

Renewed commitment to urban agenda

Organisations jointly push sustainable development goals in Asean cities

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THINK City, a social purpose organisation focused on urban rejuvenation, has updated its existing memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the United Nations Human Settlement Programme (UN-Habitat) to cement their strategic partnership on achieving urban improvement goals.

"Since my appointment and the launch of the World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur, my work has involved advocating and introducing the New Urban Agenda (NUA) along with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) all over the world," said UN-Habitat executive director Datuk Seri Maimunah Mohd Sharif after signing the MOU with Think City in Kuala Lumpur.

"However, the time has come to advance the narrative, moving away from advocacy towards action. This has prompted us to extend our relationship with Think City.

"With aligned goals, joint capabilities and combined experience, we want to take action to a higher level, diving deeper to achieve improved urban environments in Malaysia and beyond," she said.

Maimunah said it was time for the Government to intensify localising the SDGs and the NUA to address the challenges of rapid urbanisation in Malaysia.

"In many ways, Malaysia leads in the region, in devising and implementing urban solutions such as waste management, climate action and municipal finance," she added.

Think City managing director Hamdan Abdul Majeed said: "Think City has always had a productive partnership with UN-Habitat, particularly in achieving our joint vision of people-friendly, resilient and sustainable cities.

"This MOU further reinforces our commitment to improving the cities of Malaysia and beyond, and comes at an opportune time as we celebrate Think City's 10th anniversary."

The MOU between Think City and UN-Habitat, first signed in May 2018, outlined specific objectives to advocate and promote the NUA and the SDGs, specifically SDG 11 that aims to make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable.

The updated agreement includes laying the framework for the establishment of a centre of excellence for sustainable urban solutions in Penang, which will serve the South-East Asian region.

Secondly, it will guide them as they contribute to the shaping of policies and strategies in the 12th Malaysia Plan (2021-2025) in the implementation of SDGs and the NUA.

Thirdly, the two organisations will introduce scalable projects in urban regeneration, climate change, urban resilience, territorial analysis, city diagnostics and inclusive communities as well as spatial equality.

Finally, both parties will work on expanding UN-Habitat's City Prosperity Initiative in Malaysian cities.

Next week, Think City and UN-Habitat will jointly host the



Placemaking can be applied anywhere, in any climate, even for muggy tropical places such as Penang. And better still, one need not even be an architect to make it happen.



Hamdan (right) and Maimunah signed an extended MOU, representing Think City and UN-Habitat respectively, witnessed by Deputy Housing and Local Government Minister Datuk Raja Kamarul Bahrin Shah Raja Ahmad.



Hans Karssenberg of Stipo, will share his many years of experience in placemaking. (Right) Architect Nani Kahar of Lab DNA is one of the speakers at the Inaugural Placemaker Week Asean which takes place from Nov 4 to 8.

first-ever regional placemaking conference.

Targeted at Asean city planners and managers, the conference aims to promote knowledge and best practices in placemaking besides encouraging discourse on solutions for the future of communities and public spaces.

Placemaker Week Asean will feature three themes for the inaugural event, namely waterfronts, historical streets and healthy communities.

Placemaking is the process of managing and designing or adapting public spaces to benefit the community's well-being and happiness.

"It can also promote cultural identity, community bonding, population diversity, inclusiveness, health, tourism and increased commercial activities.

"Whether it is through public markets that provide fresh and nutritious food, street festivals or bike lanes to address traffic congestion, the way public spaces are designed and how these places are used have a profound impact on urban citizens and businesses," said Hamdan.

Placemaker Week Asean will take place in Kuala Lumpur's cultural heart from Nov 4 to 8, with activities consisting of educational

workshops, intensive design workshops, "place games" (where participants pitch placemaking solutions to a panel based on actual locations), and seminars. It culminates in a two-day plenary session on Nov 7 and 8.

Place games is where multi-disciplinary teams consisting of urban designers, architects and planners look at solving urban challenges, while the plenaries are expected to be highly fruitful as they will feature urban rejuvenation case studies centred on placemaking by international and regional placemakers.

Other than Kuala Lumpur, various programmes will also take place in multiple locations in Penang and Johor Baru, places where Think City is also present.

According to Hamdan, Placemaker Week Asean is prompted by the rapid change that South-East Asian countries are experiencing through mass urban migration and development, placing pressure on city builders and managers to ensure public spaces are inclusive, accessible and sustainable.

"It was also initiated to help South-East Asian cities benefit from a collaborative approach to better placemaking.

"As much as our cities are pursuing economic growth, reflected in

the increasing number of skyscrapers, we should not neglect what is happening within our public spaces," he said.

"We need to ask how we can create a sense of place and belonging. How and where can we forge social connections beyond our own homes?"

"Can we still develop meaningful experiences with others as well as with our surroundings? How do we create places that people will love?" Hamdan added.

"Ideally driven by communities and city stakeholders to ensure sustainable outcomes and liveable places for all, it is also a critical component to address some of the challenges of massive urbanisation happening throughout South-East Asia," he said of placemaking.

He added: "We want community partners such as local councils, government agencies, non-governmental organisations, private property developers and young people to work together to answer pertinent questions, which can then lead to building a stronger civic-consciousness."

Placemaker Week Asean is supported by Kuala Lumpur City Hall and Tourism, Arts and Culture Ministry, among others. For more details, visit www.placemakerweek.com.