CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR SARAWAKIANS BEYOND YEAR 2000

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I.   INTRODUCTION

Any discussion on the subject of challenges and opportunities for any country, race or community beyond the year 2000 or more popularly in the next millennium is likely to be fraught with difficulties and uncertainties in view of so many imponderables. Changes take place almost by the minute, for better or for worse, either in the economic, social or political fields locally, regionally or globally. The **challenges** ahead are almost equally demanding while the opportunities would also appear to be equally considerable depending on our ability to convert these challenges towards improving our welfare and enabling our betterment.

This paper is not intended to join the already long and numerous lists of writings that have so eloquently gazed into the future. These after all are the contributions of gurus, pundits and sages who have spent their time to chart the future road map and thereby enriching us with their views and findings. This paper merely intends to share some personal thoughts on the current challenges and issues that prevail globally, regionally, nationally and locally (in the State) but are considered to immediately and directly affect Sarawakians and the communities living in the State now and in the future such as the Dayak Community.

The timeframe, beyond the year 2000, is confined to the next 10-20 years which neatly fits within the year 2020 and hence, the framework of Vision 2020 in the Malaysian context.

Vision 2020 has already eloquently spelt out the national expectations of Malaysia as a sovereign country—principally the expectation and hope that

'Malaysia as a nation is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally.'

It is a challenge to all Malaysians, whether in Semenanjung Malaysia or in Sarawak, of whatever race and colour, including the Dayak Community, to meet this very big hope.

In Sarawak, the additional challenge has been further propounded by YAB Chief Minister in his winding-up speech at the DUN in May 1999 when he stressed the following:

'Sarawak will be the kind of place we all want .... to be prosperous, clean, good environment, pleasant people, friendly people .... pleasant amenities and having a people proud to undertake new tasks, doing things in new ways .... and creating a knowledge-based society that will serve itself .... rather than relying on the government ......'

YAB Datuk Patinggi Tan Sri Hj. Abdul Taib Mahmud
Chief Minister of Sarawak
(Winding-up Speech, DUN Sarawak, May 1999)

The challenge to us all in Sarawak, among others, is how to meet and attain the above hopes and vision.

The discussion in this paper will follow the following sequence. Firstly and as loyal Malaysians, the essence of Vision 2020 and its nine challenges will be outlined. Thereafter, this will be followed by a discussion of the external and domestic challenges and issues which can have direct impact on the people of Sarawak. Thirdly, and in line with the hopes of the Conference organisers, it is also apt and appropriate to discuss the challenges facing the Dayak Community in

the State. The paper will conclude that like all other Malaysians, the Dayak Community not only have an important role to play in the development of the country and the State, but also to be able to harness their internal capabilities and strength to the fullest advantage for the attainment of a truly developed Malaysia.

II.   VISION 2020 AND THE NINE CHALLENGES

The starting point in the discussion of challenges and opportunities must start with Vision 2020. The Vision states that Malaysia must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence. (***Mahathir, Ibid, para. 3, page 1.***)

To achieve such objective, Malaysia would need to overcome nine (9) central strategic challenges, viz.:

(i)   establishing a united Malaysian nation with a sense of common and shared destiny;

(ii)   creating a psychologically liberated, secure and developed Malaysian society with faith and confidence in itself;

(iii)   fostering and developing a matured democratic society practising a form of matured consensual, community-oriented Malaysian democracy.

(iv)   establishing a fully moral and ethical society whose citizens are strong in religions and spiritual values;

(v)   establishing a matured liberal and tolerant society in which Malaysians of all colours and creeds are free to practise and progress their customs, cultures and religious beliefs.

(vi)   establishing a scientific and progressive society that is innovative and forward looking;

(vii)   establishing a fully caring society and a caring culture;

(viii) ensuring an economically robust society; and

(ix)   establishing a prosperous society with an economy that is fully competitive, dynamic, robust and resilient.

What do all these mean to us? It is especially interesting to observe that during the regional financial crisis in 1997 and 1998, Malaysia was able to stand tall, practise its own recipe to address the crisis, and was clearly the only sovereign country in the region that did not depend on foreign assistance. The will and resolution that was displayed fits appropriately with the expectations of Vision 2020, namely self-reliance.

Going further down into the State, we did not only have to contend with the regional financial crisis, but the externally generated haze, and the coxsackie outbreak. Yet it is clear now that with a strong economic fundamental, meticulous planning in development and financial prudence, the full unity and support of the people and the political stability that prevail, Sarawak was able to withstand all these challenges, and put us in a good position to face the future.

III   THE IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES BEYOND YEAR 2000 FOR SARAWAK

By 2020 Sarawak can be a developed State if present pace of development continues. At a 2.5% population growth rate, our population will be 2.7 million in 2010 and 3.5 million in 2020. For Sarawak, there are immediate challenges ahead. For the purpose of this paper, these are classified into external and domestic challenges.

