

# **The Effect Of Economic Transformation Programme On The Accounting Information Systems Of An Agricultural Company: An Organisational Change Perspective**

**Kamaruzzaman Muhammad**

Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia  
kamaruzzaman@salam.uitm.edu.my

**Nor'Azam Mastuki**

Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia  
Noraz562@salam.uitm.edu.my

**Faizah Darus**

Universiti Teknologi MARA  
Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia  
faiza634@salam.uitm.edu.my

## **ABSTRACT**

Organisational change arises when an organisation has undergone a transformation in its operational structure and activities which are departure from the norm as a result of new external and internal forces. This paper presents the findings of an investigation on an organisational change within a group of agriculture companies (the Group) following the implementation of Economic Transformation Programme by the Malaysian government. Using content analyses and structured interviews, this study found that following ETP, the Group has since transformed its business model and corporate structure. The business model has changed from being a developer of commercial plantations to a globally integrated and diversified agriculture business. The Group's organisational structure has been rearranged and reclassified into six business clusters to reflect its main business activities. The six business clusters are palm upstream, palm downstream, research and development and agriculture service, rubber, sugar and, transport, logistics and marketing. In accommodating the requirements of the new business model and corporate structure, the accounting information systems have experienced a major transformation of which new system has been developed and existing system has been upgraded and integrated with the new system. The findings in this study provide some understanding on the effect of government policy on the accounting information systems of the group and subsequently provide guidelines to other companies of the same nature on the issues and the strategies to overcome such issues.

**Key words:** Organisational change, Economic Transformation Programme, accounting information system, corporate structure, business model, agricultural company.

## INTRODUCTION

Economic Transformation Programme (ETP), which was launched on 21 September 2010, is a bold new approach by the Malaysian government in order to increase the economy and raise the standard of living. Through ETP, the government is determined to continue the commitment to become a developed country with gross national income (GNI) per capita from USD6,700 or RM23,700 in 2009 to more than USD15,000 or RM48,000 in 2020 meeting the World Bank's threshold for high income nation. It is the first time that any effort of this kind has been undertaken in the history of Malaysia, or of any other developed nation (PEMANDU, 2009). ETP provides strong emphasis on a few key economic growth areas which identified as 12 National Key Economic Areas (NKEAs) as illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1 identifies the 12 NKEAs representing the economic sectors that capable to contribute to the Malaysian GNI improvement significantly through attracting more investments and provide more jobs opportunities. Under the ETP, PEMANDU has identified 131 entry point projects (EPPs) and 60 business opportunities to be implemented to achieve the vision 2020's goal. Its initiatives are centred on raising Malaysian companies' competitiveness through implementation of SRIs to complement focus of the 12 NKEAs. The Malaysia's global competitive is to be achieved through implementation of 37 policy measure which subsequently grouped under into six strategic initiatives. The six SRIs are (i) Competition, standards and liberalisation (CSL), (ii) Public finance reform, (iii) Public service delivery, (iv) Narrowing disparity, (v) Government's role in business and (vi) Human capital development. The main objective of the SRIs is to create an efficient, competitive and business-friendly environment that will allow Malaysia and Malaysian companies to be world-class, local champions to thrive and attract valuable foreign investment (PEMANDU, 2010).

Under the ETP, Malaysian government will serve as a facilitator where the main players are the private sectors. They are entrusted to play a major role and effectively to develop the national economy and subsequently contribute to achieving the vision 2020 and it is projected that the objectives of vision 2020 will be achieved if GNI grows by 6% per annum.

**Figure 1: 12 NKEAs under ETP**



Malaysian economy is expected to undergo significant transformation towards a service-based economy targeted to create more than 3.3 million new jobs opportunities to ensure successful implementation of the ETP by 2020. It is expected that companies in the industry under the scope of ETP will experience a significant transformation within their organisation as a reaction of the high expectation of ETP. Such transformations from the affected companies are eminent to support achieving the ETP's target.

