

Cleaning up horse dung: Innovation beyond tech

I RECENTLY found an exciting story in one of my son's books. It goes like this:

In the late 19th century, many large cities relied heavily on horses for transportation. The horses generated enormous faeces on the streets every day, exposing the residents to foul smells and increasing the risk of infection and disease transmission.

The problem came to a breaking point in 1894. It was claimed that 'in 50 years, every street in London will be buried under nine feet of manure'.

It seemed like there was no way out, until Henry Ford created the world's first assembly line. With the mass production of motorcars, the number of horse-drawn carriages quickly diminished.

In a decade, the horse manure crisis that seemed insurmountable was resolved. The message of this little story is so powerful and memorable. Not surprisingly, a quick search on Google showed how widely authors, media, and lobbyists used this story as an analogy to encourage innovations.

However, some were curious enough to dig deeper before quoting it. The Times editor, Rose Wild, in her article in 2018, said: 'We were buried in fake news as long ago as 1894'; she also admitted that she could not locate any reference in the archive for the above-mentioned quote when requested by a reader.



Exploring Sustainable Development

with Dr. Goh Chun Sheng

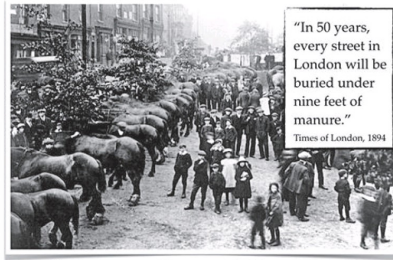
As early as 2013, journalist Brandon Keim wrote in *Nautilus*, claiming that: 'The late 19th and early 20th centuries was the age of streetcars (trams run with electricity)', and 'only a handful of wealthy drivers actually thought of cars as personal transportation.'

A writer on Medium.com, Marco Treven, also concluded that the story was largely fabricated.

Evidence was found for the case of New York, which suffered a similar horse manure crisis like London at that time. According to the book by two historians, 'Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898', the solution to the horse manure crisis was not the proliferation of motorcars but radical reform of the city's sanitation system.

With strict military-like rules and salary adjustments, the horse manure crisis was effectively overcome by immigrant workers and their shovels.

This (fake) story has practical implications for the climate crisis we face. It is not uncommon to hear sayings like 'those smart



A lesson from "The Great Horse Manure Crisis of 1894"

The Times in 1894 predicted that 'in 50 years, every street in London will be buried under nine feet of manure'. — Photo credit: stephenhiddell.co.uk

fellows will come up with new technologies, and everything will be fine!', 'the problem will solve itself,' there's nothing much we can do, so why bother?

Such linear thinking could be dangerous to our efforts in fighting climate change and moving towards sustainable development. It prevents us from seeing problems holistically and undermines our ability to cope with them.

Well, staying in our comfort zone is always easier than challenging the status quo.

When talking about the climate crisis, we often hear words like solar, wind, alternative energy sources, and even carbon capture and storage that ordinary people do not

easily understand. The focus has been primarily on how new technologies can overcome the climate crisis while maintaining our current lifestyles. Indeed, technological breakthroughs are crucial.

However, isn't it too risky for us to put all hope on technologies, assuming that the climate crisis is just another horse manure crisis waiting to solve itself?

In fact, the current progress of renewable energy deployment around the world has not yet given us enough confidence that we can effectively limit temperature rises to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Innovation is beyond technologies. It represents ideas

and solutions that diverge from the status quo. It does not necessarily require the most advanced technologies but new applications and combinations of what we have.

Numerous studies have clearly shown that system design and management innovations can significantly reduce emissions. Examples are increasing the use of public transportation, reducing food and material waste, increasing recycling and reuse rates, improving waste disposal and handling, etc. Yet these proven solutions do not seem to work well in our country.

Why? There might be two reasons.

First, a critical difference between these options with technological breakthroughs is that the focus is on cost reduction rather than wealth creation. Or simply put, they are 'not sexy enough to gain attention'.

Even in the face of the climate crisis, the world still largely sticks to the idea of measuring progress in terms of economic growth. Generating new wealth from climate technologies remains the central theme, with policymakers frequently making exciting claims about jobs and income creation.

Second, these options require people to change their behaviours. Everyone – including you and I – are involved, as our daily practices may have to change. Politicians and decision-makers likely shy away from options like these, considering the potential

resistance from people and associated political risks.

Can we completely phase out the use of plastic bags by adopting innovative packaging? Can we be more cautious with our food consumption, innovatively optimising the distribution systems? Can we recycle or reuse more of our old items with innovative waste management? Can these be accelerated with behavioural changes? Do we need to make substantial changes, or a slight twist will do? What interventions can be innovatively implemented by the governments to drive these changes? We may have to continuously ask questions like these and seek innovative ways to make things happen.

The urgency of the climate crisis gives us little time. Underestimating the risks can catch us off guard and lead to catastrophic consequences. We may need to take a step back to relook at the problem and see if we actually miss out on any options.

Ignoring the immediately available solutions is like putting the cart before the horse. Let's bite the bullet and do what's needed – pick up the shovels and clean up the mess.

