

Reflections

of Our Singapore Conversation

PLEASE
SHARE ME!

What future
do we want?
How do we
get there?

**Sceptical but still hopeful:
Kuo Jian Hong on joining
the OSC Committee**

Pg 10

**A Mother's Wish:
a supportive community
for autistic son**

Pg 15

**Keep talking, it builds
trust: citizens urge**

Pg 46

**Minister Heng
Swee Keat on
the five core
aspirations of
Singaporeans**

Pg 4

Bahasa Melayu / 中文 / தமிழ் on Pg 5-7



CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hear from Minister Heng Swee Keat about the five core aspirations that have emerged from the year-long conversation in all four languages.

Pages 4-7

VOICES

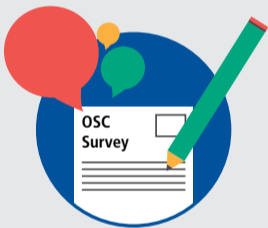
Read the diverse views of Singaporeans who participated in the OSC dialogues.

Pages 15-23

ASPIRATIONS

"Deep dives" into the five core aspirations of Singaporeans: Opportunities, Purpose, Assurance, Spirit and Trust.

Pages 24-41



OSC Survey

OSC did not just reach out to Singaporeans via dialogues. A survey was also commissioned to gather the views of 4,000 Singaporeans on a range of issues. Some of the results and analysis of the OSC survey can be found in this publication. For the full report, go to: www.oursgconversationsg/survey



PHOTO: MOE

Dear fellow Singaporean,

What future do we want? How do we get there?

These questions kept me up for many nights after the Prime Minister asked me last August to start a national conversation with fellow Singaporeans.

All around us, I see the world growing more complex, with challenges coming fast and furious, and our needs growing ever more diverse. How, in such a world, can any one group of people have the answers to everything?

If we are to work together towards a future Singapore that stirs our passion and pride, we must get everyone involved.

That's why we decided to have Our Singapore Conversation (OSC). We aimed to reach out to as many Singaporeans as possible, from all walks of life. We also felt it was important to take the time to understand each other's perspectives and aspirations.

So we did our best to make this truly OUR conversation. If people wanted to talk in dialects, in their coffee shop, on any issue they cared about, we did our best to help that happen.

I don't mind sharing that I was nervous initially about such an open-ended style. After all, most of us were more familiar with very specific questions and hard deadlines.

Some threw cold water by asking, "Why spend all this time talking about things like what we hope for or what we value?", or "Why don't you deal with immediate issues rather than our future?" I think of it like this: if we are going to know how to make good policies, or decide on the hard policy trade-offs to come, we must first understand thoroughly Singaporeans' own hopes for the future. As these hopes are deep and diverse, sometimes even in conflict with each other, we must give ourselves the chance to hear each other out. Just as importantly, Singaporeans will gain from hearing from one another.

Not everyone was comfortable with the OSC's diversity at first. At the first public dialogue, a 15-year-old student asked me if he could change his conversation group. He said, "I want to be in a group with younger people." I asked him to stay in his group because the whole point was to talk to people with different perspectives. After the



If we are to work together towards a future Singapore that stirs our passion and our pride, we must get everyone involved.

conversation, the student thanked me because the elderly members in his group had helped him see things in ways that he had never considered before.

Experiences such as this added to my resolve. I told our OSC team that if the OSC process could help Singaporeans to hear each other out, especially when their aspirations differ, then we would have achieved something valuable.

After close to one year of conversations, more than 47,000 of you have come together over 660 sessions scattered across the island. Many of you also wrote in over email, letters and Facebook.

For that, I would like to say a heartfelt thank you.

Thank you on behalf of the OSC committee, the volunteers, and the Singaporeans who will benefit from the sounder, stronger policies that will come out of your contributions.

My thanks go too to the committee members and facilitators who also came from all walks of life. They joined me on this journey of discovery even though we did not start with a clear map. They are all volunteers who never stinted on their time or ideas. Our committee meetings, like the dialogues we held, were always candid, passionate and lively. As for our facilitators, many participants told me that their openness and warmth brought the OSC to life for them. I am also grateful that many groups initiated OSC dialogues with their own communities – an encouraging example of active citizenry.

If *Reflections* does not look quite like the usual official report, it is because we have dedicated it to the voices of Singaporeans who joined in the OSC. We begin by hearing from Singaporeans who have participated in the OSC dialogues, then learn about the five core aspirations citizens have for Singapore's future. We will also see some examples of how Singaporeans have initiated efforts on their own to help build a better Singapore.

I hope it is as meaningful for you to hear from your fellow Singaporeans as it has been for us to learn from all of you.

