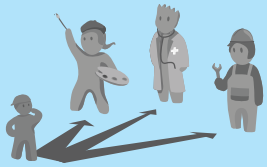
Singaporeans would like to see...

A Society with Diverse Definitions of Success

beyond academic and material success, and a review of the practice of meritocracy.



Page 1

A Singapore with a More Fulfilling Pace of Life

where we have the space to pursue other goals outside of work.

Page 3

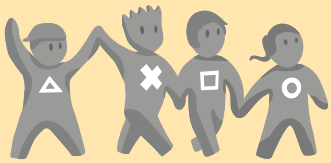
A Singapore with a Strong and Vibrant Economy

that provides opportunities for Singaporeans while ensuring social well-being.

Page 5

A Society with Strong Families

but some had differing views about what is defined as a "family".



Page 7

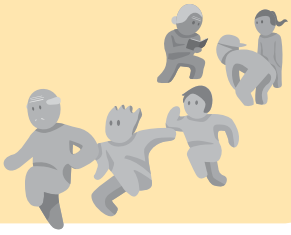
A Singapore that is Affordable to Live In

though some also felt that we should be contented with what we have.

Page 9

A Society where Everyone Can Age with Dignity

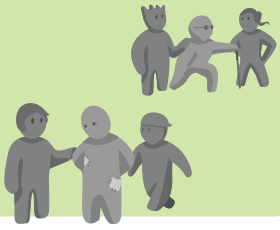
in the company of loved ones, and where we honour the contributions of our elders.



Page 11

A Society That Takes Care of the Disadvantaged

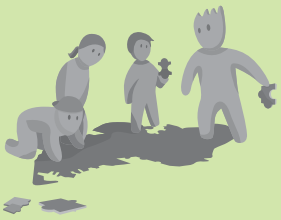
where strong social safety nets are complemented with a culture of volunteerism.



Page 13

A Society with a Greater Sense of Togetherness

expressed through a revival of our Kampong Spirit.



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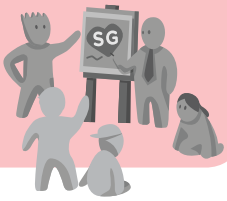
A Singapore for Singaporeans

where we retain a strong sense of national identity, in spite of demographic shifts in our society.

Page 17

A Society where Government and the People Have a More Collaborative Relationship

characterised by mutual respect, sincerity and empathy.



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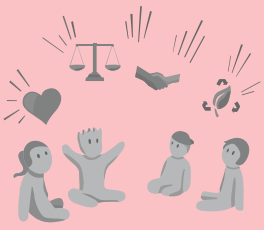
A Society Anchored on Values

that underpin our attitudes, actions and aspirations.



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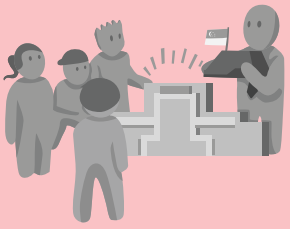
A Singapore with a Competent and Trustworthy Government

that is accountable to its citizens.



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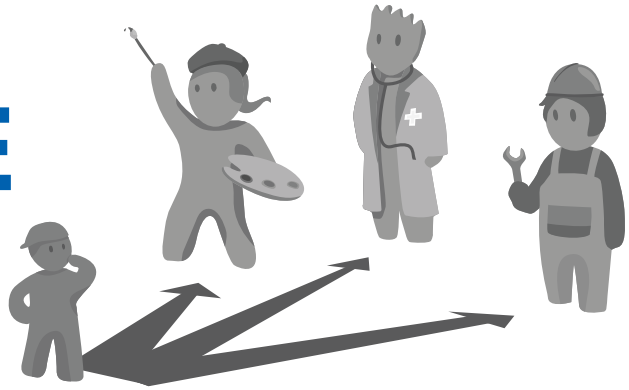
PERSPECTIVES Arising From Our SG conversation

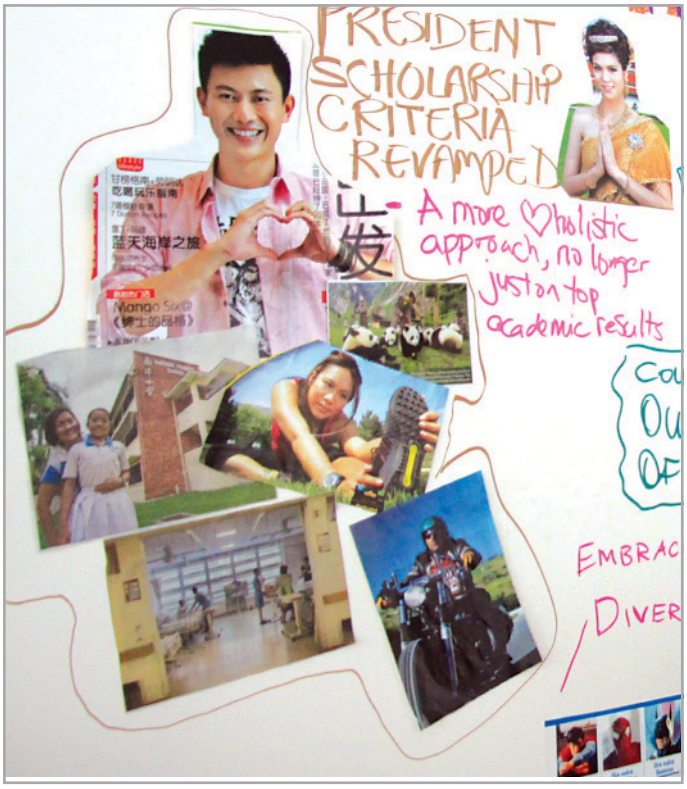
Home Heart Hope

BY THE OSC SECRETARIAT

A SOCIETY WITH DIVERSE DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS



beyond academic and material success, and a review of the practice of meritocracy.



"The idea of failure is seen as a very bad thing. You cannot fail… It should be ok to fail and it's about what you learn from it."

How do Singaporeans and the Singapore society define success? What would success look like beyond academic results and the 5Cs - Cash, Car, Condominium, Country club membership and Credit card? Many expressed a strong desire for Singapore to become a society that valued "multiple definitions of success", where people would be "treated with dignity whatever they were doing", and where there would be less focus on material goods as measures of success. In a survey released by [1]OCBC in October 2012, more than 60% of 2,100 respondents related more strongly with the new Cs of Control, Confidence, Community, Can and Career than they did with the old Cs. Turning to education, many felt that the over-emphasis on academic achievements, had led to the stressful pursuit of grades and results at the expense of holistic learning and development.

"A system change is insufficient; what's more important is the mindset. There is a need to imbue a mindset that someone who earns less is not necessarily less successful."

Singaporeans also recognised that meritocracy had been a key tenet of our society and had contributed to the provision of equal opportunities for Singaporeans. The scholarship system was frequently cited as an equitable way of identifying and developing talent. However, some felt that meritocracy no longer served Singapore as well as before, arguing that extreme meritocracy and competition could lead to a winner-takes-all society, with winners thinking little of others. There were also concerns that the focus on academic qualifications in talent recruitment strategies might inadvertently exclude those with other skills, and the lack of social mobility could compromise the legitimacy of meritocracy. Many observed that there were relatively fewer chances for young Singaporeans from lower-income homes to rise by merit, as richer families could spend more on their children to set them on the path to success. While some assessment of individual merit was necessary, many felt it was time to review the implementation of meritocracy and definition of merit.

"Don't measure success in terms of education qualification."

1 OCBC Bank's 2012 Survey on the new 5Cs

"There must be a way to grade people – a grading system cannot be removed completely."

Youths would like to see greater flexibility in their educational and career pathways, as well as more opportunities to pursue their passions and maximise their potential in areas such as the arts, sports, community work and entrepreneurship. However some still felt restrained by their parents' mindset that "good grades equal opportunities" and "life is only fulfilling when you are rich and successful". Some parents expressed a desire for a more holistic education system, where students would be equipped with critical thinking skills, and where creativity, character development and, most importantly, the ability to stay resilient in the face of failure, would be encouraged. Others would like to see a strengthening of education as a key vehicle for social integration between diverse groups of Singaporeans. Some also pointed out that we would need to change our "kiasu" mindset, which inhibited Singaporeans from trying out alternative pathways such as entrepreneurship, as many were not prepared to bear the costs of failure in these riskier ventures.

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"In 2030, Singaporean society would be one that has balanced growth, valuing achievements beyond what is academic and financial."

"A society that has multiple measures of success, and weighs both the tangible and intangible costs and benefits before making a decision."

