

Rights to the City: Malaysia's first Public Housing Liveability Conference unlocks the potential to create sustainable and liveable public housing

The Conference ignites ideas and enable effective support and collaboration towards developing liveable and resilient public housing system in Malaysia.

Kuala Lumpur, 16 June 2022 – The first Public Housing Liveability Conference organised by Think City in collaboration with Citi Foundation represents a major first step in devising interventions to promote better public housing liveability and strengthen the resilience of vulnerable communities living in Malaysia's public housing, be it through policy recommendations or practice.

Rights to the City conference featured YBhg Datuk Azhar Ahmad, Deputy Secretary General (Housing and Community Wellness), Ministry of Housing and Local Government, YBhg Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop, Chairman Khazanah Research Institute, Hamdan Abdul Majeed, Managing Director Think City, distinguished speakers from UNICEF Malaysia, Thrive Well, Malaysian Institute of Planners, Yayasan Hasanah, ARUP Malaysia in addition to voices of the PPR communities. This conference brings together policymakers, independent organisations, and community leaders to gain better understanding of the issues and challenges faced by residents at public housing and leverage on each other's strengths and expertise to be more responsive in creating meaningful solutions and agile policies for improvement.

Some of the issues faced by the residents at PPRs include constrains of locality and built environment leading to space, accessibility, and connectivity challenges, socioeconomic, welfare, cultural, and gender status affecting mental health and wellbeing, impact of climate change and resilience towards the macro-environmental shocks arising from financial and health status.

Presenting the keynote address at the conference, YBhg Tan Sri Nor Mohamed Yakcop said, "The provision of housing or the affordability problem for the social sector is first and foremost an issue of poverty, not housing. The social sector primarily houses residents who are poor or those categorised as the economically vulnerable. In order to address this problem, solutions must therefore involve policies for the alleviation of poverty. Being deprived of housing can result in harmful consequences such as homelessness and the inability to lead a life they value. Therefore, state support in the form of direct housing subsidies, general income support and other social programmes are necessary."

"We have understood that certain groups are particularly vulnerable to the external shocks, and have poor access to services, opportunity for decision-making, and avenue for redress and justice. Together, we must work on enhancing community capacity to protect themselves from future risks," said YBhg Datuk Azhar Ahmad in his closing remarks at the conference, on behalf of YB Dato' Sri Reezal Merican Naina Merican, Minister of Housing and Local Government.

The Minister said he looked forward to the findings of the conference to facilitate collaboration with the various stakeholders to realise a sustainable and liveable public housing.

The drive for a system change stems from the discovery that the nation's urbanisation push has impacted negatively on the B40 communities, especially those living in the PPRs and experience significant barriers to modern amenities, creating pockets of deprivation. While they are beneficiaries of isolated interventions by individual organisations, a cross-sector coordination is needed to bring together all stakeholders towards a common agenda to collectively define the problem and create a shared measurement system to track progress and coordinate efforts in maximising impact.

"Malaysia has gone through a rapid urbanisation phase and fortunately through effective policies, Malaysia has been successful in housing the nation, with access to food, water, power, telecommunication, and broadband. However, when the city develops, the public housing community voice tends to be reduced, and inequalities in their living environment becomes evident. The low-income earning families living in these strata flats are often daily wage earners and a higher-than-average proportion are single mothers. Many of these households' live meal by meal, making ends meet where they can. Therefore, there is an urgent need to affect the livelihood of the public housing community, to make it more resilient and to ensure that the residents are financially independent and receive social protection programmes, especially in times of crisis," opined Mr Hamdan Abdul Majeed Managing Director, Think City.

He also reiterated the objectives of the conference to seek a multi-pronged approach to remedy the issues surrounding the public housing system from social and economic challenges to the physical condition of the housing complexes and their surroundings that directly affect health and quality of life of the residents. Efforts to address the lack of social power and decision-making power to empower resident to look after their own living environment was also looked at, to enable residents to take full charge of their lives.

