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MRANTI: Transforming Innovation and Ideas into Commercial Propositions for Malaysia – and Beyond

By Elizabeth Yee - May 23, 2022



Meranti is known as the tallest tropical tree in the world, easily standing at some 100.8 metres from where its buttress roots enter the ground to the very top of its canopy. And the world's tallest Meranti tree was identified in Borneo. Akin to the Meranti trees which stand strong, tall and elegantly in its ecosystem, the Malaysian Research Accelerator for Technology and Innovation, or fondly known as MRANTI, is set to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the world's best. Led by Dzuleira Abu Bakar who has a proven track record and is regarded by industry as a visionary, the agency is supported by a strong network branching across diverse industries. What's more, its

solid foundation rooted in tech and innovation ensures that MRANTI is set to be the accelerator and catalyst of Malaysia's innovation ecosystem.

There had been a lot of dialogues and discussions, around the world, on creating innovation ecosystems. But what is an innovation ecosystem? An innovation ecosystem consists of public agency, universities, corporations, startup accelerators, investors, foundations, entrepreneurs, mentors, and media. Each has a vital role in generating value in the larger ecosystem by transforming new ideas into reality through access and financial investment.

Innovation ecosystem matters because it provides us a way to organize communities of innovative people united by a diverse range of values, vision and ideas. The ecosystem allows for the co-creation of new ventures and new insights to transform into reality. And now the talks are shifting toward how to improve these ecosystems and how to make them more effective and efficient.

The trend is towards building a process by which more innovators and entrepreneurs can develop and launch solutions to solve real-world problems, faster. This process creates expertise in new areas, helps to diversify the economy, and allows businesses to meet customers' expectations. Justifiably is that ecosystem lays out the ways to create resource-sharing and wealth creation. Remember successful startups do generate job opportunities and, consequently, wealth effects that ripple positively throughout the Malaysian economy.

The value of an innovation ecosystem lies in the access to resources for startups and the flow of information for the ecosystem's stakeholders. Understandably, startups are busy building new technologies that apply across industries and audiences. They are speaking with everyone in the ecosystem, identifying their key partners, and turning these in-kind and financial investments into tangible products that impact the way we live. This information flow creates more investment opportunities for the right institutions to connect with the right ideas for their businesses and portfolios, at the right time, for the right reasons.

The people in MRANTI are psyched and inspired to mold these bold new ideas of technology and innovation into commercialisation. The agency acts as a catalyst, facilitator, nurturer and incubator of research initiatives among the research communities in Malaysia. In addition, it plays a key role in nurturing and developing talent and leaders for its Research Institutes, the wider research community, and industry, their mission is to advance scientific discovery and technological innovation for furtherance of growth.

To elevate the ecosystem forward, the agency's fundamental role is by unlocking value across the entire value chain.

MRANTI collaborates with its partners in both the public and private sectors and brings science and technology to benefit the economy and society. As an enabler, MRANTI bridges the gap between academia and industry in terms of research and development. In these endeavours, the agency seeks to integrate the relevant capabilities of their research institutes and collaborate with the wider research community as well as other public sector agencies towards meaningful and impactful outcomes.

The agency works across sectors by integrating their capabilities to create impact with Multinational Corporations and Globally Competitive Companies; partnering local enterprises for productivity and gearing them for growth; and nurturing R&D-driven start-ups by seeding for surprises and shaping for success.

While conceptualisation frameworks and setups are crucial for the birth of projects, funding is the proof of "we-mean-business".

MRANTI has been allocated RM30 million to be upgraded into an 4IR Hub under Budget 2022. This hub will act as a centre of excellence and support the innovation ecosystem by developing new technology clusters such as drones, robotics and autonomous vehicles. Meanwhile, some 2.5% gross expenditure on R&D (GERD) to GDP is expected to drive the realisation of ideas and experimentation into works of innovation.

MRANTI believes that the best advocates for their endeavour are their collaborators. An endeavour is only recognised when the collaborators of the agency that live and breathe their vision and mission: National Technology & Innovation Sandbox (NTIS) ; Global Innovation Exchange (GIX) ; International Innovation Hub (IIH); University and entrepreneurs they work with; Technopreneurs will also have access to infrastructure support, coaching and mentoring as well as a platform to conduct pilot tests.

Dzuleira who is the Chief Executive Officer of MRANTI Corp and formerly the CEO of Malaysian Global Innovation & Creativity Center (MaGIC) is making sure that MRANTI's is on track in achieving its goals of unlocking value across the entire value chain.

In her short few months on the job, Dzuleira has set a task force comprising MAGIC and TPM members to look at gaps and opportunities within the technology and commercialisation ecosystem. She has ramped up engagement sessions with key stakeholders including from universities, private and public sectors. Review business

and operations models across agencies for best practices are programmes, innovation centres and review infrastructure and facilities planning to foster the growth of 4IR technologies and other technology opportunities

“Overall the taskforce has been charged to formulate strategies to ensure that MRANTI is able to move innovation forward – with speed, the right support structures and systems, synergies, towards a sustainable future,” said Dzuleira.

“MRANTI is a one-stop agency with the resources to accelerate commercialisation of innovative ideas/concepts.”

The parallelism lies in this: While tropical Meranti has its importance for carbon sequestration and carbon storage in the tree and its rooting system to enrich the environment, MRANTI, the catalyst, incubator and connector, brings forth the intangible creativity ideas to fruition – contributing to societal benefits such as improving outcomes in healthcare, urban living, and sustainability.