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Advocating low-carbon cities

Management guru Peter Drucker is often quoted as saying that "you can't manage what you can't measure". What he means by this is that you won't know if you are successful unless success is defined and tracked. In the same vein, given its emphasis on sustainability, Sime Darby Property (SDP) has, since 2010, put in place an index to measure the sustainability of its townships and business units.

SDP head of sustainability and quality management Mohd Pouzi Che Nik says the townships are assessed twice a year, based on the stages of development.

The index — Susdex — measures the sustainability of a township from its vision plan until its completion and handover. Already in its third version, it is now called Susdex Plus and based on the Global Reporting Initiative Framework. It covers the three key pillars of sustainability: people, planet and profit.

The index has been acknowledged by independent sustainability adviser Forum for the Future, which is headed by Sir Jonathon Porritt. Forum for the Future is a non-profit organisation that works globally with business, government and other organisations to tackle complex sustainability challenges.

"The index drives all our sustainability initiatives. And since we came up with it, we've been improving on it and have made it more of a science ... so it is a guide for our planners, contractors, suppliers and other stakeholders," says Mohd Pouzi.

He adds that since SDP embarked on Susdex, the townships assessed — Nilai Impian, Bandar Bukit Raja, Melawati, USJ Heights and Putra Heights rated gold. Denai Alam, Bukit Jelutong, Ara Damansara and Planters' Haven rated silver.

A large component of the index is the advocacy of low-carbon cities. "We start off with the Susdex indicators and from there, we ensure that the design of our townships covers various aspects of low-carbon cities, be it design, technology or management," explains Mohd Pouzi.

SDP has also carried out programmes and initiatives towards creating low-carbon cities. These include the monitoring of land cleared and developed, having an energy reduction exercise through the Lean Six Sigma processes of continuous improvement and initiating a carbon sequestration programme.

Carbon sequestration involves the removal of carbon from the atmosphere by carbon sinks such as oceans, forests and soil. One way of increasing carbon sequestration is by having new forests.

At SDP, this is where the Tree-to-Tree project comes in. The project involves having a "live" calculator to keep tabs on the number of trees felled in a particular area for development and the number of trees planted following the principle of "one tree planted for one tree chopped down".

"Here, we work with our landscape architects to ensure that this is adhered to. We also refer to a threatened forest species handbook and

work with FRIM (Forest Research Institute Malaysia) and ILAM (Institute of Landscape Architects Malaysia), especially with regard to the replanting of trees," says Mohd Pouzi.

There are also activities aimed at reducing the company's carbon

footprint. These include the T.R.E.E (Together in Restoring the Earth Environment) project, a tree-planting programme in its townships with the involvement of the residents.

"We collaborate with the residents' associations and local authorities to promote the sustainability agenda. The response has been very encouraging. At every township where we had the event, 300 to 700 families took part in the tree planting," he says, adding that the initiatives are seeing results. Although there was an 85% increase in carbon emissions between 2009 and 2014 due to SDP's organic growth and development, 2013 to 2014 saw a 9% dip.

"It shows that we are managing the land clearing well, in that we do not clear a thousand acres at one go, but rather a small portion, then build and landscape, before moving on to the next parcel. Carbon emission intensity also rose 18% between 2009 and 2014. But from 2013 to 2014, there was a 24% drop. This shows proper collaboration between infrastructure and building works."

By 2020, the target is to reduce carbon emissions intensity by 8% against 2009 baseline. To achieve that, the carbon sequestration initiatives need to be stepped up. Towards this end, SDP is in the midst of collecting data to establish the baseline in measuring carbon sequestration. It plans to work with consultants and institutions of higher learning such as Universiti Malaya, Universiti Sains Malaysia and Universiti Teknologi Mara.

Mohd Pouzi acknowledges that the success of the initiatives relies on the involvement of the residents. To create awareness of the importance of reducing carbon emissions and moving towards zero-carbon cities, a communication unit has been set up within SDP's Sustainability and Quality Management Department.

"The new unit will work with the sales and marketing and corporate communications departments so that every township will have a sustainability communication plan.

"We have started engaging with the residents, beginning with a survey on their awareness of sustainability activities that we have embarked on. From there, we will undertake benchmarking to see where the gaps are. Then we'll begin to communicate and engage with the residents," he says, adding that one of the first things introduced is a sustainability corner at the company's sales galleries.

"We want to be transparent in how we measure quality and sustainability, and the tools that we use ... and in future, we would also like to talk about Susdex and the plans we have for the townships to improve their ratings — perhaps moving towards achieving platinum."

He says the initial feedback from the survey reveals that most residents are aware of the activities undertaken by SDP but not how they can bring value to them. "So, that's the next stage — creating awareness that sustainability makes good business sense and gives value to one's property."

Apart from advocating low-carbon cities, SDP gives priority to other areas such as health and safety, which are also incorporated in Susdex. "We ensure compliance with the legal requirements and pay attention to how we manage the safety of our workers, from the access of workers and vehicles to safety measures and messages. Every month, we also have health, safety and environmental reporting," says Mohd Pouzi. ■

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CULTIVATING THE NEXT GENERATION

Sime Darby Property (SDP) plans to expand its Young Sustainability Ambassador programme to the children living in its townships, to create greater awareness of sustainable living and environment-friendly activities. The programme was launched in 2013 and targeted at the children (7 to 17 years of age) of SDP employees. Since then, membership has grown from 100 to 230.

"We hope that by 2020, we will have 1,000 members," SDP head of sustainability and quality management Mohd Pouzi Che Nik says, adding that from its 2015/16 financial year onwards, SDP will reach out to residents of its townships, particularly the children.

One of the programmes is Sustainability-Tea, which began in January in Nilai Impian, Negeri Sembilan. It focuses on community engagement, and the topics discussed included health, especially teaching the young to eat healthy, and safety.

At the event in January, the focus was on healthy living. Celebrity chef Ili Sulaiman gave a talk on healthy eating habits and conducted a cooking demonstration. Residents were also offered health and dental check-ups.



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> MOHD
POUZI



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