

Foreword

I warmly welcome the publication of this important collection of expert essays following the launch of the Smart Villages Initiative on 27 January 2015, hosted by the University of Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS – Universiti Malaysia Sarawak) in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia. The launch was attended by the Honourable Datuk Dr Erwin Ebin, Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation, Sarawak; Tan Sri Dr Ahmad Tajuddin Ali, President of the Malaysian Academy of Sciences (Akademi Sains Malaysia); the Honourable Datuk Haji Talib Zulpilip, Chairman of Sarawak Economic Development Corporation; and Professor Dato' Dr Mohamad Kadim Suaidi, Vice-Chancellor of UNIMAS.

A highly successful workshop followed the launch, in which the Malaysian Academy of Sciences played a key role. The Kuching workshop attracted participants from a wide range of countries, including Cambodia, Indonesia, India, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, as well as Canada and several countries in Africa and Europe. It also coincided with Malaysia's 2015 chairmanship of ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Malaysia has been in the vanguard of rural electrification, and today's high-tech smart villages under construction are improving the lives of numerous rural families, while promoting environmental sustainability. Estimates show that today, only 1.3 per cent of the rural population of Malaysia is without electricity.

Early steps towards electrification were taken shortly after the Second World War, as pointed out by Tan Sri Ir Ahmad Zaidee Laidin, chair of the organising committee of the workshop, in his essay. Building blocks of the Government Transformation Programme were introduced in 2010, providing a roadmap towards achieving the status of developed country by 2020.

Strong links exist between Malaysia and the United Kingdom, sustained by the many highly talented students from Malaysia who have studied at British universities, Cambridge among them.

I am particularly delighted to note that the Cambridge Malaysian Education and Development Trust (CMEDT), which was founded in 2010 under the chairmanship of the Honourable Dato' Sri Mohamad Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak, Prime Minister of Malaysia, has played a formative part in enabling this new Smart Villages Initiative to get off the ground,



SMART VILLAGES

together with the Malaysian Commonwealth Studies Centre at Cambridge (MCSC), founded by the Honourable Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad, formerly Prime Minister of Malaysia.

I commend these essays to everyone concerned about energy for development, and in particular to policy makers and decision takers as we seek to lift the disadvantaged in our communities out of the bottom billion.

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