"Singapore should be a society which encourages people to pursue what they truly want to do and choices will not be inhibited by the lack of approval by society."

"The system of meritocracy has been a very effective way to identify individual based on merits rather than family backgrounds. For many decades, average Singaporeans has benefitted greatly from this belief. In my opinion, the nation is at a crossroad to redefine the meaning of meritocracy to meet the changing global demands."

"Meritocracy is good, but the reverse is true and insidious."

"More recognition of the contributions from other members of society/leaders from non-traditional routes to success, e.g. business leaders, social work, NGOs, arts groups."

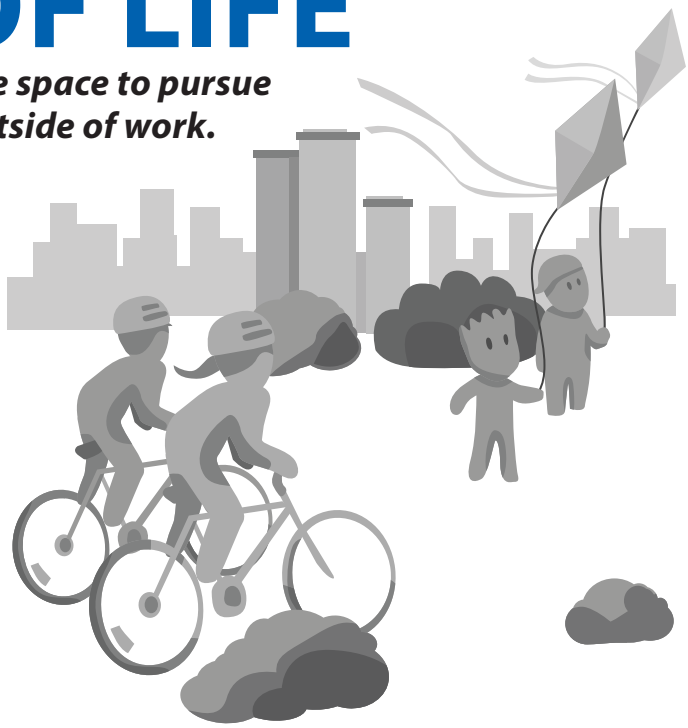
"In our globalized communities today, we also urgently need people who are critical thinkers, anchored by a desire to contribute to the society from which they have benefited."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How might we calibrate the definition of merit and the implementation of meritocracy in our society?
- How ready are we, as students, parents and citizens, to accept the risks of failure and view failure as part and parcel of the learning journey when exploring alternative paths to success?
- With greater flexibility in educational pathways, how can youths seek to fulfill their aspirations while ensuring that they remain financially secure?
- What steps can we take to adopt the new Cs? What aspects of our society do we want to reaffirm, recalibrate or refresh in the process of adopting these new Cs?

A SINGAPORE WITH A MORE FULFILLING PACE OF LIFE

where we have the space to pursue other goals outside of work.



"Home is where we feel security and love. It is a place where our loved ones are with us. Not too stressful so that we have time to slow down and appreciate one another."

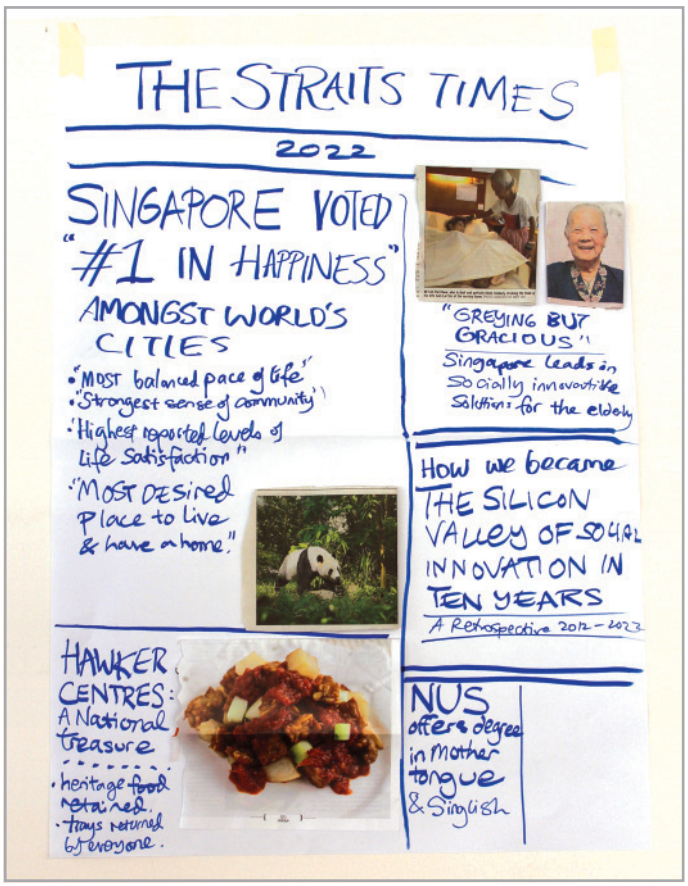
"Last time, we have less but are happier. Now we have more, but not happy."

Singaporeans envisioned a future where we could enjoy a more meaningful and fulfilling pace of life that was not wholly focused on economic success and material pursuits.

While some acknowledged that economic growth was important and individuals should play their role as responsible workers, many felt that material success should not be attained at the expense of other goals in life, such as nurturing strong family relationships, communal bonds, supporting causes that one is passionate about, and pursuing personal interests in areas such as the sports and arts.

Singaporeans were concerned that the fast pace of life and high stress levels in Singapore were unsustainable. Others lamented that work took up the bulk of their time, and did not feel proud that Singaporean workers had ranked highly on the most number of hours worked in a number of recent surveys. The rising cost of living had also added to Singaporeans feeling pressured to work harder to maintain their standard of liv-

"We don't always have to be number one."



ing. The challenge to find good jobs, especially during mid-career transitions, was another source of stress.

Many parents pointed out that Singapore had become a hyper-competitive "tuition nation", and said that this had caused significant stress for families. Underlying this phenomenon was the "kiasu" mindset, which many felt had snuffed out the joy of learning. Many participants wanted the education system to be more holistic, so as to allow children to realise their strengths and potential in areas beyond academic subjects. There were various suggestions to reduce unnecessary competition in and amongst schools, such as abolishing school ranking systems.

"Go beyond GDP to measure other well-being indicators."

Finally, even as Singapore remained a globally-competitive city, there was a desire to broaden the measures of Singapore's success beyond existing indicators such as GDP growth, to include more holistic measures such as a happiness or well-being index into assessments of our country's progress. Many also felt that more could be done to maintain a balance between work and life. Some said that there was no need for Singapore to be the best in everything, as the relentless pursuit of rankings and KPIs was unhealthy. On the other hand, some felt that this might lead to a slippery slope of incompetence and emphasized that work-life balance was a personal choice.

"If we don't aim for number 1, there's a risk that even last is ok."

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"Promote work-life balance so that people have time to enjoy, and have time to relax."

"I see my clients more than my children."

"Economic imperatives have taken over our lives."

"As teachers, when we reach home drained and exhausted, we still have to mark tons of scripts."

"Even a primary 1 boy is in school from 730am-3pm once a week."

"Why can't Singapore relax the education system in primary and lower secondary for late boomers to catch up in JCs and universities?"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- To what extent do we want to pursue happiness and a less demanding pace of life? What might we have to give up as a society if we collectively decide to prioritise a more comfortable pace of life?
- Are competition, competitiveness and the pursuit of excellence necessarily bad things? How might we ensure that Singaporean society does not manifest these qualities in unhealthy ways?
- How might we address the costs of economic growth, without losing its benefits?
- Some Singaporeans would prefer a more comfortable pace of life over career progression, while others are prepared to accept a more stressful and demanding lifestyle in order to pursue career progression. What choices can "I" make to achieve my ideal pace of life?

A SINGAPORE WITH A STRONG AND VIBRANT ECONOMY

that provides opportunities for Singaporeans while ensuring social well-being.

> ***"A stronger Singapore with higher status and recognition on the global platform, holding its own weight against the strongest countries in the world."***

Many Singaporeans expressed appreciation for Singapore's economic success, and hoped that we would remain vibrant, stable and globally competitive, with a business-friendly environment complemented by a well-educated, highly-skilled and productive workforce. Others wanted to see strong local SMEs and MNCs that were able to succeed on the global stage. Whatever their specific ideas, most among this group agreed that this would require a deliberate focus on long-term goals, rather than short-term gains.