External Challenges

The ensuing discussion will focus on two major challenges, viz.:

(i) ***Globalisation and Global Competition***

The first major challenge is that of globalisation and global competition. Globalisation refers to the worldwide integration of economic systems in which the principal instruments have been the multinational corporations (MNCs) and their operations. With the collapse of communism and the triumph of market forces and/or capitalism, some have talked of the end of history (Fukuyama, 1989), while others saw growing decentralisation and local entrepreneurial governments are **competing for investment** with national, regional and local scales. Ohmae (1995) hailed it as the 'end of nation-State' as regions or sub-regions compete for global investment. Today, globalisation has been further entrenched by IT and its forces. The undesirable, contagious and deleterious impact of globalisation as witnessed during the recent regional financial crisis is a clear signal of what can happen if countries are not prepared to face such challenges.

The emergence of globalisation in turn has meant that global competition for business, investment, trade and commerce will become more intense. Competition today has intensified dramatically and virtually in all parts of the worlds (M.Porter, On Competition, 1998). Competition is defined as 'the striving or potential striving ...... of two or more persons or organisations ...... against one another ...... for the same or related objects

(Peachment; A; Curtin University, 1998). In many countries, **national competition policy** has been formulated to regulate undesirable competitions and trade practices such as in the US, European Union, Australia and so on. Other countries notably Singapore, has looked at competition differently and established a Committee on its competitiveness so as to better position themselves well and be competitive globally. (Committee on Singapore's Competitiveness, November 1998.) As a matter of interest, Singapore's strategies for future competitiveness include:

- Manufacturing and Services as Twin Engines
- Strengthening its external wing by incorporating a global dimension to spur its growth
- Building World Class Companies
- Strengthening our Base of Small and Medium Local Enterprises
- Human and Intellectual Capital as a competitive edge
- Leveraging on Science, Technology and Innovation
- Optimising resource management
- Government as business facilitators

Mindful of these dynamics of competition, it is apt that we ask how are we to position ourselves, and face the other countries in the years ahead. Participants in this seminar can help to explore ways and means to meet these challenges. To the Dayak Community, such challenges must be reckoned with as it is not merely one that is only left to the government.

(ii) *The Digital Economy and the New Economy*

With the advent of information technology, this has necessarily led to a new form of revolution (as distinct from the epochal agriculture and industrial revolutions) the Information Technology Revolution. In the words of Don Tapscott (The Digital Economy, 1995), he says:

> *'A new medium of human communications is emerging, one that prove to surpass all previous revolutions—the printing press, the*

telephone, the television, the computer—in its impact on our economic and social life: Interactive multimedia and the so-called information highway, and its exemplar the Internet, are enabling a <u>new economy</u> based on the networking of human intelligence. In this <u>digital economy</u>, individuals and enterprises create wealth by applying knowledge, networked human intelligence, and effort to manufacturing, agriculture and services. In <u>the digital frontier of this economy, the players, dynamics, rules, and requirements for survival and success are all changing</u>.'

In very recent times, the Economist (July 24th-30th 1999) has further discussed the characteristics of, albeit critically examining the reality of the new economy. Among others, **the theory of the new economy** in relation to the current strong performance of the American economy talks about—the growth of the hitech industries, the spread of the internet, the expansion of e-business (e-commerce). The new economy explains America's expansion, surge in productivity, vanishing unemployment and the death of inflation. Equally noticeable in the new economy is the mushrooming of the new economy geography—hightech states with high technology workers.

In Malaysia today, the country is already abuzzed with the concept of the Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) at the national level and Cyber villages at the State levels. Sarawak is already planning ahead to meet this emerging new challenge.

What do all these new development mean to Sarawakians and for that matter, the Dayak Community in particular. If anything it means the immediate and urgent need for the present and future generations to quickly

adapt, adopt and be IT literate, and to study and master sciences and mathematics. The predominantly rural Dayak Community must take full cognisance of this digital and new economy, as distinct from the past traditional economy that they have for too long been accustomed with. New values, new habits, new approaches and a new mindset must be adopted. Only in this way can we be able to participate meaningfully and succeed in the next millennium (beyond 2000) and become competitive.

Domestic Challenges

There are many domestic challenges except that this paper will only focus on four areas, viz.:

(i)   Continuing focus and sustainability of racial harmony, unity and stability

(ii)   Understanding our role and contribution in the federal system of government

(iii)   Changing economic structure and managing development success

(iv)   Challenges and demands of growing urbanisation and urbanism

(v)   Managing social impact of rural-urban migration

These challenges in essence can be categorised into economic, social and political aspects.

