

# CHAPTER 24

**IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY |**

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Climate change;

Pollution;

Deforestation;

Water scarcity;

... and the list goes on. To be honest, I think I have been seeing these words long enough to wonder - have things got any better? Has there been any real solution to any of these environmental threats?

All of us know that combating environmental threats is a global challenge that requires concerted efforts from all sectors of society. Collaboration, education and a commitment to sustainability are essential for creating a more environmentally sustainable future. Failing to adequately address and solve environmental problems can have severe and wide-ranging consequences for both nature and society. Let us take for example, climate change. Continued greenhouse gas emissions can lead to more extreme weather events, rising sea levels and disruptions to ecosystems. This can result in damage to infrastructure, displacement of communities and economic losses. It is therefore crucial to address and solve environmental problems proactively to mitigate these potential consequences. Nevertheless, while progress has been made in addressing some environmental problems, few, if any, have been completely solved. Many environmental challenges persist and continue to evolve.

When I was a kid, I always thought that with all the 'Save the Earth' campaigns and the efforts to solve environmental problems shown in the media, things would slowly get better as I grew up. Boy, was I wrong! It seems to me that no matter what or how much has been done, threats on our environment are here to stay. On the other hand, Islam teaches us to never give up hope even in the most difficult situations. Anas ibn Malik reported that the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, "If the Final Hour comes while you have a shot of a plant in your hands and it is possible to plant it before the Hour comes, you should plant it." To me, this is a call to jump at any opportunity that I have to play my part in saving the environment.



Praise be to Allah, *Usrah in Action*, the course that I was offered to teach at the International Islamic University Malaysia last semester gave me just that! It gave me an opportunity to do something about the environment. It also reminded me of a quote by a famous architect, Richard Rogers: “The only way forward, if we are going to improve the quality of the environment, is to get everybody involved”. The course requires students to fully engage with local communities by conducting community profiling and situational analyses. Subsequently, students are tasked with executing projects aimed at addressing specific community needs. The projects encompass a wide range of objectives, spanning all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These projects tackle various issues, including environmental threats.

Having the opportunity to do something for the environment, I asked my students to start brainstorming ideas on this project. My mission to save the environment has now become our shared mission. All we had to do was to identify a community that we could involve in achieving our objectives and at the same time, think of a way to benefit the community too. It is a two-pronged approach to this project. We came up with many suggestions, but eventually agreed to choose the children at a childcare centre as the community for our project. The main reason for this choice was that, we believe that saving the environment should start with a good awareness campaign on the importance of the environment, and what could have been a better way to instill awareness than by implementing them to children at an early age? As the saying goes, ‘it’s never too early to start’. In this case, it is early education on the environment for the kids. We also decided to include any elements of SDGs in educating the children. Childcare centres play a vital role in nurturing and supporting the development of young children. With a focus on early education and care, the children will get to develop cognitive development and encourage their creativity. Hence, the objective for the project was set to inculcate SDG values in the children.

With the children as our target community, we started to contact several childcare centres. We decided to implement the project for the children at *Taska Khaleef*, a childcare centre at *Taman Harmoni Vista*, *Bandar Universiti Pagoh*. This place was chosen because it has a number of children up to four years of age. The principal was also very receptive to our idea and kind enough to allow us to visit the centre anytime at our convenience. She was also willing to come to the centre to be interviewed during the community profiling.



On the day of visit, my students and I visited the childcare centre to conduct the initial profiling and situational analysis. Interviews were conducted with the principal and the teachers and some of us played with the children to assess what they know about the environment or SDGs. The focus at this point was to engage with the children with some kind of fun activities such as colouring and games. We decided to focus on the children between two to four years old to achieve the objectives of the project. The session went well and we even saw other opportunities to help the teachers at the centre as well.

From the analysis, we came up with a proposal to achieve our objective. With the belief that environmental care and sustainable future should start from an early age, our project aims to create an SDG-related nursery rhyme/song that is based on traditional childhood rhymes. As children learn easily through rhythm and repetition, creating an SDG-themed nursery song can let the children learn the values of SDGs in a more fun way. We call this project - Playful Pathways to Progress. We hope that once we come up with the nursery rhyme/song, we will not only be able to use it to teach the children, but allow the teachers to continue using it in the learning session with them. This allows the sustainability of our objective to inculcate SDG values in the children.

For my students, other than the opportunity to contribute to the society, they found this to be such a rare experience to engage in a community of small children and implement a project with them. As for me, even though initially I saw this course as an opportunity to do my part in saving the environment, I realised that engaging with a community outside the academic context opens a whole new world of endless opportunities. I got to establish a sense of belonging to the people in my place, and learnt to connect with at least a small group of the community in a meaningful way. I learnt about compassion, gratitude and responsibility. I somehow find this satisfying and it allows me to assure myself that even though the future of our environment is still uncertain, there are always other things to be hopeful for, to make every second in your life counts.



## COLLECTION OF MEMORIES



*Figure 1 &2: Student engagement with kindergarten children*



## COLLECTION OF MEMORIES



*Figure 3: Student engagement with kindergarten children*



*Figure 4: The team at the centre*