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Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:
Perspectives from Asia and Europe



Interview | Conducted by Edward Lim Xun Qian

Interview with Professor Alan Chan, Vice-President (Alumni and Advancement), Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

Professor Alan Chan is Chairman of the NTU Advisory Committee for International Engagement (ACIE). The committee comprises faculty and administrative representatives from different colleges, schools, departments overseeing matters pertaining to academic and student affairs, research, and administrative functions. The charge that has been entrusted to ACIE, in our President's words, is "to work with our stakeholders and the campus community to identify the key strengths and challenges in our international activities; to develop ideas for streamlining principles and processes as we create, support and sustain activities; to establish a greater level of communication and coordination among stakeholders of international programmes and within the NTU community; and to explore internal and external mechanisms to leverage new opportunities that are aligned with NTU's strategic focus."



Professor Alan Chan
Vice-President (Alumni and Advancement),
Nanyang Technological University (NTU)

What is the direction that NTU is heading towards in terms of internationalisation?

NTU is already a global university and to be more precise, we are a global comprehensive research-intensive university. So, when you talk about internationalisation, it is not as if you are starting from zero and you want to change into something that is completely different. So, it's really a matter of deepening our networks with other universities and research organisations to benefit our students, enhance both education and research. Whatever policy or strategy we adopt, it will be in the context of the kind of university that we are and the kind of excellence that we want to achieve.

What will the students and faculty get out of this?

The idea is to provide a more global kind of a learning experience for our students. By going overseas, by exposing yourself to a different culture, by

learning from people outside of Singapore, we will be learning from a different academic environment that will contribute to an expanded intellectual horizon.

How do you think the 17 UN SDGs can be aligned with NTU's internationalisation?

Being in line with the SDGs will require collaboration in research and that certainly aligns well with the university's general direction of working with other regional universities and research organisations.

If you look at climate change for example, it's not something that any one particular, individual or even country can use. It does require global collaboration and research plays a very important role in addressing some of the grand challenges that we face today. Beyond that, global collaboration will also be important to address other development goals such as alleviating hunger. Many of these goals would require policy contribution, research breakthroughs and a lot of ethical and social questions need to be raised. For example, when we think about genetically modified food, which may contribute to alleviating hunger, it also raises other questions, and these issues will be best addressed through international collaboration. The university as a global partner in many networks and alliances can also take the initiative to gather people together.

Large groups of our students go on community involvement projects to build houses for developing countries and our research centres help to engineer clean water for these countries. Is this an example of working towards SDGs as well?

For our research centres to make an impact, they must have the necessary "know-how", that's why research is important. Then you can export the research to other countries and achieve those goals. We also need to work with the philanthropic organisations. Without the support of philanthropy for example, we would not have been able to go to Sri Lanka and create clean water for the community.

Will there be a new policy for NTU's internationalisation? If there is something new, you'd like to push for in the next 3 years, what will it be?

We have recently been admitted to the World Economic Forum with a community known as the Global University Leaders' Forum which NTU have been admitted into last year. The Global University Leaders Forum (GULF) community is comprised of the presidents of 28 of the world's top universities. It has two major roles, acting as a community to address educational, scientific and research agendas, and as an advisory body providing intellectual stewardship to the World Economic Forum. So, this a very influential group and I think the university can make an even greater impact on policies, industry and technology directions through this group. I would want to encourage and see the university playing a more central role in this particular network. We are also a new member of the Association of Pacific Rim Universities, which is also a very useful international university network. Through these alliances we can make an even greater impact globally as a university.

We also have 50 alumni associations outside of Singapore in many parts of the

world where students or alumni travelling overseas can link up with their university community which will help them to ease into the environment.

About the interviewer:

Edward was elected twice as the President of the Nanyang Technological University Students' Union (NTUSU). As President, he launched an initiative entitled The First Step, supported by Singapore's Education Minister Mr Ong Ye Kung and CEOs, which helped students get a better head start at their careers beyond academic performance. He has also been an invited speaker at the African Students and Youth Summit and was also invited to 3 of Singapore's television programmes to represent youth voices. Edward was Chairman of NTU Students' Fund, a million-dollar fund that supports financially challenged students through their education and he currently serves on the University Board of Discipline as a member. He is currently a recipient of the prestigious Nanyang Scholarship and is reading a Bachelor of Mechanical Engineering with a Second Major in Business Analytics.