Our Singapore Conversation does not end here. The spirit of speaking up constructively and hearing each other out sincerely and respectfully continues, just as making Singapore our best home is a continuing work in progress. The quest for a better Singapore never ends.

And beyond just conversing, let each of us resolve to act now and always, to make Singapore our endearing home, a home of heart, a home of hope for everyone!

Heng Swee Keat
Chairman

Our Singapore Conversation Committee

What OSC Reflections is...

- ✓ An account of the OSC process and insights from our learning journey together over the past year.
- ✓ A snapshot of Singaporeans' voices that reflects the diversity of perspectives. OSC Reflections seeks to honour the views of Singaporeans who have taken the time to share their views.
- ✓ A signpost for key directions that Singaporeans feel our society should move towards. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong will touch on some of the issues at the National Day Rally 2013.

What OSC Reflections is not...

- ✗ NOT a signal to the end of the conversation. Instead, it represents the spirit of Singaporeans coming together to take the country forward, by speaking up constructively and hearing each other sincerely.
- ✗ NOT a policy document that outlines government responses to Singaporeans' contributions to OSC. Government agencies will use the views from OSC as an important source of inputs for policy reviews.



Our Singapore Conversation

IN NUMBERS

All that you need to know about the national conversation at a glance

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF DIALOGUES

(as of 15 July 2013)

~660



- Organised by:
- OSC Secretariat
 - Community groups
 - Government agencies

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS

(as of 15 July 2013)

~47,000
+ 4,000 surveyed

TOTAL NUMBER OF LOCATIONS

75

NUMBER OF LANGUAGES USED

7

English, Mandarin, Malay, Tamil,
Cantonese, Hokkien, Teochew

NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS INVOLVED

not including government agencies
(as of 15 July 2013)

>40

ESTIMATED TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS OF CONVERSATIONS

1,645 hrs



Watching all 8 Harry Potter movies

82 times

NUMBER OF ONLINE CONTRIBUTIONS

(as of 15 July 2013)



1,331
EMAIL
THREADS

4,050
FACEBOOK
WALL POSTS

211
FACEBOOK
PRIVATE MESSAGES

230,000

ONLINE REFERENCES TO OSC



based on
"Our Singapore Conversation"
Google search

73

OSC YOUTUBE VIDEOS



TOTAL DURATION OF YOUTUBE VIDEOS



149
MINUTES

PUBLIC DIALOGUES ORGANISED BY THE OSC SECRETARIAT

VOLUNTEERS

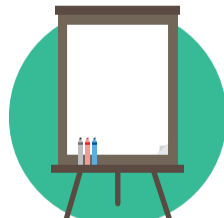


120
FACILITATORS



83
NOTE-TAKERS

SHEETS OF FLIPCHART PAPER DRAWN ON



6 sheets per group
× 5 groups
× 35 dialogues

1,050

When laid out, they cover the floor of about 10 3-room HDB flats



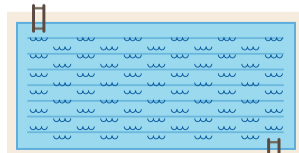
CUPS OF COFFEE & TEA DRUNK



90 cups per canister
× 4 canisters
× 35 dialogues

12,600

Enough to fill 1/1000 of an Olympic-sized pool



NUMBER OF MR SKETCH MARKERS USED



15 boxes
× 8 markers

120

Form a straight line with the markers and it will take about

60 steps
to cover the length



NUMBER OF STICKY NOTES USED



8 pads per group
× 5 groups
× 35 dialogues

1,400

× 100 pieces per notepad =
140,000 pieces of sticky notes

When laid out, they cover the floor of about 10 MRT carriages



Working together towards our aspirations

Views and ideas on five core aspirations that have emerged from the year-long conversation will be considered

The OSC has been a learning journey. We listened and learnt to appreciate one another's views and hopes for the future, and the values that we would like to see in ourselves and our society. We realised and learnt just how diverse individuals and groups are in our society and yet how much we share and value in common as Singaporeans.

We strived to design the OSC as an inclusive and iterative process. About 47,000 Singaporeans from all walks of life actively participated in our dialogues. In addition to dialogues organised by the OSC Committee and Secretariat, the broader community too took ownership of the process and organised dialogues to give their stakeholders a voice.

The OSC process also provided an interactive space for citizens to express and explain some of their ideas for our common future, and these views and ideas have been conveyed to policy makers to consider.

Informed by these dialogues, the OSC Committee presents the following five core aspirations that citizens feel should guide our society:

OPPORTUNITIES

Singaporeans desire opportunities to make a good living and pursue their aspirations. Amidst global uncertainties, we will need a strong, competitive economy and workforce to support businesses that provide good jobs. We want to build a society where all Singaporeans have chances to realise their potential, regardless of their family background.

