



Beyond GDP – Measuring Progress, Creating Impact 2026
Expert Group Discussion

Project/Subject: Beyond GDP – Measuring Progress, Creating Impact

Document Type: Expert Panel Focus Group Discussion (FGD) Report

Convened By: Malaysian CSO–SDG Alliance (MCSA)

Date of Session: 11 March 2026

Venue: Za'ba Memorial Library, University of Malaya

Session Co-Chairs: Ms. Lavanya Rama Iyer (MCSA Beyond GDP Lead) & Dato' Sri Mustapha Mohamad (Former Minister of Economy in the Prime Minister's Department)

1. Executive Summary & Context

The Expert Panel Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was convened by the Malaysian CSO–SDG Alliance (MCSA) as a core segment of the Beyond GDP Forum 2026. The session brought together an interdisciplinary cohort of stakeholders spanning academia, civil society organizations (CSOs), government ministries, international bodies, and professional associations. The primary objective was to evaluate how non-state actors can strategically advance Malaysia's national Beyond GDP framework while harmonizing domestic tracking with evolving global standards.

2. Global Policy Briefing: UN High-Level Expert Group (HLEG)

Dr. Richard Marshall, Senior Economist at the United Nations Resident Coordinator's Office (Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam), delivered an overview of international structural developments:

- **Mandate & Scope:** Established under Action 53 of the UN Pact for the Future, the HLEG aims to supplement rather than replace traditional GDP metrics. The objective is to capture critical overlooked dimensions including human well-being, equity, inclusion, and environmental sustainability.
- **Operational Timeline:** Administered by UNCTAD, the expert group initiated work in 2024, holding physical sessions across 2025 and early 2026. The group's findings will culminate in a formal report to the UN General Assembly, preceding state-level intergovernmental adoptions.
- **Methodological Paradigm Shift:** Initial global debates balanced adjusting traditional GDP (e.g., equality or environmentally-adjusted figures) against constructing standalone dashboards. Deliberations have heavily shifted toward a **Three-Pillar Dashboard**

Approach focusing on:

1. *Well-being*

2. *Equity & Inclusion*
 3. *Sustainability*
- **Data Requirements:** Selected indicators must remain scientifically robust, simple to communicate, policy-relevant, and adaptive to national customisation and granular disaggregation. Concurrently, there is an expanded global emphasis on wealth accounting (social welfare and environmental assets).
 - **Malaysian Suitability:** As Malaysia nears high-income nation status, structural focus must pivot toward quality of life, sustainability, and equity. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (DOSM) already demonstrates robust statistical capabilities via existing metrics, such as environmental-economic accounting and the Malaysia Well-being Index (MyWI).

3. Core Thematic Discussions & Stakeholder Perspectives

Government Integration, Policy Alignment, & Existing Baselines

- **Acknowledge Current Foundations:** Datuk K. Yogeesvaran (BNM, MIER) and Esther Lew (Ministry of Economy) emphasized that Malaysia is not starting from zero. Government blueprints historically integrate dimensions beyond pure macroeconomic outputs. Existing high-quality datasets including the Real Progress Index, Human Development Index, and the Malaysia Well-being Index (MyWI) should be baseline-audited rather than duplicated.
- **The Dashboard Preference:** Datuk K. Yogeesvaran strongly advised against modifying the core calculation of GDP, arguing it would cause data complications, disrupt international comparability, and dilute the index's primary objective. A supplementary dashboard is mathematically and politically cleaner. He additionally called for preventive policy measures built into governance systems to mitigate harms proactively, rather than relying strictly on post-hoc measurements.
- **State-Level Granularity & Communication Barriers:** Esther Lew shared that the Ministry of Economy and DOSM are currently localizing the well-being index to sub-national levels. This state-level disaggregation has drawn methodology and weighting questions from lower-ranked state leadership. Furthermore, public financial discourse and media channels remain overly reliant on singular GDP headlines. Shifted narratives must be reinforced by leadership figures like the Ministry of Finance.

Rights-Based, Social, & Demographic Customization

- **Human Rights & Structural Architecture:** Omna Sreeni-Ong (MCSA) asserted that the final national framework must weave in a explicit rights-based approach, noting current national policy plans routinely omit links between statistical indicators and human rights. She highlighted complex areas such as agricultural child labor as fields requiring interpretation through a human rights lens.
- **Family & Institutional Culture:** Dr. Anjli Doshi (former Deputy-Director General, LPPKN) presented the structural precedents of the multi-domain Malaysia Family Wellbeing Index, a comprehensive framework tracking over 100 items across areas like community engagement and spiritual/economic stability. She cautioned that instilling new frameworks within deeply entrenched civil service mindsets takes significant time, drawing parallels to the long rollout of gender-responsive budgeting. Due to existing digital constraints and manual processes, she advised running isolated pilot programs prior to national scaling.

