

Valuable Contribution to Global Sustainable Development

*Published on July 26, 2020 by Prof Jeffrey David Sachs
The Star*



SUNWAY University is becoming a global centre of excellence in higher education thanks to the remarkable vision, energy, commitment, and generosity of its founder Tan Sri Dr Jeffrey Cheah. Universities often take centuries to achieve their preeminence and grandeur. No doubt, the benefits of time and tradition are invaluable for such long-lasting institutions. Yet Sunway University is forging a path to excellence through another means – its relentless focus on the societal challenges that will help Malaysia, Asean and the world to build the future we want.

A day spent on the Sunway campus wonderfully makes the point. At every turn throughout the campus, the students, faculty, and visitors confront the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The message is clear. We are at Sunway University to make a difference to our societies. Of course the campus itself, and indeed all Sunway City Kuala Lumpur, reflect that point in another dramatic way that is easy to overlook. Sunway City Kuala Lumpur sits on a former abandoned tin-mining site, formerly filled with toxic wastes and degraded landscapes that seemed to render the site unusable and unviable. Indeed, that is how it looked to almost everybody – citizens, bankers, public officials – but not to Jeffrey Cheah. He saw the future of world-class higher education, health care facilities, resorts and leisure activities, and he made it come to life.

In the US, I often visit Carnegie Hall, Carnegie-Mellon University, and the Carnegie Endowment for Peace, and I (and millions of others) are thereby reminded that Andrew Carnegie was not only the leading US businessman of his time, but a visionary, gifted philanthropist, and most importantly, a creator of a positive future. I know from my close work with Jeffrey Cheah and his team that I am watching the same set of skills at work in all that Jeffrey Cheah organises. He thinks big and boldly, sees opportunities that elude the rest of us, understands serious and rigorous management, and knows how to inspire others to the needed tasks.

Sunway University and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network are partnering on a new decade of action, to overcome the Covid-19 pandemic and accelerate progress towards the SDGs. There are many wonderful facets of that partnership. Sunway University hosts the Jeffrey Sachs Center for Sustainable Development, a profound honour for me and one so named despite my urging that the new centre should better be named for its illustrious founder rather than me! Like many others, I learned that one does not win such debates with such a visionary and generous partner. I am thrilled to be chair of the centre and to hold the esteemed position as Tan Sri Jeffrey Cheah Honorary Distinguished Professor at Sunway University.

Sunway's leadership on the SDGs has continued to expand. Sunway University together with SDSN will partner this year on Sunway University's Master's Degree in Sustainable Development so as to enable a fully online programme that can attract students from across Asia. This expanded online programme, building squarely on Sunway's excellent existing Master's Degree, will put Sunway University in the lead across Asia, and will strengthen Sunway's partnerships with other universities as well, including University College Dublin, which also will offer a fully online Master's Degree in Sustainable Development this year.

Sunway University is also taking the lead on several of the SDGs, notably SDG 4 (Education for All) through the SDG Academy which it hosts together with SDSN, and an upcoming global programme on Education for Sustainable Development together with SDSN and the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). Sunway will also host an effort to engage all of the Asean countries in planning a "green recovery" from Covid-19 in order to accelerate the transformation to zero-carbon energy in the future, needed for long-term climate safety. We believe that an Asean Green Deal would be a powerful complement with the European Union Green Deal adopted earlier this year. As a capstone and base of operation for all of these exciting activities, Sunway University hosts the new SDSN Asia Headquarters, joining together with the SDSN headquarters offices in New York City and Paris in the global management of the SDSN, which now has more than 1,300 member institutions in the worldwide network.

In a recent meeting this summer of university leaders with the United Nations leadership, Jeffrey Cheah explained his vision and steadfast commitment to the SDGs to UN Deputy Secretary General Amina Mohammed. This was a very happy occasion for me. The Deputy Secretary General and one hundred university leaders around the world got to hear first-hand of the powerful vision and determination of Jeffrey Cheah to contribute to a better life throughout the world. All were inspired by his words, which helped on that day to forge an even more powerful global alliance of universities around the world on behalf of the world's shared Goals.

About Prof Jeffrey David Sachs



Honorary Jeffery Cheah Distinguished Professor

A recent appointee to the esteemable line-up of Jeffrey Cheah Distinguished Professors, world renowned economist Prof Jeffrey Sachs, director of the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network and bestselling author is one of the world's most influential experts on sustainable economic development and the fight against poverty.

For more than a quarter century, Sachs has advised dozens of heads of states and governments on economic strategy. He is also chairman of the Jeffrey Sachs Center on Sustainable Development at Sunway University, which was launched in 2016, and is the special advisor to United Nations Secretary-General on sustainable development.

Brought to you by Jeffrey Cheah Foundation in conjunction with its 10th anniversary.