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Expand 'Kampungku Mahir' programme to impart skills to villagers — PM

BERA: Prime Minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob wants the 'Kampungku Mahir' programme, organised by GiatMara and includes skills such as wiring and motorcycle repairs, to be extended to more villages.

He said the programme through GiatMara could benefit villagers, while enabling residents such as youths to acquire the necessary basic skills.

'Skills such as repairing motorcycles for example could be taught to the younger generation and they could later use the skills to work for others or open their own workshops.'

'I agree that the programme, which brings such benefits, be expanded to many more places and GiatMara is one of the success stories of the government via the Rural Development Ministry (KPLB),' he said.

Ismail Sabri, who is Bera MP, was speaking at the 'Moh Ngeteh and Kampungku Mahir Walkabout Programme' at Kampung Kuala Triang hall here yesterday. Also present was GiatMara chairman Datuk Dr Din Adam.

The skills programme

organised by GiatMara encompasses various training institutions as options, and the Prime Minister was told that the programme had produced 13,593 successful entrepreneurs with 40 of them attaining millionaire status now.

So far, there are 232 GiatMara branches nationwide with various skill training offered such as cooking and serving skills, mechanics, manufacturing, electrical service, hospitality, hairstyling, automotive technology, air conditioning and refrigeration technology.

'I understand 80 per cent of the individuals who underwent training at GiatMara found good jobs. When I was the Rural and Regional Development Minister, there was already much interest to join GiatMara,' he said.

At yesterday's programme, Ismail Sabri spent almost two hours mingling with and visiting the food stalls put up by GiatMara trainees and local residents, apart from checking up on village houses that received wiring service as well as motorcycle repairs carried out by students of the training institution. — Bernama

Youth and Sports Ministry backs generational endgame anti-smoking bill

KUALA LUMPUR: The Ministry of Youth and Sports (KBS) has expressed its support for the Tobacco and Smoking Products Control Bill 2022 to prohibit smoking among the younger generation born on and after January 1, 2007 in building a healthier Keluarga Malaysia (Malaysian Family).

Deputy Youth and Sports Minister Datuk Seri Ti Lian Ker said his ministry had allocated RM100,000 for organising activities to foster and raise awareness of the dangers of smoking.

'It is the responsibility of KBS not only to mould youth to become leaders but also to nurture them to have discipline and awareness that smoking

burdens themselves and the country, in terms of diseases and so on.

'KBS in spirit and in depth supports that an act be enacted to more strictly manage tobacco products,' he told reporters at the Generational Endgame Anti-Smoking (Gegar) Run event here yesterday.

On July 27, the Bill, known as the Generational Endgame to Smoking, was tabled for the first reading in the Dewan Rakyat.

Among others its highlights the ban on smoking any tobacco products or tobacco substitutes as well as the ban on the use of smoking devices, by any individual born on and after Jan 1, 2007. — Bernama



Noriah (standing) delivers a speech during a community engagement session. — Photo by Conny Banji

Kapit a destination for experiential tourism, says Tourism M'sia state chief

KAPIT: The people should support domestic tourism as part of efforts towards revitalising the industry, which was badly hit by the Covid-19 pandemic.

In stating this, Tourism Malaysia Sarawak director Noriah Jaafar suggested Kapit as one of the places in the state that could offer experiential tourism through its beautiful natural landscapes and rivers.

'After the outbreak of Covid-19, people are significantly more health-conscious. They start to go hiking, cycling and do other healthy activities to achieve a healthy lifestyle.'

'They can go and visit rural areas like Kapit where they will be able to enjoy fresh air and organic food produced by the local community,' she said when met at Rumah Gari Timbang in Sungai Kain here.

Noriah was one of 16 participants of the 'Sarawak Product Experience (SPE) Balleh Culture Experience' programme at Rumah Gari.

The programme, joined by Song District Office representative Harry Don Bosco, Kapit District Office representative Caroline John Sikie, travel agents, photographers and online page promoters, was organised by Sarawak Tourism Board (STB), and ran from Sept 7 to 9.

Noriah also suggested that the folks at 29-door Rumah Gari – renowned for producing some of the finest 'pua kumbu' in Sarawak – to look into promoting its beautiful surroundings. She said was amazed upon



STB Digital Unit manager Heidi Tay Lian Ai takes a dip in the pristine waters of Sungai Kain. — Photo by Michael Wong Siong Hang of Unzip Bintulu

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Noriah Jaafar

seeing how clean and clear the waters of Sungai Kain was.

'We are aware that many rivers in Sarawak have yellowish water. So if we go to this kind of area, we can see how clean the river is.'

'Tourists should experience this. I am quite surprised to know that we still have an unpolluted river here in Sungai Kain,' she said.

She also said visitors to Rumah Gari could get first-

hand experience of making the 'pua kumbu' from scratch using plants foraged from the forest.

This way, the people would appreciate the value of local products, Noriah added. 'As a West Malaysian, we have always thought that 'pua kumbu' is the one we can buy for RM10 at the bazaar. People often question when they see 'pua kumbu' being sold at RM100 per piece at booths during National Craft Day, for example.

'That is because they do not know the arduous process to make an authentic 'pua kumbu', she said.