> ***"We need to be able to wait, be patient and see long term, only then can we nurture true talent and innovation."***

Overseas Singaporeans in particular stressed the need for Singapore to innovate to keep pace with global competition, and continue to leverage its unique position to connect with both the East and West. Many also said that we should prepare the young for a future that is likely to be driven by creative entrepreneurs, and overcome our innate desire for conformity to develop an innovative culture in Singapore. Some expressed cautious optimism about Singapore's future,

> ***"I graduated from private school and knew that if I looked for a job I would probably get paid maybe $1.4k? So I decided to start a business. Gave a few free talks pitched to some companies got good referrals and now I give talks/teach at companies that would have not even offered me a job! Complaining is not going to get you anywhere."***

as our success would depend on our ability to leverage and strengthen our comparative advantages, in light of global trends such as automation. Some also suggested that we look beyond academic qualifications to identify the skill-sets and attributes required for Singaporeans to remain competitive in the global economy.

> ***"I want Singapore to be a nation that leads in environmental solutions and we already have some good results – Pulau Semakau and water distillation."***

Many would like to see more good jobs open up in the future. While Singaporeans should strive to improve themselves, the government should also ensure that enough good jobs are available for Singaporeans. However there were varied views over the definition of "good jobs". Should good jobs be equated with high wages, and if so, what would an appropriate wage level be? Should less materialistic considerations, like personal fulfillment, determine what a "good job" is?

Given that Singapore's only natural resource is its people, some expressed concern over the scenario of a "Sunset Singapore", where young Singaporeans would leave Singapore to pursue better job opportunities elsewhere, leaving the aged and vulnerable behind. Others questioned Singapore's ability to cope

"We assume that our economy will continue to be robust and that we need the influx of foreigners to sustain the economic growth…but what if the opposite happened…we will see an exodus and locals have to pick up the pieces."

in the event of a sudden exodus of foreigners, which would have grave implications on the economy, given our heavy reliance on foreigners to sustain economic growth, particularly among SMEs.

Even as we strive to maintain a strong economy, most Singaporeans wanted to balance our pursuit of economic growth with social well-being. As Singaporeans become more affluent and educated, there was concern that an increasing number of Singaporeans may not see the importance of caring for the disadvantaged in society. Many envisioned a Singapore where social and economic progress could coexist, and where Singaporeans willingly contributed back to society.

"The future of Singapore should be built on social capital instead of dollars and cents."

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"Maintain Singapore's hub status in air and sea transport, as well as its reputation as a key tourist destination."

"We want a robust economy to provide Singaporeans with comfortable lives."

"For Singapore to survive as a sovereign state, we have to be exceptional. We don't have the opportunity to not be economically viable."

"Although we are a thriving economy with efficient government, good social network and system, it is still a doubt if Singapore can still maintain her prominent global identity in years to come. It is indeed worrying to see how developed countries in the Eurozone fall apart while world powers like America falls into debts of trillions USD. In addition, developing countries including our neighbours are rapidly catching up and these countries have absolute advantage over Singapore with their vast natural resources. Singapore has none of these resources except for human beings whom we claimed to be our valuable."

"We hope Singapore to be the leader in technology, health science and finance. But we also want all Singaporeans to have a bigger heart. Bigger heart means better home for all."

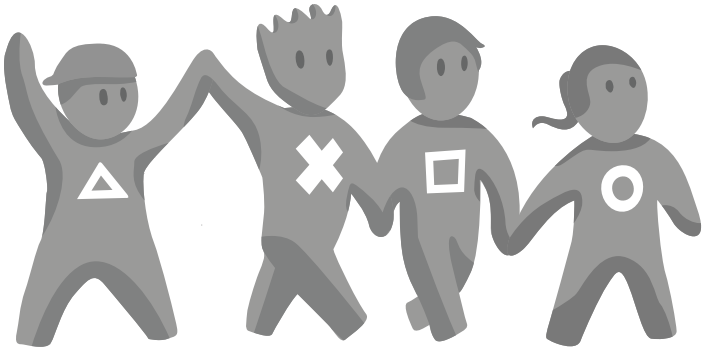
"Do we need more than just a change in the education system for the children? Do parents and adults go through an education system to change their mindset too? Education system can change to cater for children with different needs, however parents are the ones who are focusing on results and grades"

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What trends and developments might shape the future of our economy? How might we adapt ourselves to stay relevant and competitive?
- How might "I" prepare myself to contribute to the future economy and society?
- How might we complement the pursuit of economic growth with a balanced focus on well-being, i.e. how might we ensure that Singapore remains a home with a heart for its people?

A SOCIETY WITH STRONG FAMILIES

but some had differing views about what is defined as a "family".



One of Singapore's Shared Values, articulated in 1991, was "family as the basic unit of society". In the conversation so far, most Singaporeans echoed that strong family ties were a hallmark of traditional "Asian values", and is something that should continue to be emphasised in Singaporean society. In fact, many felt that it was important to reaffirm these values in the face of globalisation and "influences from the West" that clashed with traditional values.

> ***"When society openly and widely accepts single parenthood and cohabitation, people seem to adopt an increasingly casual attitude towards relationships and head very quickly for the door when things get rough."***

Some feared that dysfunctional families were the root cause of many social problems. They linked the decline of traditional family values to Singaporeans' increasingly fast-paced lifestyles, and lamented that Singaporeans seemed to focus on personal achievements at the expense of time spent with their families and communities. Others pointed out that recent lapses in conduct among educators or scurrilous exposés on STOMP were indications that children were not being raised in a wholesome environment.

On the issue of evolving family structures, some cautioned against normalising alternatives such as cohabitation and single parenthood, as these could erode positive values such as fidelity and commitment. Many among this group felt that these changes could result

> ***"We need to uphold the traditional family as the bedrock of society, with both the roles of the father and the mother being celebrated and honoured."***

in a slippery slope of moral decline, where the end point was an overly permissive society with few moral codes.

However, several people felt that they would like a more accepting, tolerant and inclusive Singapore. They would like to see a more progressive society where everyone would be treated fairly, regardless of their sexual orientation, or personal choices on marriage and parenthood. Many among this group drew inspiration from equality movements elsewhere. Like those who argued for a re-affirmation of "traditional" values, this group also felt that there were moral grounds to accept alternative social arrangements like gay marriage.

> ***"Population policies should be inclusive and respectful of the rights of every individual, regardless of sexual orientation or marital status."***

"We need to relook laws that promote intolerance and discrimination in society. For example, 377A is an archaic law that discriminates against the LGBT community."

While these views were fewer in number, they were not insignificant. Significantly, they were not restricted to specific demographics. For example, there were youths with strongly anti-homosexual views, while some older Singaporeans took the view that greater tolerance of gays should be the way forward.

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"My family and I would like to have stable, wholesome families, right Asian traditional values and customs inculcated through schools, customs, society and people."

"Singaporeans in 2030 can have a more broad and open-thinking mindset."

"The Singapore Government is right to stand by the traditional family structure – not because the majority of the population still wants it, but because it is morally right to do so."

"While we accept the homosexual community, and their operating within their circle, I feel that they should not push the limits by wanting legalization of such unions, which distort the meaning and purpose of a family."

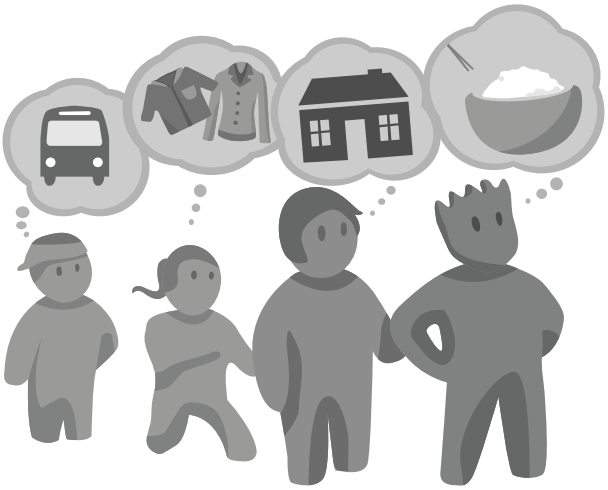
"People are treated equally, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity."

"We should look at this matter from the viewpoint of the family and what is best for the family and nation... Extramarital sex, homosexual practices, pre-marital sex, lying, stealing etc. should be taught to the children of the next generation that they are wrong."

"Policies that reward a traditional family structure necessarily penalize those who do not follow this model - particularly single mothers and LGBT citizens, and are therefore discriminatory."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How might we continue to develop strong families in the 21st-century Singapore?
- How might we ensure social cohesion, while embracing diversity and allowing space for individual choices?
- How might we reinforce or create "shared values", while respecting diversity at the margins?
- What role can the community play in arbitrating among diverse views? How big a role should the government play in acting as a moral arbiter?
- How do we develop a society with the right attitudes, social norms and platforms to support the resolution of these disputes?