- **Social Cohesion & National Identity:** Tan Sri Noor Azlan Ghazali (MINDA-UKM) highlighted that parameters must explicitly factor in Malaysia's unique multi-ethnic and multi-racial social fabric, proposing that metrics for national unity and social cohesion be deeply embedded within the dashboard.

Community-Level Impact, Youth, & Civil Society Narrative

- **Redefining Evaluation Metrics:** Dr. Shakir (USM) stated that local universities are trapped utilizing traditional economic indicators like Return on Investment (ROI) or Return on Value (ROV) to measure community projects. A decentralized Beyond GDP framework would empower academic and civil groups to validate grassroots social interventions to state funding bodies through a standardized, well-being-focused lens.
- **Lived Realities vs. Policy Silos:** Chee Yoke Ling (Third World Network) highlighted that communication styles must match the targeted audience. While policy circles require technical language, grassroots adoption demands metrics rooted in local lived experiences. Dr. Larry Wong (MIER) added that while DOSM has made commendable strides in the "democratization of data," institutional silos across ministries, state agencies, and CSOs remain an obstacle to unified development.
- **Indigenous Preservation & Youth Integration:** Dr. Nurzalifa (Jungle School) advocated for youth and university student integration to run community wellbeing pilots. She underscored the critical need to preserve and consolidate the sustainable environmental management data of indigenous communities (citing the displaced Orang Asli of Pulau Carey) into an accessible, centralized digital repository.

International and Private Sector Intersections

- **Alternative Models:** Dr. Jamal Othman (APM) urged the team to review international alternatives like the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) and the Inclusive Wealth Index to clearly establish what Malaysia defines as "progress". He noted the SDG steering committee platform serves as a ready-made channel to advance these proposals.
- **Private Sector & Decoupling:** Tan Mei Ling (World Bank) stressed that a concrete stakeholder engagement blueprint must target state ministers alongside the private sector. Corporate entities must understand the economic case for change, particularly around decoupling GDP growth from environmental degradation (e.g., historical tracking of plastic generation vs. energy stabilizing trends seen in developed economies).

4. Key Takeaways & Previous Discussion Summary

The expert panel agreed on several operational realities:

1. **No Duplication:** Malaysia has an extensive ecosystem of well-being indices and high data availability. The technical task is indexing, sorting, and weighting existing data clusters rather than manufacturing a parallel tracking framework from scratch.
2. **Dashboard Consensus:** Modifying traditional GDP calculations is counter-productive; the project will focus on a complementary dashboard aligned with global UN dimensions.
3. **Communication Priority:** Translating highly technical indexes into accessible, simple concepts is vital to gain citizen buy-in and reshape national economic reporting narratives.

5. Strategic Next Steps & Action Items

Ref	Strategic Action Item	Proposed Target / Lead Group	Status / Priority
1	Form a Dedicated Working Group: Convene a small, agile technical committee to spearhead immediate mapping tasks.	MCSA / Core Project Secretariat	High Priority
2	Landscape & Gap Analysis Mapping: Conduct a comprehensive audit mapping existing Malaysian indices (MyWI, Family Wellbeing Index, etc.) against the 3 pillars of the UN HLEG framework.	Assigned Small Working Group	Immediate Action
3	Draft a Process & Substance Proposal: Outline a formal process flow and circulate technical indicators among a tightly focused expert loop to identify target stakeholders.	Dato' Sri Mustapha Mohamad / Core Chairs	In Progress
4	Establish a Stakeholder Engagement Plan: Draft a tiered advocacy roadmap specifically targeting Cabinet ministers, state-level leadership, economic policymakers, and private sector corporate leaders.	Tan Mei Ling (World Bank) / Advocacy Team	Upcoming

5	Develop International Perspectives: Synthesize Malaysian-specific contextual metrics such as social cohesion and national unity to contribute back into the evolving global UN-HLEG dialogue.	Ms. Lavanya Rama Iyer / MCSA Lead	Ongoing
6	Launch Narrow Pilot Initiatives: Identify a specific sector or regional community to test dashboard tracking and baseline methodologies prior to macroeconomic scaling.	Academic Partners / Youth Coordinators	Proposed