to clogging of drainage systems, increasing risk of flash floods.

Even when properly disposed of, disposable face masks still present an environmental problem. Most face masks — three-ply or surgical — are mainly composed of mixtures of non-woven artificial fabrics and polypropylene thermoplastic, which are not readily degradable. Used

PPE cannot be recycled as it may be contaminated with pathogens and infectious diseases which could lead to indirect infections if it enters the recycling system.

All this **does not** mean that we should stop using face masks! Face masks remain a critical part of the strategy to contain the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we need to recognize the environmental impacts generated by disposable masks and minimise these impacts through proper disposal and limiting trips that require the use of face masks. Furthermore, we should look for ways to reduce our use of disposable products, as it is not just PPE that creates environmental impacts.

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The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the ways in which we *cari makan* (look for food). It has also opened up new conversations about how to *cari makan* (earn a living).

Cari Makan is an anthology of stories. The response to COVID-19 is a story with many observers and points of view. The picture becomes more complete (and complex!) the more voices we listen to, for the general observer is every one of us. Our collective perspective — our collective intelligence — is strengthened when we are in this together.

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