A SINGAPORE THAT IS AFFORDABLE TO LIVE IN

though some also felt that we should be contented with what we have.

> ***"Housing, healthcare, transport and daily essentials should be affordable for all Singaporeans especially the lower income."***

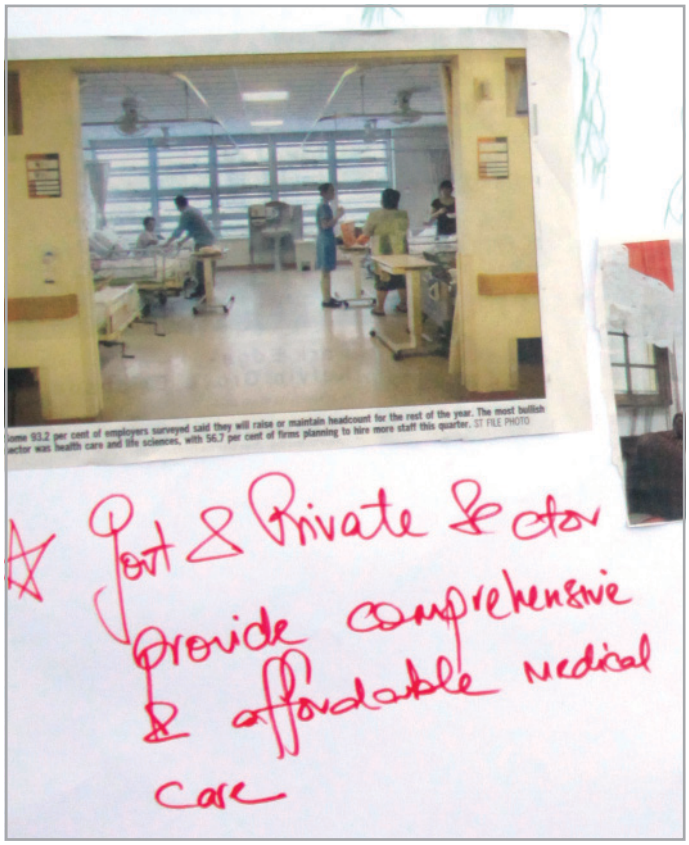
Singaporeans felt strongly that Singapore must remain affordable for Singaporeans to live in, especially for lower-income families. While Singapore had become more affluent over the years, the cost of living had also increased. Many hoped to see a future where our basic needs such as food, housing and transportation remained affordable, and Singaporeans could access good and affordable healthcare without sacrificing their quality of life.

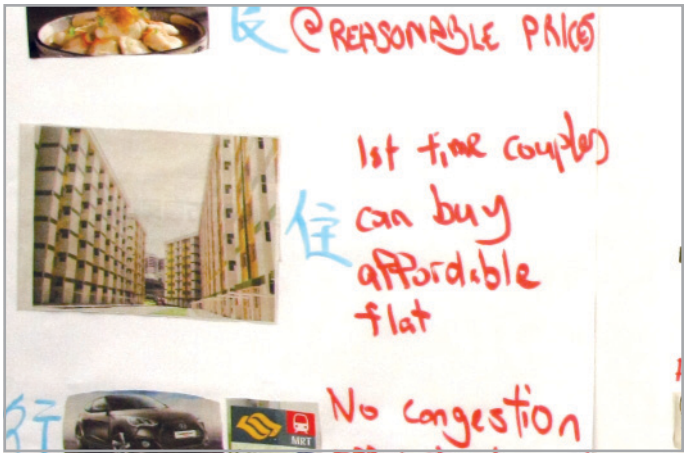
Many Singaporeans were concerned with the rising property prices, especially of HDB flats. Many felt that current housing prices were too high and had saddled many young couples with long-term debts. Others said that decisions to get married or have children were often deferred due to these high costs. Conversely, some older Singaporeans said that they were asset-rich but cash-poor and did not want their current home prices to drop, as they would need to monetise their flats for retirement. There were divided views over whether a home should serve as a basic need or as an investment vehicle. Some even questioned the relevance of home ownership given the state of housing prices, and suggested that more rental flats could be made available to Singaporeans who could not afford to own a home in the immediate future.

> ***"Would living in a HDB flat without a car plus a decent public transport system minus extravagant holidays be too tough to bear?"***

> ***"If the high costs of living on food, transport, medical, housing and utilities remain hesitantly unchecked or escalate further from now, future retirees would be left with nothing much for their old age."***

The cost of medical care was another one of the top concerns of Singaporeans. Many elderly Singaporeans felt that Singapore was a place where one could die, but not fall sick, as medical care was very expensive and could place a large burden on their families. Several Singaporeans also observed that many were reluctant to go for preventive check-ups as the cost of these check-ups was typically borne by the patient.





"If Singapore is always dissatisfied, discontent and negative, Singapore will never be perceived to be affordable."

Many expressed hope for a Singapore where government and the community would work together to ensure that everyone, especially poorer Singaporeans, had ready access to basic needs. Many were concerned about rising food prices, which tended to affect lower-income families and the vulnerable elderly more. Some were concerned that higher rentals in hawker centres and wet markets would be passed on directly to consumers.

Other Singaporeans highlighted the cost of raising children in Singapore. Young parents in particular were concerned about the cost of preschool and the added pressure of having to send their children to tuition classes. Others felt that the COE system should be tweaked to give greater priority to families with young children or elderly members to care for.

"What is the meaning of economic affordability? What is affordable to one may not be affordable to another (e.g. luxury items and branded goods). It depends on the perspective of affordability. We need to be contented with what we have."

Despite the real struggles of dealing with the rising cost of living, there were also some Singaporeans who felt there was a need to reconsider our expectations of material well-being. In many respects, our sense of what is affordable might be shaped by our expectations and aspirations. As such, "affordability" would always seem to be slightly out of reach. Instead of striving endlessly for material satisfactions, many within this group affirmed the importance of contentment.

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"Singapore is a city-state…every city has a crowded train, bus, and living environment. If a person doesn't like the crowd, he is fighting a losing battle."

"There is no point in insisting that families here should change their 'view' about procreation while ignoring their plea on the high costs of living."

"Housing prices have gone out of control."

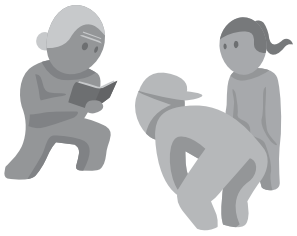
"Most of us only want a roof over our family's heads."

"Those retired should not be burdened by cost of living, and those wanting to have children should not be afraid by the cost of raising a child."

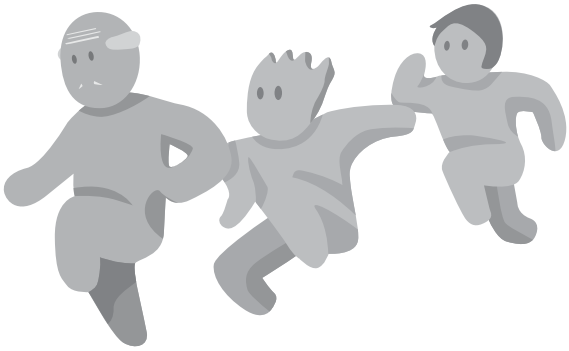
FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How might Singaporeans who are better off contribute towards supporting the basic needs of Singaporeans who are less well off?
- Would Singaporeans accept higher taxes if more revenue is needed to provide for the basic needs of disadvantaged Singaporeans?
- How might we as a society decide what level of basic needs all Singaporeans should be able to afford, and what are the luxuries that should be left to the decision of individual Singaporeans to pursue?
- In a city like Singapore where land is scarce, should we retain the home ownership philosophy or should we shift to a housing system based mainly on rental?

A SOCIETY WHERE EVERYONE CAN AGE WITH DIGNITY



in the company of loved ones, and where we honour the contributions of our elders.



> ***"I want a Singapore where the elders are honoured."***

Singaporeans unanimously wanted to see a Singapore where it was possible for everyone to age with grace and dignity, in the company of their friends and family. Most recognised that it was important to remain active and engaged in the community through one's golden years, and many came forward to share how seniors in their communities had been involved in various projects centred on enabling and empowering the elderly.