This study seeks to examine the transformations occurring in one of the affected companies. Specifically, this study aims to examine the impact of organisational change on the accounting information systems following the implementation of ETP by the Malaysian government. This study aims to examine such impact on a group of agriculture companies (the company) that is involved in palm oil business. The findings in this study provide some understanding on the effect of government policy on the accounting information systems of the group and subsequently provide guidelines to other companies of the same nature on the issues and the strategies to overcome such issues. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a literature review on organisational change. Section 3 explains the case study. The findings are presented in section 4. The conclusion is provided in the last section.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

From the viewpoint of a contextualism, a change occurs from the results of institutional pressures, isomorphisms and routines (Quattrone and Hopper, 2011). Leifer (1989) refers change as a normal and simply a natural response to environmental and internal conditions. Change often appears as a normal part of life includes the capacity to change, particularly in the shift from a mechanistic to an organic paradigm, reflecting the need to embrace flexibility in less certain environments (Daft, 1998). A change can not only occur in individuals but also within an organisation as studies have also shown that a change can also occur in an organisation (Nelson, 2003), often known as organisational change.

Organisational change arises when an organisation has undergone a transformation in its operational structure and activities which is seen as a departure from the norm and response to environmental and internal conditions.

It is conceptualised as moving from the status quo to a new, desired, configuration to better match the environment (Nelson, 2003). To achieve such transformation, successful management of change to any organisation is crucial to survive and succeed in the present highly competitive and continuously evolving business environment. However, what constitutes an organisational change is often taken for granted despite the large number of studies having conducted on why and how organisation change occurs (Innes and Mitchell, 1990; Cooper, 1990; Pettigrew et al., 1992; Scapens and Roberts, 1993; Argyris and Kaplan, 1994; Anderson, 1995; Shields, 1995; Anderson and Young, 1999).

Organisational change can be caused by external environments such as policy imposed by government for a particular industry or a change in standards and procedures imposed by the regulatory. This is consistent with the coercive isomorphism that underlies in the institutional theory where an organisation is often pressured by institution upon which they depend on externally (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983) such as the standard setters to adhere to their requirement. Organisational change can also be caused by internal environments occurring within a company's controllable capacity or action such as implementation of new business strategies and alteration of major sections of a the group due to pressure of competitive edge. This is consistent with the mimetic theory that argues there is tendency for an organisation to imitate another organisation's structure due to the belief that the structure of the latter organisation is beneficial. Of which, in this situation, mimicking the action of another organisation is perceived as a legitimate way of becoming a safe way to proceed. The impact of organisational change in a group when applied accordingly, often results with desirable consequences for users, organisations, and other interested parties and ultimately, organisational success.

Wanderley et al. (2011) describe the process of organisational change involve three levels that move in a sequential manner from the economic and political level to the organisational field level and subsequently, organisational level. The economic and political level is widely accepted norms and principles that are influenced by politically developed bodies such as law and regulation and accounting principle. These widely accepted norms and principles tend to be strongly influenced by powerful power distribution and represent the macro context for resource allocation (Dillard et al., 2004; Wickramasinghe and Alawattage, 2007). The second level is the organisational field level which consists of industry groups and professional bodies. The economic and political level enters the organisational field level through the organisational field criteria that provides legitimacy for the actions at the organisational field level (Dillard et al., 2004). The practices in the organisational field level become the legitimacy regulative base for action at the organisational level. At the organisational level, an organisation develops new organisational practices which are subsequently copied by other organisations at a later period (Wickramasinghe and Alawattage, 2007).

Studies have also shown that organisational change within the organisation often take place when a new environment is being introduced (Tsamenyi et. al.,

2006; Lukka, 2007; Wanderly et. al, 2011). This is because the organisation as well as humans often seen as contradictory and complicated towards the new environment and such contradictions serve as a basis for a constant challenge and if it gets responded, can help humans to develop and create successful organisational change within an organisation. In other words, these contradictions would drive, empower and enable changes and development in an organisation. Contradictions cannot disappear but constantly re-generated and what one can do is to relate to them and handle them (Seo and Creed, 2002; Easterby-Smith and Lyles, 2003). Arguably, in the context of this study, the adoption of a government policy may lead to institutional contradictions which subsequently influence the organisational operations and human praxis within an agriculture company. Until these institutional contradictions are resolved, the organisational change within an organisation would not be successful.

