

IDEAS 12th Anniversary Dinner: Moving Forward Together
CEO Speech – Annual Report 2021
Tricia Yeoh

Slide 1

1. Tan Sri Rafidah Dato' Seri Rafidah Aziz, Former Minister of International Trade and Industry, H.E. Justin Lee, Australian High Commissioner, H.E. Wayne Robson, Canadian High Commissioner, Representatives from the European Union, US Embassy, Australian High Commission, Your Excellencies, Tan Sri², Datuk, Datin, colleagues and friends.
2. A very good evening to all of you, ladies & gentlemen. A warm welcome to the IDEAS 12th Anniversary Dinner: Moving Forward Together.

Slide 2

3. Ladies & gentlemen, tonight's dinner is significant for a number of reasons. First, it is the first time in two and a half years that IDEAS is hosting our annual dinner and that means the first time in two and a half years that we are able to thank you, our supporters and friends, in person, for your continued support and generosity.

Slide 3

4. Second, although I have been with IDEAS since 2013 – this is my ninth anniversary with the organisation – this is the first time I am speaking at an annual dinner as its CEO. After a 3-year sabbatical to pursue my PhD, I have been back over the last two years serving IDEAS at its helm with great honour.

5. Finally, this is a momentous occasion because the last time we met in February 2020, it was a different Malaysia. We were

not just living in a very different country, it was a very different world. The COVID-19 pandemic has transformed fundamentally the way we think, work, and basically – how we live.

Slide 4 – Slide 5

6. Friends, 2020 and 2021 were exceptionally challenging years – for the world, for Malaysia, and for IDEAS too. We were subject to the fears and insecurities of what this new virus would bring. Streets were empty, we cowered at home uncertain of what was to come. The white flag movement resulting from lower income families in distress, surviving on one meal a day, gained momentum on social media.
7. The series of consecutive lockdowns meant that all of us had to work in isolation. A real challenge for young executives who draw energy from each other, and for a

team that works collaboratively. This was my actual home set-up for many speaking engagements.

Slide 6

8. Closer to home, staff contracted COVID, one of whom suffered very seriously. Some of us had relatives and friends pass away – it was a grave time. IDEAS Community Projects under our Foundation arm started a fund with Projek Bangsa Malaysia and raised more than RM2 million to provide equipment for hospitals in the Klang Valley.

9. The country was faced with a newly-formed government, Emergency measures, suspension of Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies. Budgets were passed by the Cabinet without parliamentary scrutiny. The nation was paralysed, unable to act. IDEAS issued many, many statements during that period

addressing the issues of economic hardship, pandemic management, calling for Parliament to reopen and more.

Slide 7

10. Yet throughout the last two and a half years, the IDEAS team has demonstrated exceptional resilience, a trait that I emphasised to the team repeatedly as crucial for the organisation to weather the storm. Over the last two and a half years, we have published **46 (27 in 2020, 13 in 2021, 6 in 2022)** policy papers and reports, organised **51 (7 in 2022, 27 in 2021, 17 in 2020)** webinars and events and completed **26** (12 in 2020, 14 in 2021) projects worth **RM6, 396,765** million (RM 3, 164,922 in 2020, RM 3, 231, 843). We completed **27** projects over this period.

11. In 2021, we raised a total of RM3.5 million, which was an unprecedented year

for us, consisting of 85% from abroad and 15% from local sources. In all of IDEAS history there was only one year in which there was more local than foreign funding, which we hope will become a reality again. On that note, I would like to thank all the Malaysian funders tonight displayed on the backdrop here for all of their support – it shows us that Malaysians do believe in supporting the cause they believe in.

12. 94% of our grants were project-specific, with only 6% as core funding – this means that we completed numerous projects in 2021. In the future we would like to see an increase in our core funding that allows us to be more strategic and pivot when we feel the need to.

Slide 8 – 14

13. Some of the key highlights of the past two years are (some photos and screenshots of policy papers on maybe 2-3 slides):

- a. CPTPP
- b. ASEAN Prosperity Initiative
- c. NEP@50
- d. National Unity and Interracial Harmony
- e. Political Financing Reforms
- f. Monitoring Budgets and Political Appointments in GLCs
- g. Public Procurement
- h. Orang Asli – Access to Education

Slide 15

14. Despite the series of lockdowns, IDEAS went through an unprecedented period of collaborating with other organisations and leaders in ways that were never before thought possible.

- a. Together with several others, we formed a Seed Community for a Professional Parliament that urged for the reconvening of Parliament during its suspension.
- b. We worked closely with RasuahBusters to reach the Malay community on anti-corruption issues.
- c. Importantly, we also contributed to the formation of an APPG on Political Financing, which has now submitted a Private Member's Bill to Parliament on this issue.

Slide 16

15. Team members came and went, but we gained a tremendous new and dynamic team who I am extremely proud of today. Let me share with you the faces behind the team that works hard everyday to bring you the quality research, press statements and policy advocacy work.

Slide 17-18

16. First, the operations and finance team. Mazrina Arifin, Finance Director; Ahmad Bashier, Finance Assistant Manager; Amaluddin, Finance Executive. Amelia Ramli, Senior Administrator , Yang Hartini Jaapar, Human Resources Manager and Mohd Safrizal, our driver.

