



Our youth inspire hope



WILDLIFE MATTERS

BY DIONYSIUS SHARMA

WHEN we explore the ocean of leadership, we find a common theme in almost everything that has been written or said on this – that a good leader has the ability to be an effective communicator.

Here is why: the person who can formulate and communicate the best argument almost always wins. If you sharpen your capacity to think and to communicate as a consequence of writing, you are better armed. The pen is mightier than the sword, as the saying goes. This is no cliché. Ideas change the world, particularly when they are written.

So, is the ability to be an effective communicator something that is dictated by age? An incident not long ago changed my thoughts on this.

I was interviewed by a junior reporter who was in primary school during a WWF-Malaysia event in Malacca. He barely came up to my shoulders, and yet confidently asked me clear and relevant questions on conservation efforts. Trust me when I say that I've met plenty of incredible leaders who are excellent communicators throughout my career. However, none have impressed me as much as the youth of today. I will always remember this junior reporter, who stood with the rest of our media, rooted in his mission to speak up and ask me his list of questions.

This really strengthened my conviction that youth really are the next generation of leaders.

As we all know, the role of communications in everything we do today has evolved with time. The digital age has brought with it a myriad of new ways in communicating, and the strata of society at the forefront of this digital revolution are today's youth.

The role of youth in changing the future of the world is more pertinent now than ever. Youth have had a commanding presence that demands our attention, especially in times of dire need. Across the years, they have used their voices to press for much needed change. The youth movement in the United States calling for greater gun control is testament to the power of youth in changing the course of policies, events and even history itself.

The world stopped and paid attention. This is precisely why Sembang@WWF was born four years ago, as we recognised the value of communications as an effective and powerful tool to raise awareness on conservation among the younger generation. Sembang@WWF is a storytelling platform for all things conservation, and it provides a space for youth to speak out and stand up for environmental issues close to their hearts.

This year, Sembang@WWF chose tiger conservation as a theme for discussion. The world is now home to just 3,890 tigers that can only be found in 13 tiger-range countries. This is a drastic decrease from an estimated 100,000 tigers close to a century ago.

The half-day event held on April 21 in conjunction with Earth Day was both inspiring and uplifting. We saw speakers between the ages of 12 and 21 take to the stage to deliver compelling, well-researched and relevant talks on tiger

conservation. The audience listened in rapt attention as speakers shared facts on the Malayan tiger, why Malaysians need to care about tiger conservation, and how youth can use their voice to support conservation efforts.

There are only as few as 250-340 tigers left in the wild in Malaysia. Poaching and the illegal wildlife trade are one of the most urgent and critical threats to the survival of this majestic species that is our national symbol of pride.

Youth have an innate ability to communicate effectively, especially when they are passionate and invested in issues that are close to their heart. The young adults we met at Sembang@WWF truly strike us as future conservationists, who will stand up for our Earth when we need to the most.

Listening to the younger generation speak up for tigers has reignited that flame in all of us at WWF-Malaysia to do more and keep fighting for the survival of our tigers. It also tells us that we've been doing something right, if we've managed to touch the hearts of these young adults. This generation of young, vibrant and energetic Malaysians gives us hope that the future is indeed brighter than we imagine it to be. It gives us hope that the road towards better days in conservation is being paved as we speak.

This only tells me that the youth of today are not only leaders of tomorrow – they are the leaders of this present moment and beyond. So thank you, the youth of Malaysia, for inspiring us.

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SUMMARIES

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