A review of the organisational change literature has also shown that most of the studies focus on organisational change and management accounting perspective. These studies examine the impact on the organisational stability after a new management accounting techniques such Balanced Scorecard and Activity based Costing is introduced (Cooper, 1990; Soin et al, 2002). The results of these studies are mixed where the new management accounting practice became institutionalise with significant changes of the rules and routines in the organisations while other studies found no significant changes (Markus and Pfeffer, 1983; Argyris and Kaplan, 1994; Anderson, 1995; Shields, 1995; Anderson and Young, 1999). These studies however, were mainly conducted in a management accounting perspective which findings could not be generalised to a study that examines organisational change caused by the policy of government particularly on the accounting information systems structure. Examining such issue may provide new findings from a different perspective that contribute to the organisational change literature.

From the information systems perspective, at the organisational level, one however could pose a question. Does economic and political level such as a government's policy provide an impact of an organisation and if yes, what impact does the policy has on the accounting information systems? Previous studies of organisational change provide some evidences that the adoption of a new management accounting system change significantly the patterns of behaviour among humans within an organisation (Innes and Mitchell, 1990; Cooper, 1990; Pettigrew et al., 1992; Scapens and Roberts, 1993; Argyris and Kaplan, 1994; Anderson, 1995; Shields, 1995; Anderson and Young, 1999). Other studies examine human resistance to accounting change (Markus, 1983; Dent, 1991; Scapens and Roberts, 1993) and the role of technology in the implementation of new accounting systems (Markus and Pfeffer, 1983; Orlikowski and Robey, 1991; Orlikowski, 1992). The findings of these studies illustrate the complex socio-technical forces that influence the process of organisational change. These studies were mostly conducted in the developed countries.

Studies in the information systems literature have examined the link between organisational change and information systems (Fry, 1982; Bakopoulos, 1985; Culnan, 1986; Markus and Robey, 1988). These studies raised the concern of the relationship between organisational change and information technology. Markus and Robey (1988) argued that most of the findings in these studies could not provide strong generalisability of these two variables due to several academic disciplines adopting different concepts and theoretical and methodological biases. These studies however focus on the impact of information systems on organisational change. For example: Leavitt and Whisler (1985) suggested that information systems would shape the organisations into recentralise and the nature of managerial jobs would change in terms of middle management would be replaced by top management elite. Similar suggestion was proposed by Robey (1977) and Attewell and Rule (1984). These studies however, focus mainly on the impact of information systems on organisational change. This study aims to examine the impact of organisational change on information systems particularly on the accounting information systems.

## **THE CASE STUDY**

### **The Establishment of FELDA**

This study chose FELDA Global Ventures Holdings Bhd (FGV) as the case study. FGV was incorporated in Malaysia as a private limited the group in 2007. The the group was initially operated as a commercial arm of FELDA and subsequently became a public listed the group on 28 June 2012. FGV, a Malaysian based the group is part of the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) group operating across North America, Europe, Asia and Australia. The group is the world's largest palm oil producer and oil palm operator based on planted hectares, the world's largest Crude Palm Oil (CPO) producer and the second largest of palm oil refiner in Malaysia. In 2012, FGV is entrusted to take responsibility from FELDA to lead and undertake the business of FELDA group.

FGV is an investment holding the group with investment mainly in oil palm plantation and related downstream and support activities which have been identified as one of the 12 NKEAs. FGV is affected through the implementation of 8 Entry Point Projects (EPP) and as such, ETP has redirect palm oil companies in Malaysia including FGV to a new focus to improve the upstream productivity and increasing downstream expansion such as processed food, biodiesel, oleo derivatives among others (Yuan May, 2012).

As of 2010, Malaysia's palm oil industry is the fourth largest contributor to the Malaysia economy and contributed RM53 billions of Gross National Income (GNI). The industry spans the value chain from upstream plantations to downstream processing which currently remain heavily skewed towards upstream activities. Through ETP, oil palm sector is expected to enhance upstream productivity and capture the full potential of existing downstream opportunities. The industry is

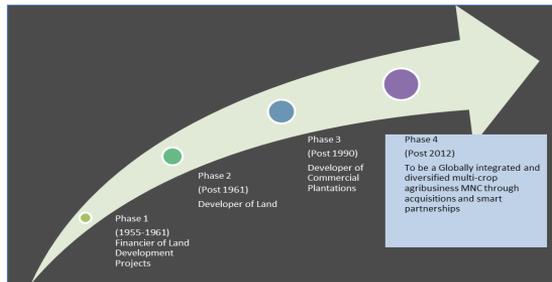
targeted to raise total GNI contribution to RM178 billion by 2020.

