

Social Cohesion And National Unity: Equality, Fairness and Inclusion

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Address to the Twelfth Malaysia Plan Kick-Off Conference,
Putrajaya, 1 July 2019.

Why is social cohesion vital?

- Essential for sustaining development
 - Country experiences prove that social unrest hinders human development, economic dynamism
- A more developed and informed society → increased demands on government, more conscious of rights and opportunities
 - Lack of basic needs can affect citizens' sense of belonging
 - Government policies must be more attuned to delivering basic needs
- Age of social media → easy for disinformation and hate speech to spread
 - Need for regulation, protection of rights and dignity

Key issues and challenges

Social cohesion and national unity

- National unity: ultimate objective of the New Economic Policy (1971)
- Central to Rukunegara
- Enduring priorities → new impetus and urgency
- Should be pursued through a clear, systematic, and constructive set of policies guided by the principles of **equality**, **fairness** and **inclusion**.

1. **Equality**: foundation for upholding basic rights, providing basic needs and securing common ground

- Challenges: establish a rights-based system for (1) safeguarding equality and dignity and (2) providing basic needs to all, regardless of identity

2. **Fairness**: principle for safeguarding opportunity and promoting participation

- Challenge: institute fair employment law and fair employment practices, take Bumiputera economic community to the next level

3. **Inclusion**: basis for forming national identity, fostering diversity and building solidarity

- Challenge: consolidate pluralist national identity, foster interaction and understanding across ethnicity, culture, religion

Social cohesion in recent years

- Uneven treatment in recent Malaysia Plans
 - 10MP: minimal mention
 - 11MP: sub-theme under “Enhancing wellbeing for all” overarching thrust
 - Focused on social integration in sports, volunteerism, education, arts and culture and charity
 - Lead programme: Kelab Rukun Negara in schools
 - Mid-term Review of 11MP
 - Formation of Unity Council
- National Unity Consultative Council
 - Founded 2013, completed Blueprint November 2015 → made 9 proposals
 - Not incorporated into 11MP
 - Unity Blueprint being considered again

Principles, objectives and implementation basics

Principle	Policy objectives	Key areas of intervention	Features of implementation
Equality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guarantee rights and defend dignity • Provide basic needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Recognition of rights and appreciation of equality ❖ Prohibition of hate speech and protection of dignity ❖ Basic education, basic income, healthcare, social protection, housing 	
Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take Bumiputera economic community to the next level • Regulate fair employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Higher education, employment, enterprise development ❖ Employment: recruitment, promotion, remuneration 	
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate national identity • Foster interaction and understanding across ethnicity, culture, religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ National leadership ❖ Cultural policy ❖ Education institutions 	

Taking the Bumiputera economic community to the next level

- Reemphasis on developing capability, competitiveness, confidence
 - Key to achieving NEP’s second prong – social restructuring – established as a fundamental of national unity
- Proposals for moving forward
 1. Maintain focus on the **specific sectors** involved:
 - (i) higher education – need-based assistance can effectively target the disadvantaged, build capability, and help next generation to move up the social ladder
 - (ii) employment in high-skilled, professional and managerial positions
 - (iii) enterprise development – broad-based promotion of capability is especially important
 - (iv) wealth and property ownership
 2. On **sector-by-sector** basis, incorporate more need- and merit-based selection to
 - ➔ Foster fairness in the system (especially expanding preference for the disadvantaged regardless of race)
 - ➔ Enhance Bumiputera capability development
 3. Devise **sector-specific, long-term strategies**
 - ➔ Extending from ongoing priorities and some commitments in the MTR of 11MP:
 - Pro-B40 policies – above all, in **education**
 - “multi-tier exit policy” for Vendor Development Programme

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Fairness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Take Bumiputera economic community to the next level • Regulate fair employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Higher education, employment, enterprise development ❖ Employment: recruitment, promotion, remuneration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Policy enhancement through incorporating need and merit, devising systematic, long-term, and sector-specific policies ➤ Fair employment legislation + enforcement-oversight body (Fair Employment Commission)
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consolidate national identity • Foster interaction and understanding across ethnicity, culture, religion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ National leadership ❖ Cultural policy ❖ Education institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Nation-centred political culture ➤ Pluralist outlook and emphasis on ethnic, cultural, religious diversity ➤ Syllabus content and programmes promoting meaningful and diverse interactions ➤ National Unity Council

Conclusion

Social cohesion and national unity

→ Renewed impetus, with new opportunities and challenges

Moving forward

1. **Equality** in basic rights, needs, dignity

- Guarantee of basic rights, provision of basic needs, defense of dignity

2. **Fairness** in opportunity and participation

- Systematic, sector-by-sector reforms to take Bumiputera economic community to the next level
- Fair employment – balancing opportunity and diversity

3. **Inclusion** in national identity

- Multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious character
 - Diversity in interactions → fostering understanding
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