(i)   ***Continuing Focus and Sustainability of Racial Harmony, Unity and Stability***

It may sound mundane to talk about racial harmony, unity and stability again. Yet we cannot assume that these things can happen without being nurtured, given focus, and sustained. Harmony, unity and stability constitute the most important condition if any country is aspiring to enjoy continuous development and high rate of growth. Other factors such as

resource endowment, high rate of savings and investment, and so on are necessary but not sufficient conditions.

We should continue to take heed of these prerequisites to nation building to preserve, maintain and sustain the present racial harmony, unity and stability in future. The Dayak Community has played, is playing, and will continue to play its part in this.

(ii) ***Role and Contribution in a Federal System of Government***

In the process of pursuing the development of the State, it is incumbent that we need to understand our role and contribution within the federal system of government. For those who are familiar with the concept of Federalism, there are two levels of government, namely the Federal or central government and the state or sub-national government (of course there is the local government that operates under the State Government)

For a harmonious working relationship, it is imperative for both the Federal and State government to be of the same mind and to work in tandem wit each other a the opposite would make it difficult to implement development policies, programmes and projects. There must be synergy between the two levels of governments - both would need to understand each other.

In the context of this discussion, it would be therefore not out of place to stress the need for our people to recognise that we operate within the federal system ,and groups and communities such as the Dayaks would need to be mindful of this framework of government.

(iii) ***Changing Economic Structure and Managing Development 'Success'***

Sarawak has experienced considerable socioeconomic transformation over the past three decades. The structural changes in the economy meant that there has been a gradual shift from activities associated with primary production to secondary and tertiary production. As an example, manufacturing and services are fast growing sectors while agriculture and other primary sectors will gradually reduce in relative importance. In recent times, we are seeing the introduction of electronic industry, talks of biotechnology and other large scale manufacturing coming into the State. These shifts result in new challenges. New economic activities mean new types and styles of jobs. These require new skills. Sarawakians must now be ready to adapt and brace for the future and this challenge is one that all communities need to face. Clearly, it is also a challenge of managing development 'success'.

(iv) ***Challenges and Demands of Growing Urbanisation and Urbanism***

Sarawak is currently experiencing rapid urbanisation. From an urban population of 15.5% in 1970, it has today (1999) increased to about 50%. New towns, expanding sizes and forms of existing towns are emerging. Urbanisation has led and given rise to urbanism, and its attendant sets of problems and expectations. Largely as a result of rapid industrialisation, major urban centres such as Kuching, Miri, Bintulu and Sibu had been receiving large inflows of migrants especially from the rural areas. There are, of course, plenty of lessons learnt from the experiences of others. Where the rate of urban growth growth exceeds the capacity of urban space and economy to absorb the influx of migrants, what inevitably ensue are an expansion of squatter settlements and an increase in the incidence of urban poverty.

In grappling with the growing urban issues, Sarawak has fared rather well but much remains to be done to address the various requirements such as the housing needs. Unless properly tackled this can generate social and environmental degradation.

(v)   ***Managing the Social Impacts Of Rural-Urban Migration***

Undoubtedly, a major contributing factor of urbanisation in the state is the rural-urban migration phenomenon. While it can be said that outmigration has induced a process of rural depopulation in the sending areas and that rural Sarawak is losing young, productive and better educated manpower to the urban areas, there are positive effects arising from this process.

In the Sarawak context, concerns about the negative effect of migration on the rural economy and society appears misplaced. Recent studies reveal that migration is an efficient labour reallocation mechanism. As findings from the Internal Migration Study Sarawak indicates, migration to the urban areas helps rural migration improve their socio-economic position while at the same time contributing towards improving the well-being of their immediate kin at the place of origin through remittances and other forms of assistance. Most migrants send back information about urban opportunities to prospective migrants in the village. Their informal networks ensures an orderly flow of migrants to urban centres. More importantly, many migrants manage to gain and improve skills and the majority of them adjust well to urban environment.

Notwithstanding the positive impacts of rural-urban migration, there remain several areas of concerns that need to be addressed, particularly its effect on rural development.

It needs to be emphasised that the orderly and manageable migration process to urban areas in Sarawak is partly due to the availability of employment opportunities in the rural sector such as those generated by the logging industry and various land development schemes. As recent developments indicate, this orderly process can be disrupted by the slowing down of rural-based activities such as the logging industry. The situation is further heightened by the emergence of a new generation of better educated work force who are less attracted to opportunities in the rural areas being more urban oriented in their career pursuits.