Slide 19

17. Our Programme Secretariat. Amir Ridzuan Jamaludin, Manager; Faiz Zaidi, Senior Executive, Salsabila Abdul Manan, Executive.

Slide 20

18. Our External Relations Team. Louis Denis, Manager; Murni, Senior Executive; Zuhdi

Farhan, Executive for Events, and Jivinyaa Selvaraju, Executive, Communications.

Slide 21

19. Last but not least, our Research Team. The brains behind it all. Led by Dr. Juita Mohd, Research; Sri Murniati, Deputy Research Director;

Slide 22

20. Democracy and Governance Unit: Aira Azhari, Senior Manager; Halmie Azrie, Executive.

Slide 23

21. Public Finance Unit: Alissa Rode, Manager; Executives Low Zhen Ting and Arief Najmuddin.

Slide 24

22. Economics and Business Unit: Dr. Juita Mohd, Director. Julia Merican and Jazreen,

Senior Executive. Executive Imran Shamsunahar.

Slide 25

23. Last but not least, the Social Policy Unit, also led by Dr. Juita Mohd, and Kirjane Ngu as its Executive.

24. Please join me in thanking the team for all of their efforts, that mostly go unseen – but they are the ones behind the work that you see in public.

Slide 26-27

25. One of the reasons the synergy of this team is so amazing right now, apart from the fact that each of them brings their own strengths to the table, is owed to the fact that we have alignment of our *raison d'être* from top to bottom – we all share a common belief about what our reason of existence should be.

26. Over the last two years, IDEAS has worked hard in aligning our Purpose, Vision and Mission of the organisation. As a think tank that has seen 3 CEOs and undergone significant transformation, it was important to us to be able to determine once again what our priorities are, in the context of a Malaysia that is also rapidly changing.

27. For 9 months the leadership team worked hard alongside a culture consultant 95%, and then shared with the rest of the organisation in a full-day workshop what we now call our Culture Manifesto. Which I am pleased to share with you all today.

28. IDEAS' Purpose is to build a better Malaysia for all. Our Vision is a nation that upholds liberty and justice. Our mission is to conduct evidence-based public policy research to stimulate critical discourse. and our three most important values are Making

a Difference, Constantly Curious and Trustworthy.

29. Alongside statements that make these a reality, it helped especially younger staff to connect the dots. It is sometimes difficult for researchers swimming in a pool of data to feel that their work can actually make a difference in Malaysia.

Slide 28

30. Last but not least, we revamped something called the Making a Difference Grant – in which all executive-level staff can apply with a full proposal for a project of their own, not part of the organisation but an individual project. The winning project would receive RM10,000 as a grant to fulfil this project.

Slide 29-31

31. This year, we received 5 grant applications from 5 different teams, and I would like to formally recognise them today. The following were the grant applications (put the face of the people plus the name of the proposal on the slide):

- a. Salsabila Abdul Manan: “Including Voter Education into the National School Syllabus”
- b. Jazreen Jefri: “Debunking the Stigma: A Socio-economic Analysis of the E-Sports Scene in empowering Malaysian Women & Youth”
- c. Kirjane Ngu and Julia Merican: “Re-Innovating Civic Education for Malaysian Youth”
- d. Halmie Azrie: “Literacy Lab: Capacity Building and Political Literacy for Youth”
- e. Low Zhen Ting: “Project Re-Power: Commercialising Refugee Handicrafts through E-Commerce”

Slide 32

32. And the winning team after having gone through a round of presentations and judging was team Kirjane Ngu and Julia Merican: Re-Innovating Civic Education for Malaysian Youth. Because we did all of this online several months ago, we would like to take this opportunity to recognise them today.

Slide 33

33. May I invite IDEAS Founding President Tunku Zain Al-'Abidin Muhriz on stage to present a congratulatory gift to the winning team. Thank you Tunku Zain.

Slide 31

34. Finally, I would like to end by thanking a series of people without whom all of our work at IDEAS would be impossible.

- a. First, our donors and sponsors. Without you, we wouldn't have been able to survive for 12 long and fruitful years.
- b. Second, the IDEAS Board Members, Advisory Council Members, and Senior Fellows who constantly provide oversight and guidance.
- c. Third, members of the government and political parties with whom we have been communicating and advocating our policies to, who have been more than open to receiving us.
- d. Fourth, members of the media who carry the messages that we bring forward to the public, so importantly reporting faithfully the issues of the day.
- e. Fifth, our civil society and think tank colleagues and collaborators with whom multiple meetings happen on a weekly basis – you show us the magic of truly working together.
- f. And last but certainly not least, the IDEAS team itself. Team, I am inspired

and honoured to be your leader. You give me reason to come into work every single day. We are a purpose-driven organisation and each of you exemplifies this, truly.

35. Ladies and gentlemen, it is precisely during turbulent times that we can refine and sharpen our purpose of existence. It is precisely during times of the country's uncertainty that we must shape, hone, curate the message of the future: that IDEAS as an organisation must and will continue to play a crucial role in contributing to the country's policy reform agenda. Advancing a competitive economy, ensuring trust in institutions and promoting an inclusive Malaysia – towards a nation that upholds liberty and justice. It is for such a time as this that we are alive.

36. Thank You.