



ProSPER.Net Leadership Programme: Building Transformational Leadership Towards the SDGs – June 29th to July 5th 2017, Bangkok

**Dr Subarna Sivapalan
Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS,
Malaysia
FELLOW, ProSPER.Net LP**



Leadership Reflection

I must admit that while I have been involved in community based ESD and SD research, I feel I have much to learn in understanding and applying leadership competences in SD and ESD at the community level. Thus far, my application of leadership competences in these situations have been based mostly on readings and logic. Most of the time too, the leadership decisions and interventions I undertake are by trial and error.

The period from June 29th 2017 to July 5th 2017 will certainly be an unforgettable one for me. These dates mark my participation as a Fellow of the ProSPER.Net Leadership Programme on *Building Transformative Leadership towards the Sustainable Development Goals*, organized by United Nations University Institute for the Advanced Study of Sustainability under its ProSPER.Net initiative, and hosted by Chulalongkorn University, Thailand. The leadership programme was developed with the following objectives:

1. To improve the thinking process of transformational leadership through creative thinking, and searching for alternative solutions
2. To gain communication skills and enhance the capacity for decision making through interpersonal active learning and group working environments
3. To obtain abilities for project planning, management, and assessment through problem based learning challenges in the community
4. To summarize the concepts and examples of sustainable development and initiatives in the community

As the LP draws to an end today, I would like to take the opportunity to briefly reflect on the activities that were conducted during the programme, and my key take away messages from the programme.

The Leadership Programme has been instrumental in helping me understand the whole spectrum of leadership development within the context of sustainability. My participation at the LP has been pivotal in enabling me to gain knowledge and competences on the specific skill sets needed to lead multi-stakeholder community level projects.

The Leadership Programme has also been a very transformative experience for me. At the professional level particularly, I have been able to gain valuable input on the transformational leadership competences to strategically and sustainably address the myriad of challenges that are associated with the successful implementation of community based SD and ESD projects, particularly those related to SDG areas.

The expert lecture sessions on the 5Ps, PEOPLE, PROSPERITY, PEACE, PARTNERSHIP and PLANET, as well as the field trips to local communities at the Ao Udom Coastal Development Zone, Panas Nikom Environmentally Sustainable City, and the Baan Rangsi Bangkok City Rooftop Farm enabled me to reflect upon and draw parallels with my ongoing work with local communities in Malaysia.

As I have also started working with projects involving international communities in Japan and Australia, the LP experience has shown me how best I can coordinate and lead multi nation projects.

At the personal level, the LP experience has given me an opportunity to reflect and act upon, how I, as an individual, can rise up to meet the everyday challenges of SD.

Through my participation in the Leadership Programme, I have come to realize that one of the challenges I face as a leader is in strategizing sustainable ways in which all the key stakeholders of community research projects I lead can be effectively engaged to come up with a common plan and recommendations for the issues explored.

Given the diversity of the stakeholders, the other challenge has been in ensuring all stakeholders, particularly the community, get equal access to contributing their ideas on the project. Another challenge I face is in getting the community to bravely come forward with problems they face in relation to their energy and sanitation woes, given the sensitivities related to the issue.

Prior to attending the leadership programme, my leadership solution to these predicaments faced by the communities was for me communicating on behalf of the community, with the community's consent and attendance. However, this is an unsustainable solution for the long run, as the voices of the community members are being channeled through me, instead of it being channeled by the communities directly.

Using the experiences and lessons learned from the LP, and the engagements I have had with the community leaders during my visits to the local communities in Thailand, I have come to realize that these strategies that I have employed could further be optimized through the implementation of strategies such as Transformative Scenario Planning and Gaia, which I hope to trial once I am back.

As I draw an end to this reflection, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank UNU-IAS, ProSPER.Net, Chulalongkorn University, the Ministry of Environment Japan, experts, and resource persons for the generosity and hospitality throughout the duration of the programme.

To all Fellows of the Leadership Programme, sincere thanks to you all for your friendship, and it is my hope that we, as leaders, continue to work together within our local contexts and across our contexts to spread awareness on the importance of sustainable transformations towards the realization of the SDGs.

LET US LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND.

- Subarna Sivapalan, PhD-

July 5th 2017