The Malaysian government under ETP has also identified FGV as one of the companies to be listed in Bursa Malaysia in reducing the government's participation in business and improves liquidity in capital market . The listing of Government-owned FGV in June 2012 has raised a total of RM9.93 billion initial public offering (IPO)'s proceed and is recorded to be one of the world's largest public floats during the year.

### The Business Model of FELDA

At the early stage of establishment in 1956, FELDA did not have a business model that best suited the objective of the company. Within limited resources available, the the group adopted a business model that capable to balance between the interests of the state government and the expectation of the federal authorities in raising the living standard of the public at large. The group has grown very far with the initial function as merely a financier to the land development project to now a public listed the group that aimed to be a competitive global player involving in diversified multi-crop agribusiness multi-national company. Over a period of 50 years of establishment, the group has effectively played its role in eradicating poverty among the rural poor through various stages of business models development which can be grouped into the business model pre ETP and the business model post ETP as shown in Figure 3.

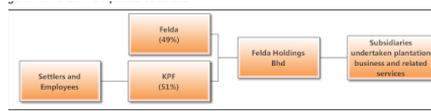
Figure 3: Business model of FELDA and FGV



### The Corporate Structure of FELDA

In 1995, the establishment of FELDA Holdings Bhd (FHB) has seen the corporate structure of the FELDA group before ETP being structured as shown in Figure 4. Figure 4 shows that FHB is controlled by FELDA (49 percent) and KPF (51 percent). The role of FHB is to undertake the group's business activities as commercial plantation developer and related plantations activities. The corporate structure remains the same until the launching of ETP in 2010.

**Figure 4: Pre-ETP Corporate structure**



Starting from 2012, FGV is entrusted to lead the group to be a top global player, to sustain earning and continue to pay out favourable dividends rate and thus supporting the ETP target to increase GNI per capita of the nation. To meet the target and to be more focus, FELDA group had undergone a series of restructuring to the corporate structure. The restructuring process started off with acquiring 49 percent of the share interest in FHB from FELDA in 2012 as shown in Figure 5 and subsequently acquiring the remaining 51 percent from KPF in 2013, making FGV as the sole controlling interest in FHB as shown in Figure 6. Of consequence, the group has to adopt a new business model after ETP which subsequently required the corporate structure of the group to be restructured. Evidently, the new corporate structure has changed significantly compared to the corporate structure before ETP in 2010. The new corporate structure now consists of six business clusters to reflect main business activities of the group. The six clusters are oil palm plantation, oil palm related downstream activities, oil palm related upstream activities, sugar refining and other businesses comprising manufacturing, logistics and others.

Figure 5: Pre-ETP Corporate Structure with 49 percent interest in FHB

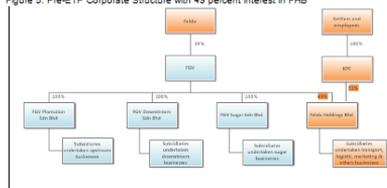
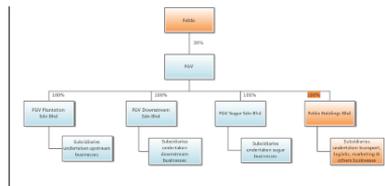


Figure 6: Post-ETP Corporate Structure with 100 percent interest in FHB



In sum, the group has undergone significant transformation particularly on the business model. It is expected that the new business model would subsequently lead to the change in the corporate structure significantly and consequently the accounting information systems of the company.

**FINDINGS**

This section presents the findings of the analysis on the accounting information systems of the group in accommodating the changes of the business model and corporate structure discussed in the earlier section.