As a society, we need to:

- Create good jobs for Singaporeans by nurturing a strong, competitive and resilient economy so that Singaporeans can realise their aspirations and lead fulfilling lives.
- Provide opportunities to all Singaporeans to pursue their ambitions and excel in their chosen fields. We must recognise that individuals have different abilities, make different career choices, and take different paths towards fulfilling their potential.
- Respect all individuals, regardless of jobs they do, qualifications they hold or their positions in society.

PURPOSE

We want to live purposefully – as individuals, as members of our communities, and as Singaporeans. We want to live in a community that celebrates achievements beyond the economic. We want to look to the things that link and bind us – our national heritage, shared memories and communal spaces. We want to create a better Singapore for future generations – together.

As a society, we need to:

- Broaden how we assess success in our workplace and education system and appreciate the need for Singaporeans to live a balanced and fulfilling life. We need to ensure that Singaporeans are able to make time for our families, even as we strive to stay competitive in the workforce.



The OSC has given many of us across Singapore a better understanding of what it takes to listen and engage each other on issues close to our hearts.

- Preserve and strengthen our shared identity as a nation. We can do this by preserving and learning more about our heritage and collective memories, expanding the space for shared experiences, and going beyond merely tolerating differences to embrace diversity.
- Foster a passion among our people to contribute to the common good. We want to take ownership for ourselves and our communities, and build up the social capital that will keep us together in hard times. We want to start and support ground-up initiatives that bring our people together.

ASSURANCE

Singaporeans want assurance that basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and public transport are affordable and within their reach. We all contribute differently, but we hope to share in the nation's progress. We strive to live with dignity and to do our best to provide for our families and prepare for a rainy day. But we also hope for adequate support to buffer shocks and weather life's uncertainties – for example, when our loved ones fall ill or when we lose our jobs.

As a society, we need to:

- Make basic needs such as housing, healthcare and public transport affordable and accessible for all Singaporeans. We should lean towards public housing flats being “Home First, Then Asset”.
- Continue to emphasise personal and family responsibility, while strengthening collective responsibility. We should as a society assure those who meet with unexpected shocks that they will be able to get back on their feet.
- Invest and plan for life's uncertainties early so that we can enjoy peace of mind in our golden years.

SPIRIT

Singaporeans want a society anchored in our common values, as these values help define us. The OSC process has enabled us, as a society, to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges that our fellow Singaporeans face and how best we can extend a helping hand to the less advantaged among us. We respect the elderly, the disabled, those with special needs, ex-offenders and others who may be at the margins of society. We aspire to a strong “kampong spirit”, and we want to strengthen our sense of togetherness and build a compassionate society.

As a society, we need to:

- Reinforce the importance of strong families, community values and social cohesion.
- Take care of the disadvantaged and provide support in a way that respects every Singaporean's dignity.



TRUST

Singaporeans want to contribute towards building our common future. This requires deepening trust among Singaporeans and between the government and citizens. We value open and sincere engagement, and believe civic-minded Singaporeans should be welcomed to engage meaningfully with policy makers and with one another. The OSC process has also helped foster understanding of the interests and cares of different groups of Singaporeans, and an appreciation of the importance of compromise and give-and-take.

As a society, we need to:

- Encourage constructive and meaningful citizen engagement on policies that impact our society, and nurture leaders who can connect with Singaporeans from all walks of life.
- Strengthen trust and accountability between the government and people. The government should share the reasons behind policies and create or enhance spaces for on-going interactions, outreach and data-sharing.
- Promote mutual understanding between different groups of Singaporeans who may have different views of the issues we care about, so that we can stay together and move ahead as a community through compromise and give-and-take.

Singapore has become more diverse in composition and outlook. As the OSC has shown, Singaporeans have textured and sometimes competing aspirations and views, each passionately held. For example:

- Affordability means different things to different people. What are basic needs to some, could be discretionary wants for others (e.g. cars, tuition).
- We desire broader definitions of success, but hold different views of what this means in terms of our life choices in education, work and beyond.
- We want to extend a helping hand to those in need, but have different views about how to do this in a way that respects each Singaporean's dignity.
- Traditional family values are still important to Singaporeans, but some among us also wish to respect those who pursue alternative lifestyles.

The OSC has helped us all understand better what we gain in listening, and engaging openly and patiently with each other on issues close to our hearts. I hope it has also moved some Singaporeans into taking action, to help build the Singapore they hope to see in the future. As the government reviews key policies in the light of the insights gathered from the OSC, let us continue to build upon this spirit of give-and-take. After a year interacting with Singaporeans from all walks of life, I am more convinced than before that the things that unite us as Singaporeans far exceed the things that divide us. Let us build a better future for all Singaporeans – together!