Indeed migration has altered the ethnic composition of the urban labour market, making it more mixed in character. However, differences in educational levels would tend to emplace the rural migrants, the majority of whom are Bumiputra, in the lower rungs of the occupational ladder in the urban economy, mainly as unskilled production workers. Under the circumstance, we cannot but emphasis the role of education and training as a strategy to help migrants compete more effectively in the urban labour market. Having said that, the **policy challenge is how to sustain and enhance the benefits Bumiputra communities have gained in the urban economy so that it will be self-perpetuating**. Opportunities abound and a lot depends on the migrants themselves, especially in efforts to develop a Bumiputra middle class.

On its part the State Government has initiated various measures to manage the migration process. Rural development programmes continue to be given emphasis. In this regard the adoption of the regional growth centres or RGC approach is certainly a move in the right direction. This further complements the other development programmes like IADPs, land development, agriculture-based development and so on.

IV   CHALLENGES TO THE DAYAK COMMUNITY

The Dayak Community in Sarawak totalling about 1 million persons and made up of various ethnic groups such as Ibans, Bidayuh and Orang Ulu constitute a significant proportion of the State's population. Although fund in almost every Division of the State (particularly the Ibans), these are predominantly rural. As a group, the community faces its own particular form of challenge : how to transform a historically and traditionally rural community into a modern community, **even if it means urbanising the rural areas**. This will certainly pose various sets of questions, viz.:

The Questions

(i)   What will it take to bring about such transformation?   Or is the transformation necessary? What implications will result if no affirmative actions are taken?

(ii)   If the transformation is to occur, how long does it take/will it take to see the Dayak Community become more urbanised and modernised. Is it important that the Dayak Community only waits for their leaders—political leaders— to bring them out of their traditional ways of thinking and doing things, or would not such transformation rests on the active and total participation of all members of the Community? Do we rely on individuals to act and the rest wait passively or should it not be the group that can work together and contribute collectively.

The Issues

What do the Dayak Community want to aspire? To be active participants in the modern economy—business, commerce and industry? To remain bounded in rural areas of the State because of the nostalgic post, or because there are no other

choices? To be able to fully and optimally utilise their land resources so as to attain maximum gains from their land holdings—NCRL? To be able to recognise that through land development, you are able to benefit from the economies of large scale operation, large profitability, and the multiplier impact of the investment. Admittedly, development may also lead to some degradation of the surrounding areas and some sacrifices. Yet it is important that we also weigh carefully the benefits against the cost, and the opportunities foregone for not doing anything. The Dayak Community must address these issues.

Some Suggestions

There is not going to be any special recipe or panacea. In the context of today's global scene, education would appear to be the most important answer. An educated, trained and skilled community will always be able to participate and partake in employment in any sector of the modern economy. The Dayak Community would need to look at education—the search and pursuit of knowledge—as the biggest challenge ahead. It is also imperative that the Community ;pursue new **skills training** beyond living with their current indigenous skills.

Another suggestion is to learn to 'live with the future'. By this, it means being able to recognise that the future has in fact already arrived now. What does this mean? For example, we know that the oil palm plantations and estates in NCR land will start to yield and bear fruits from its third to twentieth year. Planners and financial analysts in their ways will be able to tell us our earnings whether today, in the third, tenth or twentieth year. In other words, we should be able to recognise that the future—year 20—can be 'seen' today if we want to change the rural mindset.

Modern commercial agriculture and large scale land development/estate development in NCR land is another very, very critical area which has been touched earlier and still needs to be accorded utmost importance in the years ahead. The reason is very clear. This approach to agriculture will help to increase the **income-earning** power of the community. Agriculture activities for subsistence and marginal needs will not lead to an improved income earning. Of course if the crop is not oil palm, then think of other crops or economic activities.

Moving out of the economic challenges and into the realm of social challenges, there is also the need for Dayak communities in various areas to form choral societies or associations. This is what some writers (Putnam, 1997) call the development of social capital in the sense that through associations, you can learn to arrange and organise events and gatherings. In turn, this will help to develop your organisational and managerial skills. The impact over the long term can be quite considerable. On this count, it is in fact very sad to see today's generation are not as socially conscious as the past generations. Perhaps we can draw a lesson or two from the past generation particularly in the 1950s and 1960s, many of whom formed the various clubs and associations which still thrive today, some more active than others (Tan Chee Beng, 1994).

Looking beyond your own Dayak microcosm is yet another challenge. Look at others—How do they operate, think, work, organise themselves? Why do some succeed and some fail?

V   CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that the discussion in this paper has been broad-based. It has attempted to identify the challenges and issues—both external

and domestic—which are likely to have immediate and direct impact on us in Sarawak, and to the Dayak Community. It is hoped that seminar participants can be mindful of these challenges and issues, and to consider them as a framework for discussion. While mindful of these challenges, we not only need to prepare ourselves to meet these challenges, and to convert them into opportunities but also to understand the framework and context in which we live and operate. The Dayak Community. like the others can succeed if they prepare themselves well, while recognising these challenges.

2 SEPTEMBER 1999