

# Trustworthiness the biggest motivator in ensuring health security in the pandemic era

By [Dzulkifli Abdul Razak](#) - April 6, 2022 @ 5:00pm



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THE World Health Day celebrated on April 7 every year takes the theme: Our planet, our health.

Therein is a very important message that has escaped us most of the time. That is, we are inherently connected to the planet all this while.

The microcosmic world internally within us is linked in a holistic way to the macrocosmic world externally. Thus our health and planetary health, too, and vice versa.

The pandemic is the living reminder that this is so wherever or whoever we are, illustrated by the many unfortunate incidences involving vaccine episodes leading to

what has been dubbed as "vaccine inequity," "vaccine nationalism," and even "vaccine apartheid".

Nevertheless, one important lesson that has turned up clearly is the issue of trust emanating from the pandemic.

Much has been said about this, over a range of issues, notably "opinions" that resulted in ambiguity due to the "weak" data sources especially in the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The use of face masks alone has caused so much uncertainty depending on the political inclination, or even the cultural orientation of a particular community.

This alone has eroded the level of trust several times because of the ever changing mindset in trying to cope with insurmountable challenges that demand the need to react swiftly.

While it is pointed out that it is vital to maintain public trust during the pandemic, there is an urgent pressure to demonstrate that the government has the ability and efficacy to control the Covid-19 pandemic.

In 2017, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) highlighted that "reliability, responsiveness, openness, better regulation, fairness, and inclusive policy making are key areas for governments to gain public trust".

Whereas, "the lack of transparency and timely and accurate communication by the government has been identified as a major element that has caused the decline of trust in government".

All these have in turn had an eventual impact on planetary health as reflected by the overall communal health status globally.

This could be made worse when some doubt the science and are thus less likely to trust health experts about the issues based on the same principle.

Even when only a small segment of the public is not convinced by scientific recommendations, it is enough to put everyone at risk.

This brings us to the recent development when MySejahtera was said to have changed hands from the public to the private sector.

Although the issues are still being debated, by and large it will have an impact on the public level of trustworthiness, namely among the users of the app.

Of utmost concern is data privacy and the potential abuse of health-related data belonging to millions of Malaysians who have voluntarily decided to trust the system with their private data and information.

Of more concern is the wave of "infodemic" that seems to pose a huge challenge in convincing the public that it will not happen.

Simply put, it is imperative to convincingly communicate clear evidence to the contrary to Malaysians who are beginning to distrust the powers that be.

Reportedly, MySejahtera has recorded, according to the Health Ministry's published data on GitHub, over 11 billion check-ins since December 2020.

This check-in data contains intimate details about an individual's personal preferences, consumption pattern and social networks, among others.

The government's assurance that individual personal information will "only be used for the purpose of managing and mitigating the Covid-19 outbreak," is now being questioned when the transfer to a private entity took place allegedly without consultation of those who voluntarily consented to deposit their data and information in defence of the country's health security.

It is, therefore, worth reasserting the statement by Transparency International Malaysia (TI-M) which expressed concern about the lack of transparency over the government's handling of the MySejahtera Covid-19 contact tracing mobile application data: "The Health Ministry also cannot share MySejahtera data with other ministries or the private sector ... and just hope that the community will not hesitate and continue to use the MySejahtera application."

In many ways it goes counter to the World Health Day theme when health trustworthiness is being squandered away, intentionally or otherwise.

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