



Empowering Future Leaders: Advancing the SDGs through University-Led Student Initiatives for Enduring Relevance in Higher Education

Heriot-Watt University Malaysia – EmPOWER Programme

Authors

Renuga Tharuma Rethinam Saraswathy Nalatambi Lee J. Peter

Siti Nuralia Mohd Nazor

Overview

The EmPOWER Programme bridges academic learning with real-world challenges through:

- Experiential learning, leadership, and civic engagement.
- Transferable skills for the modern workforce.
- IMPACT Projects 2024: Building Flourishing Communities.
- Aligned with the United Nations SDGs.
- Student-led initiatives fostering leadership and responsibility.



Strategic Partnerships

HWUM Students collaborated with a diverse range of strategic partners (see Table 1 on the poster), including NGOs, advocacy groups, and social enterprises, focusing on key community challenges.

NGO	Main Focus Area	Key SDG(s)	Key Skills Developed
Malaysia Association of Blind (MAB)	Blind support and education	4 & 10	Sensitivity, volunteerism
Fugee School	Refugee education	4 & 16	Education planning, empathy
fayasan Chow Kit (YCK)	Safe spaces for at-risk youth	1,3&10	Community engagement, advocacy
Malaysia Federation of Deaf (MFD)	Deaf awareness and inclusion	3 & 10	Accessibility, diversity leadership
Seven Tea One	Inclusive employment	8 & 10	Social enterprise, empathy
ayadiri	Vocational upskilling	1,8&10	Logistics, training
Epic Homes	Indigenous housing	1 & 11	Leadership, social entrepreneurship
PAWS	Animal welfare	15	Outreach, campaigning

Selected Findings – Impact Projects 2024

Example 1: Student Group 'Harmony in Hands' Supporting the Malaysia Federation of the Deaf

Key Highlights:

- Collaborative Crowdfunding Project
 Students worked with MFD to raise awareness
 on Malaysian Sign Language and Deaf culture.
- Inclusive Community Engagement
 Activities included a silent film night, sign language challenges, and preschool visits—fostering unity between Deaf and hearing communities.

Outcome

The project enhanced leadership, communication, and critical thinking, reflecting EmPOWER Programme's mission for experiential learning.





Selected Findings – Impact Projects 2024

Example 2: Student Group 'The Catalysts of Change' Supporting Yayasan Chow Kit, Kuala Lumpur

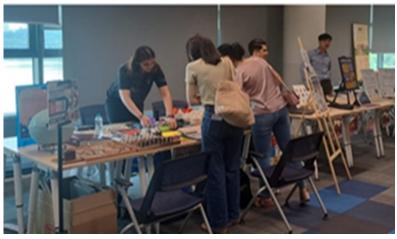
Key Highlights:

- Student-Led Fundraising Initiative
 Partnered with Tutti Frutti to support children in need, including cancer patient
 Madya, through Yayasan Chow Kit.
- On-Campus Yoghurt Stand
 Operated a fundraising booth at HWUM, combining entrepreneurship with social purpose.

Outcome

Students cultivated teamwork, adaptability, and compassion—aligning with EmPOWER Programme's goal of nurturing future-ready leaders.





Selected Findings – Impact Projects 2024

Example 3: Student Group 'Footie for Fugee 'Supporting Fugee School, Kuala Lumpur

Key Highlights:

 Charity Football Match for Fugee School

Organised by students to raise RM7,000 in support of refugee education.

- Sport as a Tool for Social Change
 Demonstrated how football can unite
 communities and promote meaningful
 causes.
- Outcome
 Strengthened civic responsibility,
 resilience, and leadership among HWUM students.





Analysis

Element	What Students Gain	Career & Societal Impact
Skill Development	Project planning, teamwork, fundraising, stakeholder management	Directly transferable to careers Better readiness for professional environments
Real-World Engagement	Working with NGOs, industry partners, communities	
SDG Alignment	Projects map to critical global goals	Inculcates global awareness & solutions mindset
Reflection & Recognition	IMPACT Transcripts provide transcripted proof of holistic skills	Makes graduates stand out to employers
Adaptive Learning	Navigating unpredictable VUCA situations	Builds resilience and flexibility

Conclusion

Final Conclusion: The Impact of the Impact Projects 2024 under the EmPOWER Programme

- The Impact Projects 2024 blends academic learning with real-world purpose—empowering students to become changemakers, not just graduates.
- A model for university-led initiatives that promote **leadership**, **sustainability**, and **social impact**.
- **2025** PIEoneer Awards Finalist *Progressive Education Delivery*
- Organised by The PIE News, sponsored by QS
- Only Malaysian university shortlisted
- Recognised for innovation, global citizenship, and leadership development