Many seniors shared that they would like to continue to contribute to society as long as they remained fit, be it in the workplace or in various roles within the community. Within this group, many felt that it was important for the elderly to be strong and self-reliant, and not depend too much on their children. However, several pointed out that it was not always easy for the elderly to lead independent lives, as job security beyond the retirement age was a major concern. A number of older Singaporeans related how they had repeatedly encountered employers who were unwilling to hire older workers, despite the existence of the Re-employment Act. They hoped that more could be done to support the elderly in the workplace.

> ***"Re-employment terms should not 'degrade' or 'downgrade' older employees"***

Across different groups, there was broad consensus that more could be done to honour the contributions of our seniors, who had worked hard to create the Singapore that we enjoy today. Many felt that the situation today was far from ideal, citing elderly aunties clearing tables in hawker centres, or elderly patients being subjected to lengthy processes to apply for financial assistance even as their health visibly deteriorated, as examples of the need for better social support for the elderly. While most agreed with the "traditional" picture of the elderly as caregivers and family leaders, a good number also felt that there was a need to re-examine these traditional roles and hierarchies, and fully recognise the spectrum of aspirations that the elderly might have.

> ***"Means testing is very difficult. I have a lot of trouble getting my children to come for interviews. They told me to get a family court order. But how can I ask my children to go to court?"***

Some younger Singaporeans – many of them caregivers – shared the tensions experienced by those who had to take care of their elderly parents and their young children at the same time. Many of them pointed out that as Singaporeans started families later in life, the struggles of the "sandwich generation" would become more acute. Others were concerned about a diminishing awareness of the struggles and hardship that first-generation Singaporeans had endured through the na-

"Many of the elderly people struggle not so much out of poverty as they do with loneliness."

tion-building decades. This might explain the growing apathy towards the needs of the elderly in our society.

Finally, many Singaporeans were also concerned that the gradual decline of strong family ties in Singapore society, as well as the erosion of "traditional values" like filial piety, compassion and respect for one's elders, could undermine the support networks available to the elderly. As such, more opportunities should be created for intergenerational bonding to help younger generations appreciate and honour their elders.

"I do not want to see the elderly cleaning tables and pushing airport trolleys when I return from other countries, including those more backward than us. It brings a profound sense of shame when I step foot home in Singapore that we are so rich a country yet cannot care for our old."

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"My vision is for seniors to enjoy a very active life-style, because public transport for all seniors is very heavily subsidised."

"…make Singapore the most 'ageless' society in Asia, where older persons are empowered to contribute their best to the community, free from discrimination and prejudice against age."

"I have 25-35 year old engineers asking for 4k and a 45-55 year olds asking for 9k. Who should I hire?"

"Restrict and control the availability of these flats to only older generation…can be fitted with special features to be more user-friendly to old folks."

"Give free travel to senior citizens on our buses and trains, 24/7."

"The need to change career in the late stage of life is scary, as this usually affects the pay packet and quality of lifestyle."

"An affordable healthcare system that takes care of everyone from the womb to the tomb."

"Youngsters are not as courteous, well-mannered and filial as compared to the past."

'Design and build HDB flats to facilitate multi-generational living."

"The only time my family wants to see me is when they want me to take care of the baby. If you don't help them jaga baby, you won't see them again."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How might we honour the older generations that have contributed significantly to Singapore? How can "I" play a role in supporting and valuing our older Singaporeans?
- As medical technology enables people to stay active for a larger portion of their lives, how will the aspirations of the elderly change? How should we rethink our perceptions about ageing, and the roles older people play in our families, communities and society at large?
- How might we develop a sustainable spending framework to allow elderly Singaporeans to age with dignity (e.g. elderly-friendly facilities) in an ageing population, while not overly burdening the working generation? What might be the role of NGOs and the rest of society in this?

A SOCIETY THAT TAKES CARE OF THE DISADVANTAGED

where strong social safety nets are complemented with a culture of volunteerism.

Many felt that while Singapore had achieved stellar economic growth, not everyone had benefitted equally. The widening income gap and growing social stratification had prompted many Singaporeans to express concerns about those who had been "left behind" or "fallen through the cracks". Some Singaporeans shared that as we reaped the fruits of economic growth, more could be done to achieve "social growth" so that the bottom 10% might also benefit from this growth. However, there was disagreement as to what form that "social growth" should take.

> ***"We should introduce a wealth tax and reintroduce estate duty. The present disparities between the rich and poor in society is not good."***

Some Singaporeans talked about the need to address the gaps in the government's policies. For example, many low-wage workers were concerned about wage stagnation and their ability to cope with the rising cost of living. While Workfare had helped to supplement this group's wages, others felt that Workfare should be paired with more efforts to help low-wage workers upgrade their skills, and eventually find better-paying jobs. There were also suggestions to relook tax policies to narrow the income gap. Others would like to see more inclusive access to services and equal employment opportunities for people with disabilities. Many also highlighted the need to improve standards in the social services sector, and provide more "user friendly" services.

> ***"Ensure all Singaporeans have access to fundamental indicators of human living like quality housing, job, education and medical. But without leaning to a 'welfare' state."***

Notwithstanding the desire to help everyone as best as we can, Singaporeans also wanted the government to continue to be prudent about social spending. Most acknowledged that there would be tensions in deciding how to allocate limited resources as we consider increasing the amount of help.

> ***"What are some ways to promote taking better care of the less fortunate? We must start from the self and not expect somebody else to take the lead. We don't need to rely on the government so heavily. Community and society can play its part too."***

The economic volatility and uncertainty that accompanies our open economy also worried middle-income earners who felt unsettled about the future and hoped for a greater sense of assurance. Among this group, many lived in fear of losing their jobs, their homes and falling ill. Many also pointed out that "we all need help at some point in our lives" and called for greater access to short-term assistance when faced with shocks in life. At the same time, some felt that short-term assistance should be provided in a way that did not undermine personal responsibility.

Many young Singaporeans also shared their willingness to step up and play a role in serving the community. Many felt that they, as beneficiaries of the opportunities available in Singapore, had a responsibility to help others who were disadvantaged. For example, some suggested dedicating some days to celebrating the contributions of blue-collar workers, such as the cleaners and construction workers, so as to help Singaporeans understand and appreciate these unsung heroes. That said, many also pointed out that the stress of work and family commitments often prevented Singaporeans from taking the time to extend acts of kindness to the people around us.

> ***"Many times, the middle class is the layer where we faced extreme pressure from housing loans, car loans, children expenses, parent expenses etc and we receive less help but pay more taxes…In the long term, it may not be a bad idea to increase taxes to pay for the increase in social security expenses."***

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"A nation with heart to care for fellow men."

"We need to be a more caring society showing compassion for the less fortunate n less able the handicap n the lower income group."

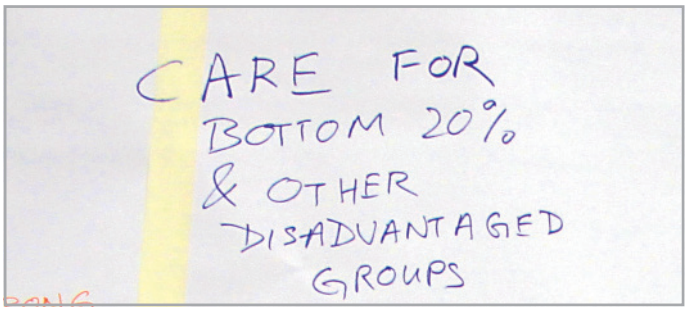
"Have a social net for those that are poor and old cause I know of families that are in a worse off case than mine. But this is on a case by case basis, whereby people do not abuse the system."

"Protection, assurance for the future, and that the Government or the systems that are put in place can take care of this."

"Redistribute income through effective taxation, to forge a philanthropic society."

"I wish we had a culture of showing respect for people who do menial labour. Why don't we value and appreciate them more?"

"There is a lack of recognition from the public for locals who do 3D job: dirty, difficult and demanding."



FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What is society's role in caring for the disadvantaged and how can we encourage more Singaporeans to contribute more time and resources towards helping those who are disadvantaged or in need?
- What principles and beliefs should we base our social policies on? How might we provide help without undermining the dignity of the individual and the culture of self-reliance and personal responsibility?
- As social needs grow, how might we sustain social programmes without burdening future generations?

A SOCIETY WITH A GREATER SENSE OF TOGETHERNESS

expressed through a revival of our kampong spirit.

Many Singaporeans envisioned a Singapore with a greater sense of belonging as well as a greater sense of ownership. Some added that togetherness was best demonstrated through our care and concern for fellow Singaporeans, and they hoped that Singaporeans would reach out more actively to the less fortunate to support them through challenging life phases.