## 4.1 Accounting Information Systems of FELDA

FELDA has its finance department overseeing the accounting information systems of the company. The structure of accounting information systems under the finance department comprises of four main components. The four main components are accounting and reporting, treasury, marketing and trading and shared services. The finance department is being headed by a chief financial officer and each of the components is being managed by a manager. The accounting and reporting component takes charge of the preparation of financial information and reports such as the statement of financial position and statement of profit and loss of the company. The component of treasury acts as the company's fund keeper taking charge of monitoring the cash inflow and cash outflow of funds of the company. The marketing and trading component involves monitoring of sales of the company including customers' order and sales delivery. The last component, the shared services component takes charge of the accounts receivable and accounts payable of the company. Figure 7 illustrates the components in the finance department and the structure of accounting information systems encompasses before ETP implementation

Figure 7: Pre-ETP Accounting Information Systems Structure



All components in the finance department have their own systems to account for their transactions and activities. The systems are developed to cater for each component with the assistance of consultants employed by the company. SAP is adopted to provide control and integration of the information within these components linking the information from one component to another component. The existing SAP is able to accommodate and provide the information to all components. However, there is a lack in efficiency of the accounting information systems in terms of timing and accuracy.

### As noted by the CFO of the company:

So in term of modifying existing AIS, so nak ikut kan the existing system that we have provide all information that we need but may not be efficient in terms of timing and accuracy.

(CFO FELDA)

## 4.2 Changes in the Accounting Information Systems

The accounting information systems of the group have experienced a major

transformation of which new system has been developed and existing system has been upgraded and integrated with the new system. The upgrading and integration of the new system to the existing system is seen to be necessary in meeting the requirements of a listed company. As noted by the CFO FELDA:

*And, if though as a listed co. now we have new governance rules, risk management, you have to be more robust punya risk management, u have to be much better your governance. So in order to implement all that in an efficient way, so we put in a new system. This system kalau nak ikutkan, is not wajib. But having it make things a lot easier. Any committee formed? Tak de la sampai ada committee utk implement a new system but we know that are things that need to be done. Ok let look at this chart now, even though we got SAP as a backbone, but we thought about accounting related system.*

(CFO FELDA)

The main reason of the group for upgrading the existing AIS structure is to raise efficiency in term of timing and accuracy of the information dissemination. Despite new business model and new corporate structure, being a listed entity, the group is also subject to the new governance rules and risk management policies which required the group to adopt better AIS structure. The findings provide an indication that there is a need to change the present structure of accounting information systems to become more efficient. This is because the implementation of ETP has led to the change of the business model and corporate and subsequently drive the company to improve its accounting information structure. In addition the listing of the company has also drive the company to strive for a better accounting information systems in supporting the company's vision.

The CFO of FELDA further noted:

*So did the listing require FELDA to provide additional information, yes. Yes, we do have provided additional information. Definitely lah. Being a listed company, macam2 la kan. So in term of modifying existing AIS, so nak ikutkan the existing system that we have can provide all information that we need but may not be efficient in term of timing and accuracy.*

(CFO FELDA)

As illustrated in Figure 8, existing AIS structure employed is SAP as a backbone of the system and a few accounting related systems have been integrated with SAP since 2012 and the development of the AIS is expected to continue until 2015. The company has also involved in the changes of the accounting information

systems thoroughly throughout the components in the finance department. Under accounting and reporting, the group has employed online KPI reporting and tracking since October 2013 where related financial data and information will be uploaded according to the prescribe format to the designated portal for top management attention. This new system replaced traditional paper report which can save time and the report can be viewed by top management via online anywhere. The CFO FELDA expressed his plans on further improving the accounting information systems in the finance department:

*The other things that we wanna to do (online KPI dah jalan dah), Business Planning and consolidation ni probably by Jan 2015. Lambat lagi. Because this take a longer time to implement. This is basically to do with budgeting process and the consolidation process. It is a new system. Now prodata in the process developing it and in fact we in the process of planning on acquisition of it. So all these again, again, we don't need to buy a new system, now we using excel and off course excel is not very efficient. And very slow and very cumbersome. So insyaAllah, by having this system in place, we should be able to speed things up better. So the budgeting process, planning process and consolidation process should be better.*

(CFO FELDA)