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About Think City

Think City is an impact organisation established in 2009 to create more sustainable and equitable places for the benefit of all. Our knowledge, skills and strategies focus on urban solutions, the environment, social communities, and the cultural economy. Think City is a wholly owned subsidiary of Khazanah Nasional Berhad (the sovereign wealth fund of the Government of Malaysia). For more information, log on to www.thinkcity.com.my.

About Rights to the City

Rights To The City is a collaborative platform where experts and practitioners work to improve public housing liveability through effective policy recommendations or implementation. We build partnerships, develop research and liveability assessments, and advocate for a systemic change in how public housing, particularly in Malaysia, is developed and managed in the long term. For more information, log on to www.thinkcity.com.my/R2C.

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Panel Session Fact Sheet

- **Panel Session 1: Rebuilding Community Resilience – Enhanced Wellbeing Prosperous Society**

The Session focuses on how the pandemic shed light on vulnerabilities in public housing. Looking at wellbeing, whether mental, physical, or psychosocial, as central focus discussion, this session will discuss how gaps uncovered led to stakeholders identifying ways to build community resilience in face of pandemic restrictions.

Moderator: Khairiah Mokhtaruddin, Manager, Environment and Social, Think City

Speakers:

- Adam Ling, Social Policy Specialist, UNICEF Malaysia
- Elisha Othman, Managing Director, Thrive Well
- Dr. Lim Shiang Cheng, Country Technical Lead, RTI Malaysia
- Prof. Dr. Siti Nursheena Mohd Zain, Director, International Relations Office, University Malaya

- **Panel Session 2: The Space Between – Public Space and Quality of Life in Public Housing**

Public housing often has varying sizes and quality of public space despite the standards that have been set. Having a safe, accessible, and usable public space is vital in enhancing neighbourly relations and improving quality of life. The pandemic, lockdowns and its effects on physical and mental wellbeing has highlighted how important public spaces are, particularly with tight indoor living conditions. This session focuses on the issues in public space within public housing from the planning, implementation, and maintenance perspective.

Moderator: Ar. Ahila Ganesan, Senior Director, Think City

Speakers:

- Dr. Asrul Mahjuddin Ressang, Deputy Dean (Research & Development), Faculty of Built Environment, Universiti Malaya
- TPr Nik Ruiz Razy, Council Member, Malaysia Institute of Planners
- LAr. Dr. Suhardi Maulan, President, Inst. of Landscape Architects M'sia (ILAM)
- Dr. Naziaty Mohd Yaacob, Accessibility Advisor, Boleh Space

- **Panel Session 3: Lives and Livelihood – Voices from the PPR Community**

The session presents an opportunity to understand the lived experience of the community in PPR. To what extent is the community being engaged in the pursuit of creating a liveable public housing? How can we ensure voices of the marginalised are being heard, respected, and responded to? This session will attempt to gain insights from women leading in the PPR community and how they can be better engaged towards collective impact.

Moderator: Hana Zulkifli, Manager, Environment & Social, Think City

Speakers:

- Noor Hayati Ismail, Secretary of PERWACOM Prihatin, PPR Kg. Baru Hicom
- Noorrimah Mohamad, President of Resident Association, PA Seri Kota

Panel Session 4: Rights to the City – Advocating for greater public housing liveability

This panel session picks up on the key notions of this conference to discuss ways to advance a public housing liveability agenda through advocacy, cross sector collaboration, research and policy.

Moderator: Dr Sharidan Faiez, Principal Advisor, Think City

Speakers:

- Anita Ahmad, Lead for Community Development and Humanitarian Disaster Response Yayasan Hasanah
- Melissa Mohd Akhir, Human Rights Activist, Kemban Kolektif
- Tan E Hun, Executive Director, Research for Social Advancement (REFSA)
- Murali Ram, Lead of Sustainability, Advisory & Planning, ARUP Malaysia