"From what we have gathered from the older generations, there was a stronger kampong spirit in the past compared to now. Hence we suggest that there be more spaces in Singapore, both tangible and intangible to foster our unique Singapore spirit."

"We don't feel that similarity and closeness with our fellow Singaporeans. We don't see that beyond our own unique qualities, we are tied together by a common culture, history, society. We don't feel the need for closeness as we aim and strive endlessly for material needs."

Singaporeans, however, were concerned that communal bonds had eroded as Singapore modernised and Singaporeans got caught up with work and pursuing material needs. Many were concerned that Singaporeans had exhibited "not in my backyard" (NIMBY) attitudes when asked to make sacrifices for the greater good of the community or the neighbourhood. Some felt that neighbourly relations in housing estates had declined to the point where many people turned to the government immediately to resolve neighbourly disputes. Many Singaporeans felt that the diminishing sense of personal space and increasing stress levels associated with living in a more crowded Singapore had led to greater animosity within the community, and heightened sensitivity towards our differences and disagreements.

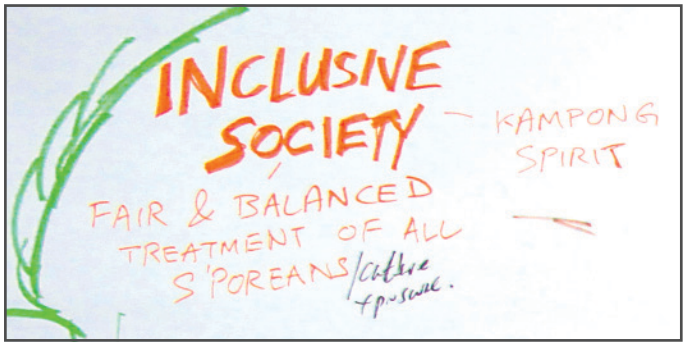
Many felt that there could be more civic participation in Singapore, and suggested that the government allow citizens and community groups to play a bigger role in service delivery within the community and take charge of maintaining their own living spaces. Some felt that community events organised by grassroots organisations came across as superficial, and suggested that more could be done to build networks among neighbours, interest groups and Singaporeans with similar passions. For example, every neighbourhood could set up a "community Facebook group" to share ideas and

"When people treat their HDB flats as homes, they in time to come will be rooted to their neighbourhood and be as closely knit a community as the kampong folks."

"We have become more materialistic in our quest for economic growth and in the process, have lost focus on our sense of community."

resources. Retirees and housewives could come together to form "kampong cooperatives" to organise activities for the community, and make products for sale.

"More open spaces will encourage people to get together. But parents must set an example by getting to know neighbours, and allow their children to get to know other children in open spaces such as playgrounds."



Soundbites from OSC Participants

"I strongly believe that we, as a country, can achieve our goals if each and every member of the society play a part and contribute to build our nation in the years to come. We have done it before and we can do it again, but this time, we will do it together, as a country with consideration for others, as Singaporeans who care for one another."

"I pray that our country will be more caring towards the old and have the kampong spirit to help each other."

"We have become more materialistic in our quest for economic growth and in the process, have lost focus on our sense of community."

"When I was young, I used to play with my neighbours. Now, I don't really know my neighbours. We don't have time to idle."

"While most Singaporean citizens, or even PRs and foreigners for that matter, do not actively express dislike for one another, nobody appears to really care for one another's wellbeing as well. There is a loss of the kampong spirit, that sense of neighbourliness."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How might we revive the kampong spirit in urban Singapore today? What can "I" do to contribute to this kampong spirit? What is stopping me from doing so?
- What can the government do to facilitate greater citizen ownership (e.g. service delivery, community bonding)? How might we clarify the roles and accountability between government and citizens?
- How might we better integrate foreigners within our communities, and strengthen social cohesion?

A SINGAPORE FOR SINGAPOREANS

where we retain a strong sense of national identity, in spite of demographic shifts in our society.

"THIS IS MY COUNTRY, THIS IS MY FLAG
THIS IS MY FUTURE, THIS IS MY LIFE
THIS IS MY FAMILY, THESE ARE MY FRIENDS
WE ARE SINGAPORE, SINGAPOREANS."
- WE ARE SINGAPORE (1987)

From the time the song "We are Singapore" was coined in 1987, Singapore has progressed and changed significantly. Looking forward to the next 20 years, many Singaporeans called for a greater sense of national identity, and more reflection on what it would mean to be a part of Singapore, or a Singaporean.

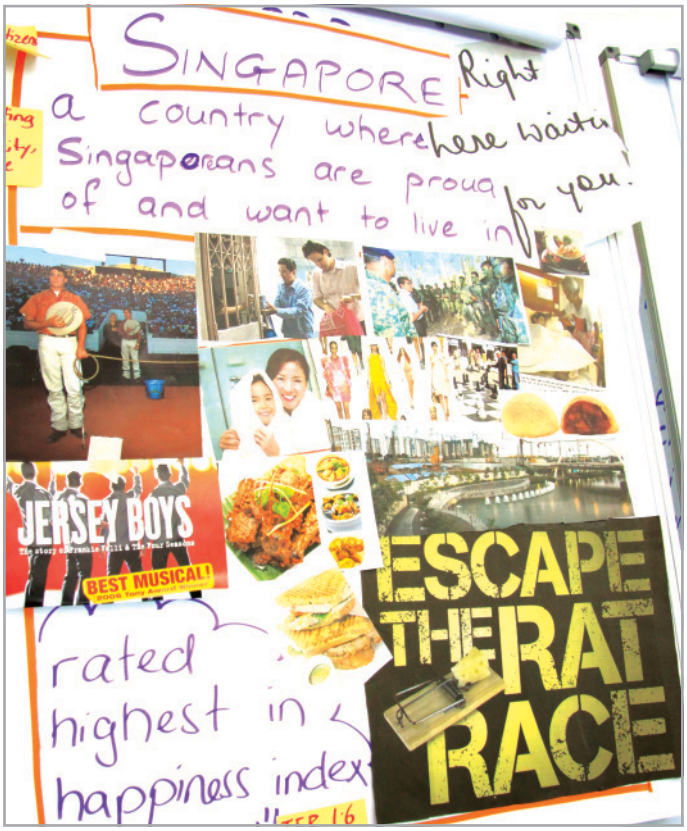
Singaporeans wanted to see our national identity developed in a more "natural and communal" way. "Efficient", "pragmatic", "goal-oriented", "commercial" and "capitalistic" were some of the words that Singaporeans used to describe the current national identity. Many felt that commercial icons such as Marina Bay Sands and the Singapore Flyer did not fully capture the heart and soul of the city. Singapore's pace of development had also outstripped our ability to preserve our culture and heritage, and some felt that the progressive loss of historical signposts was disorientating. There were suggestions for greater preservation of these historical signposts, such as colloquial language, heritage sites or indigenous art. Many envisioned a "Singapore Culture" as one that embraced the differences in our society, and accommodated people from all walks of life and backgrounds.

"I would like to see a Singapore, where buildings are not just commercial premises, like shopping centres. I want Singapore to build and promote its traditions from 20 years ago, such as coffee shops (no air con please), mama shops, Malay barber shops, the old dragon design play grounds etc."

"Familiar faces, familiar landmarks and familiar way of life"

This desire for a strong sense of community was reflected in the call for a Singapore that was a home for everyone, a place which Singaporeans would like to sink their roots in, and where a sense of "Singaporean pride" was expressed through the commitment to co-create and defend Singapore.

Underpinning these aspirations was a desire for a greater sense of assurance that "Singapore still belongs to Singaporeans". Some Singaporeans felt that the influx of foreigners in recent years had strained our social fabric. While most acknowledged the importance



"I have a dream for the future for Singapore. A dream that one day, we will be a true nation, as opposed to an economic outpost. A dream where Singaporeans will be proud and engaged with our heritage. A dream where our children feel that they belong to this country and have faith and hope in their future."

of attracting foreign talent with unique skill sets and expertise, others felt that the increase in foreigners in recent years had been too rapid, giving rise to various problems, including an infrastructure squeeze, excessive competition for scholarships and other opportunities, and high property prices.

There were divided views on Singapore's reliance on foreigners. Some saw foreigners as unnecessarily competing with Singaporeans for jobs, while others such as families with care-giving burdens admitted that they were grateful for the support of foreign domestic workers and healthcare professionals. SME owners, for example, shared that they relied heavily on foreigners, as they had difficulties attracting Singaporeans to work for them, especially in jobs that were perceived to be difficult or menial.