**Figure 8 summarised the structure of the accounting information systems after ETP implementation within the group.**

	Accounting & Reporting	Treasury	Marketing & Trading	Shared Services (SSC)
Existing	<b>SAP</b>			
New	Online KPI Reporting & Tracking	Sunguard Integrity	Just Commodity CxC	WebCycle
	Business Planning & Consolidation			
"Go Live" Dates	KPI: Oct 2013 BPC: Jan 2015	July 2013	March 2014 (Sugar) June 2014 (Palm)	April 2012

Under the treasury component, the company has formed a group to take charge of the functions of the treasury with the aim to improve efficiency. The treasury function used to be a department and the listing due to the ETP implementation has led the company to set up a group known as FGV Capital Sdn Bhd, a wholly own subsidiary of FGV. Such formation has led FELDA to structure two companies directly under FGV in catering the corporate function. As explained by the CFO FELDA:

*Satu ialah share service centre is FGV SSCSB and another one is FGV Capital Sdn Bhd. Both are new companies within the Felda group. So these are with establishment SSCSB, as FGV SSC actually (shared service centre) and FGV Capital Sdn Bhd as a treasury management centre. This one (FGV Capital) will be live insyaAllah once we get licences very soon la. As you may know Treasury Management Centre (TMC) is one of the incentive government bagi. Once we get the licence then you can think of this as not just as a treasury centre but you can consider it as an in-house bank. So that is something also new because of listing. Because we have the listing, we have a lot of fund, we will grow big, therefore we establish this the group(FGV Capital). To manage big fund. To make money..basically to manage the whole treasury of the group la. So customers to the bank are basically companies under the group.*  
(CFO FELDA)

Under shared services, the company has centralised all transactional items in order to increase efficiency and reduce manpower. The existing system was modified and improved and all transactions inputted to the system are eventually linked to SAP. The company installed a new system known as Webcycle, a system that received invoices from external parties which will automatically be scanned and matched with the system. The CFO FELDA explained:

Under shared services ini once dia process everything, the electronic approval and electronic instruction to pay, then goes to maybank and maybank will issue the cheque. So that shared services. Benda ni punya consider baru, part of the organisational restructure due to listing, Banyak berubah actually. You can see the saving. Kalau dulu everything the group akan ada purchasing clerk, payment clerk, Account Receivable clerk, check writer. Semuanya ada but no now you don't need all that. Semua tu you centralised. So kalau kita perlukan 10 clerks, may be now we just need 5. We need to have very good system to cater all this and that why the system comes in. So under shared services ni, system yang digunakan is basically SAP, that mean macam tadi saya punya example kan, PR is SAP, PO is SAP bila debit note datang, thats why we have system kita namakan sbg WebCycle ni. Benda ni baru.  
(CFO FELDA)

In sum, the group has gone some form of transformations upon the implementation of ETP. The impact of ETP has led the company to restructure their corporate

structure following the implementation of the new business model and subsequently changes to the structure of accounting information systems.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study seeks to examine the transformations occurring in an agricultural company. Specifically, this study aims to examine the impact of ETP on the accounting information systems from the perspective of an organisational change. The content analyses performed on annual reports, blueprints and other documents related to this study found that upon implementation of ETP, the group has undergone significant transformation on the business model. The business model has transformed from a mere developer of commercial plantations to a globally integrated and diversified multi-crop agribusiness through the acquisitions and smart partnerships. Subsequently, the new business model has led the company's corporate structure to be revised in order to accommodate to changes. The corporate structure has transformed significantly from a single tier corporate structure to a six cluster double tier corporate structure. Due to the change in the business model and corporate structure, the accounting information systems in the finance department has to undergo some changes which includes improvement and extension to the existing systems. An interview with the CFO of FELDA provides reasons as to why such changes occur.

This study is not without limitations. First, this study is based on content analyses of the documentations of the company and an interview with one respondent which is the CFO of FELDA. Further investigations via interviews would provide a more comprehensive understanding on the transformations in the company. Secondly, this study focuses only on one the group which is agriculture in nature. Therefore, the findings in this study may not be able to be generalisable to other companies of other industries. The findings in this study provide some understanding on the impact of a government policy on the structure of an organisation in the agriculture sector.

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