Some pointed out that Singapore was not alone in facing the challenges of shifting demographics. Immigration, for example, was a natural function of globalisation. Many within this group cautioned against anti-foreigner sentiments, and pointed out that Singapore had been founded as an immigrant society. Instead of focusing on a "Singaporean core" that is ultimately "me-centric", many felt that it was important for Singaporeans to be more open-minded. In fact, some felt that "Singaporean pride" need not be limited to Singaporeans, and envisioned a future where the local-foreigner divide was less antagonistic, and where we could all appreciate each others' differences and unique contributions.

"I will face extreme difficulties operating in less than 10 years as most of our local staff including management is over 50s. Difficulties in recruiting and retaining young talent in our SME business, tightening of foreign workers by MOM is adding fire to my worries and long term sustainability of my family business."

"We need to address new residents in the context of how to attract new people to balance the needs of the current citizenry, not purely as a way to grow the economy."

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"Every Singaporean feels that Singapore is the best place to live and they will not entertain thoughts of migrating to other countries."

"Many felt that the influx of foreigners increases the competition faced by Singaporeans in the areas such as housing and jobs as well. Most youths feel that their job opportunities are greatly reduced with foreign talents being preferred as these foreign workers' wages are lower and are willing to clock in extra time at work."

"I think very few Singaporeans have an issue with Research Fellows, Doctors, International Tax Experts, etc. It is mostly obvious that there is a shortage of specialty skills. The issues come when permits are given for jobs that can be filled by Singapore PMETs."

"My hope is that the Govt can carefully consider the recurrent impact of huge influx of foreign workers, and calibrate a more moderate hiring policy on foreign manpower, while maintaining sustainable economic performance for the benefit of all Singaporeans."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What do we, as a nation, stand for and what is our vision of the future for Singapore? Can we, as Singaporeans, work together to build this national identity above individual interests?
- How can we balance Singapore's land constraints against our various needs for space, including the preservation of places of heritage and cultural significance? What are the costs and benefits?
- How might we calibrate our policy on foreign workers, recognising that they contribute significantly in jobs that Singaporeans often do not want to take up, and that that many Singaporeans work in businesses that depend on foreign labour?

A SOCIETY WHERE GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE HAVE A MORE COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

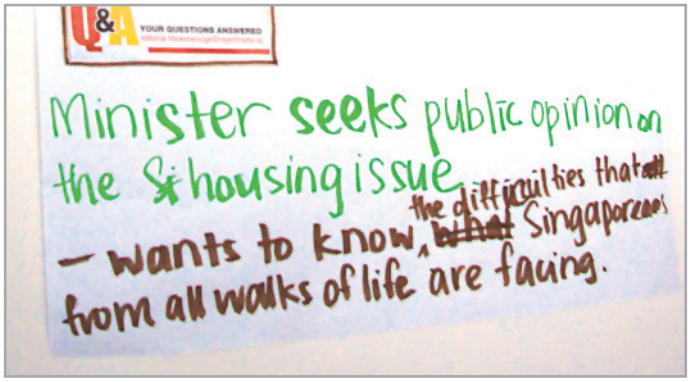
characterised by mutual respect, sincerity and empathy.

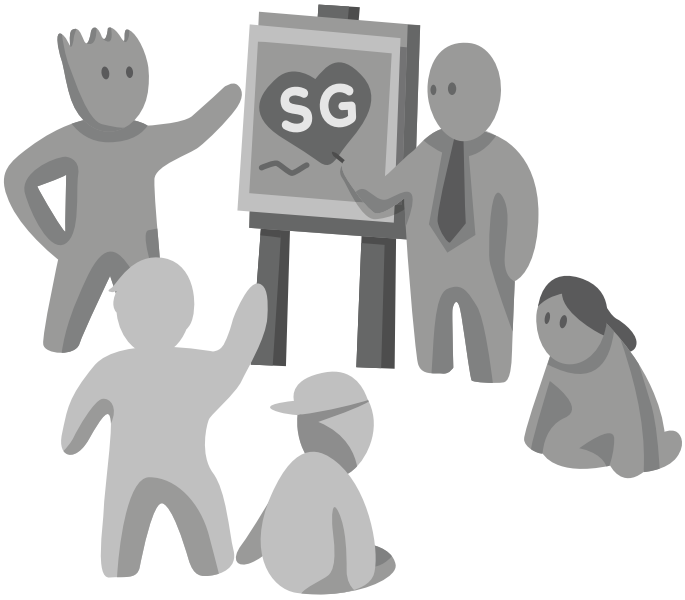
> *"A government that is flexible in its approach to deliver deep public service that meets the needs of citizens."*

Singaporeans also wanted to see a more equal relationship with the government, where public consultation efforts were sincere and inclusive, and where government reached out more proactively to collaborate and co-create solutions with the public.

On this point, some suggested that government could be more transparent. For example, it could release more data to enable people to arrive at conclusions on their own. Others recognised that government might have good reasons for mediating between groups of stakeholders behind closed doors, but felt that more openness could nevertheless engender greater trust in government's consensus-building efforts.

Many people wanted to see a government that was more empathetic, and in touch with the day-to-day concerns of the common man. Most agreed that a proven track record of effective policies was a necessary but insufficient condition for trust. It was also important for the government to interact with the public

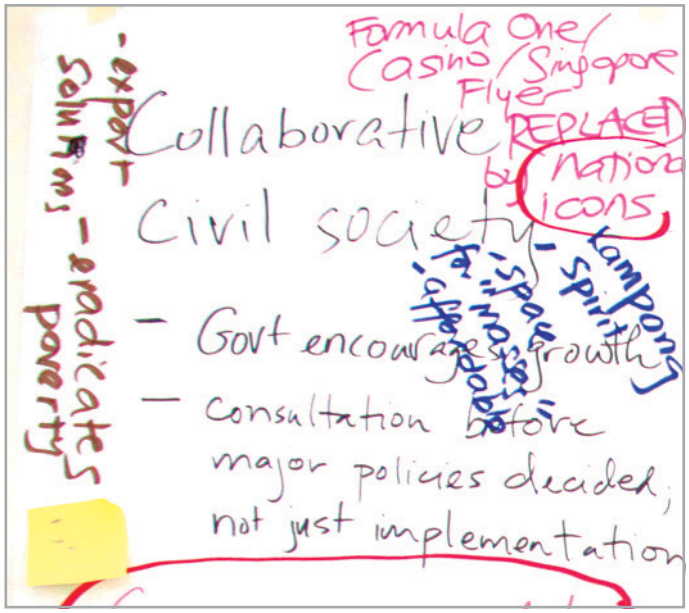




> *"Why do we keep asking 'why isn't the government doing something?' If it's important to you, just do it yourself."*

with greater heart. Within this group, many suggested that there could be greater empowerment of government's frontline officers, more transparency in various appeals processes, and greater flexibility in applying policies and programmes. Policy-makers could also be given more exposure to ground operations, to ensure that they formulate policies that serve the people's needs and can be implemented readily.

At the same time, many hoped for a future where the public would be more circumspect and thoughtful in its appraisal of government policies, and more willing to collaborate with the government instead of criticising from the sidelines. Some felt that Singaporeans today had become closed-off and anti-social, and "not used to having conversations" with each other. This



"Singaporeans generally have a self-centred mindset: they want to know what other people (including the government) can do for them, instead of thinking about what they can do for others."

could be due to the stresses of modern working life and the preference for virtual interactions over face-to-face conversations, brought about by the ubiquity of the Internet. Others pointed out that the advent of social media and the easy proliferation of misinformation on social media channels were likely to contribute to the increasing complexity of governance over time.

Some noted that Singaporeans today had an attitude of entitlement, and did not take the effort to consider Singapore's situation in relation to the global context. They felt that a historical preference for top-down governance had fuelled the expectation that government would take care of everything, and stifled Singaporeans' capacity to solve problems by themselves. Instead of always waiting for government to solve all problems, some felt that Singaporeans should "be the change", stand up for their views, and take charge of their own lives.

"Singaporeans need to be more accountable. Many people like to complain to the media, but when asked for their names, they prefer to hide in anonymity."

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"Government does not have all the solutions, so it needs to engage the community more, and acknowledge ideas to encourage further participation."

"Even though government says that it wants to engage us, it always seems that we end up having to accept 'pre-cooked' positions or finalised policies in their entirety. Sometimes, we just can't help but feel that government doesn't trust us to have anything useful to say, and treats us like children!"

"Public institutions and systems do not have sufficient leeway to help people with special circumstances."

"I work for the government and I welcome criticism of our policies. It keeps us on our toes."

"There is a tension between whether government should intervene more, which may disable Singaporeans from solving their own issues – and whether government should provide more help for vulnerable groups like the elderly"

"Why are policy deliberations kept from the public eye, and why does it seem that government only approaches us for comments after policies are almost 'fully cooked', with no more room for adjustment or revision?"

"I wanted to participate because I feel if we are sincere about collaboration we cannot just criticise from afar."

"Too much social welfare development, people take things for granted, over-reliance on government."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

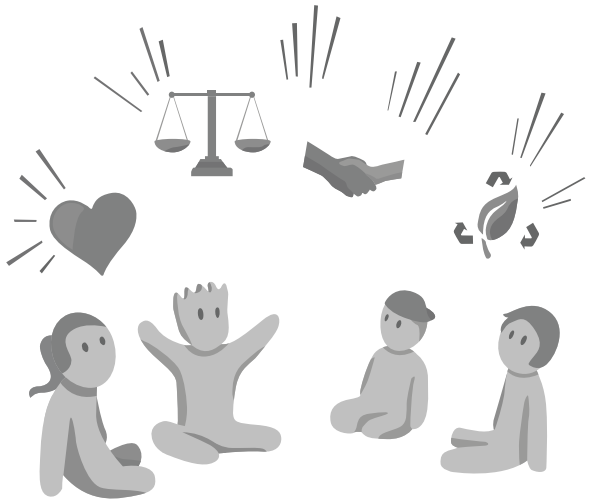
- How can we encourage a more collaborative state-society relationship? What kind of culture and policies would support the facilitation of ground-up initiatives and co-creation of policies?
- How might we better tap on citizens perspectives to improve service delivery? How can "I" contribute constructive ideas and suggestions?

A SOCIETY ANCHORED ON VALUES

that underpin our attitudes, actions and aspirations.

Many emphasised the importance of anchoring the Singapore identity on a set of core values which would acknowledge our status as a cosmopolitan society, while respecting our traditions. Graciousness, kindness, inclusiveness and respect were among the more frequently cited values. Importantly, these values should not only be displayed in behaviour, but also in our attitudes and mindsets.

There was also a general sense that our core values had eroded over time, and that Singaporeans were now too caught up with pursuing individual ambitions and material success, as evidenced by a [2]survey of 2,000 Singaporeans which indicated that Singaporeans were mostly "kiasu", "self-centred" and "elitist". Some pointed out that the government's use of financial incentives in support of outcomes like good grades had had the unintended consequence of promoting self-centred and mercenary behaviour.



"The competitive environment that we are in has resulted in self-centredness. Individualism is like the loose sand and cannot form the fibre of the nation. We need something to gel the sand together. We need to stay competitive and do so with the right ethics and social values."

Many also pointed out that the meritocratic system in Singapore had given rise to a generation of self-centred individuals who did not see a need to be gracious towards others. However, others felt that the use of

2 aAdvantage Consulting Group & Barrett Values Centre 2012 survey on how Singapore residents view the current and desired Singapore society.

"One key challenge is to gain a general consensus (on) what these (principles/values) are and… to strike a balance between a didactic approach and an 'open' approach to pass on these values"

incentives was acceptable, so long as we took care to reward behaviour aligned to positive values that we would like to promote, rather than material outcomes.

Many older Singaporeans expressed concerns about the excessively liberal, permissive and individualistic views among the young. They felt that family ties had weakened. This was perhaps due to the fact that child rearing was increasingly outsourced to foreign domestic workers, and that parents now spent less time inculcating the "right values" in their children. Some felt that there was a need to reintroduce some form of moral education in schools, as these "right values" should be taught from young.

"Could minorities be disadvantaged in our pursuit of common values?"

Singapore's Shared Values (1991)

1. ***Nation before community and society above self***
2. ***Family as the basic unit of society***
3. ***Community support and respect for the individual***
4. ***Consensus, not conflict***
5. ***Racial and religious harmony***

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"I think most Singaporeans have values… just that we lacked practice."

"Kiasuism is not a birthright."

"Lessen the emphasis on financial incentives to develop character."

"A garden city with many gracious people, people who are civic- minded, honest, thoughtful, respectful, loving, tolerant, kind, caring, considerate and law abiding."

"Have a spirit of magnanimity; and an open mind to live and let live in peace."

"A Singaporean - confident yet humble & generous in heart. Always seeking to learn and improve. Dignified and respectful but also assertive in voicing his/her concerns in a sensible way. Striving to excel but not forgetting the help received along the way and extending help to others. An individual yet a team player. Realistic, pragmatic yet remaining a believer in certain ideals. Having a heart for those who are less fortunate and doing something about it."

"Heartware is something that comes from within and it has to be nurtured from young. Good family values is where it starts and it flourishes thru community and then country as a whole."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- What are the core values that we as Singaporeans would be proud to embrace? What do we want to retain from the set of Shared Values introduced in 1991? Are there traits or behaviours that we want to actively discourage among Singaporeans?
- How might we reconcile our existence as an open and cosmopolitan city-state with our Asian heritage?
- How can I practice the values I consider to be core in daily life? What are some instances where I have experienced/would like to experience these values manifested in the behaviour of my fellow Singaporeans?
- How might we inculcate these values in our children?

A SINGAPORE WITH A COMPETENT AND TRUSTWORTHY GOVERNMENT

that is accountable to its citizens.

"Government with the right values."

While most were proud of the government's track record of efficient, prudent and incorrupt administration, a number expressed concern over recent lapses in conduct, which they felt raised doubts about the rigour of government's internal checks and balances.

Many felt that government should continue to be held to high standards of moral conduct. Some pointed out that the Singapore government was highly paid by international standards, and should therefore do more to hire the "right people" and enforce the "right values" in its ranks.

As a whole, people felt that government's service delivery standards were high, and should remain that way. Some felt that there was room for improvement, and shared their concerns about the implementation of government policy, specifically the lack of coordination across government agencies when it came to scheme administration. (Some examples cited included social welfare schemes and assistance for SMEs.) They noted that these lapses in service delivery had caused frustrations among Singaporeans, and could have created a perception that the government did not truly care for its people.

While most recognised that the government's powers were kept in check by laws and institutions, some felt that more could be done in this regard, and hoped for a future where the government could be more accountable to its people. Some felt that this accountability could take the form of greater political or press freedom, while others wanted to see more openness and transparency in the relationship between government and the public. For example, several people pointed out that government operated in a "black box", and maintained an overly tight control over the information it shared with the public. This lack of sharing could stifle social discourse and fuel frustration with the government. However, some also felt that the government has become too populist, and there needs to be a balance between greater accountability to the citizens and trust in the Government.

"A more concerted effort should be made to communicate the statistical evidence driving policy decisions."

Another group of Singaporeans wanted to see more citizen advocates empowered to speak up on the public's behalf. Many within this group felt that the lack of opportunities for people to participate in political or civil society discourse, or the policy-making process, had contributed to the "complaint culture" that exists

"We want to understand how parliament decides on policies, and what principles and basis are these decisions based on"

"Singapore's political climate promotes apathy and fear. Maybe if Singaporeans are able to express themselves more instead of being cooped up, they would have a stronger sense of belonging."

today, as well as a state-society relationship that appears to be more adversarial than collaborative. Whatever their specific hopes, people felt that there should be more fairness in the relationship between government and the people, viewing this as a hallmark of a "civilised society".

Soundbites from OSC Participants

"The complete abolishment of the ISA and the death penalty, which have no place in any civilised 21st-century society."

"Government with the right values."

"Our leaders must serve with compassion and passion, and not for the money. They must see it as a privilege to serve"

"To gain trust and faith from the Singapore people in long term, individual of elected MPs or ministers must declare their wealth and transacted properties in the past seven years."

"Make it illegal for the government to discriminate against and penalise citizens in opposition wards."

"Separation between the government and the PAP."

"Show the people the facts and figures. Singaporeans are not stupid. We see through wayang, no matter how prettily dressed up it is."

"The government shouldn't keep changing, like every election vote in a new government, a new political party, as it is disruptive."

"Singaporeans want a two-party system or a check-and-balance system, but the PAP government keeps saying we cannot afford it. I think most of our disenchantment today stems from this impasse, and no matter how well the government does there are always be underlying concerns and suspicions."

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

- How can we balance the disclosure of government information with the need for confidentiality in government functions such as diplomacy and national security?
- How might we decide what and how much information should be released to the public? How might information be shared in a way that will facilitate constructive conversations?
- How might we decide on the appropriate level of scrutiny of government actions, taking into consideration the possible implications on the effectiveness and efficiency of the government?
- What is the societal consensus on the values and standards of behaviour expected of public servants, in their private and public capacities?