Bekerjasama ke arah aspirasi kita

Pandangan-pandangan dan idea-idea tentang lima aspirasi teras yang timbul daripada perbincangan selama setahun akan dipertimbangkan

Perbincangan Singapura Kita (OSC) merupakan suatu perjalanan pembelajaran. Kita masing-masing saling mendengar dan belajar untuk menghargai pandangan dan harapan bagi masa hadapan, serta nilai-nilai yang ingin kita lihat dalam diri dan masyarakat kita. Kita sedar dan pelajari tentang kepelbagaian yang wujud di kalangan individu-individu dan kumpulan-kumpulan dalam masyarakat kita walaupun kita banyak berkongsi dan menghargai perkara-perkara yang sama sebagai rakyat Singapura.

Kita berusaha untuk membentuk OSC sebagai proses yang inklusif dan berulang. Sekitar 47,000 warga Singapura dari segenap lapisan masyarakat terlibat aktif dalam sesi dialog kami. Selain daripada sesi dialog yang dianjurkan oleh Jawatankuasa dan Sekretariat OSC, masyarakat umum juga turut berasa bertanggungjawab terhadap prosesnya dan telah menganjurkan sesi dialog bagi memberikan ruang bersuara kepada kumpulan-kumpulan berkepentingan mereka.

Proses OSC juga menyediakan ruang interaktif bagi warganegara untuk meluahkan dan menjelaskan idea-idea mereka bagi masa hadapan kita bersama, dan pandangan serta idea itu telah disampaikan kepada penggubal-penggubal dasar yang berkenaan untuk dipertimbangkan.

Berdasarkan sesi-sesi dialog tersebut, Jawatankuasa OSC membentangkan 5 aspirasi teras yang warga Singapura rasakan dapat menjadi panduan kepada masyarakat kita:

PELUANG

Warga Singapura mengharapkan peluang-peluang bagi membina kehidupan yang baik dan mengejar aspirasi mereka. Di tengah-tengah ketidakpastian global, kita memerlukan ekonomi dan tenaga kerja yang kukuh dan berdaya saing bagi menyokong perniagaan yang menyediakan pekerjaan yang baik. Kita ingin membina masyarakat di mana setiap warga Singapura mempunyai peluang untuk merealisasikan potensi mereka, tanpa mengira latar belakang keluarga mereka.

Sebagai sebuah masyarakat, kita perlu:

- Mewujudkan pekerjaan-pekerjaan yang baik bagi warga Singapura dengan menyemai ekonomi yang kukuh, berdaya saing dan berdaya tahan agar warga Singapura boleh merealisasikan aspirasi dan menjalani kehidupan yang memenuhi keinginan mereka.
- Menyediakan peluang-peluang agar semua warga Singapura dapat mengejar cita-cita dan cemerlang dalam bidang yang mereka pilih. Kita perlu menerima hakikat bahawa setiap individu memiliki keupayaan yang berbeza, memilih kerjaya yang berbeza, dan mengambil laluan yang berbeza untuk mencapai potensi mereka.
- Menghormati setiap individu, tanpa mengira pekerjaan yang mereka lakukan, taraf kelayakan yang dimiliki atau kedudukannya dalam masyarakat.

TUJUAN

Kita mahu menjalani kehidupan yang bermakna -- sebagai individu, anggota masyarakat dan warga Singapura. Kita mahu hidup dalam sebuah masyarakat yang merayakan pencapaian melangkaui pencapaian ekonomi. Kita

ingin melihat kepada perkara-perkara yang mengikat dan menjalin kita bersama -- warisan negara kita, kenangan dan ruang bersama. Kita mahu mencipta Singapura yang lebih baik bagi generasi masa hadapan -- bersama-sama.

Sebagai sebuah masyarakat, kita perlu:

- Meluaskan bagaimana kita menilai erti kejayaan di tempat kerja dan dalam sistem pendidikan, dan menghargai keperluan warga Singapura untuk menjalani kehidupan yang seimbang dan memuaskan. Kita perlu memastikan warga Singapura mampu meluangkan masa untuk keluarga, walaupun kita sedang gigih berusaha untuk kekal berdaya saing dalam tenaga kerja.
- Memelihara dan mengukuhkan identiti bersama sebagai sebuah negara. Kita boleh melakukan hal ini dengan memelihara dan mempelajari tentang warisan kita, mengekalkan kenangan-kenangan yang kita lalui bersama, meluaskan ruang bagi berkongsi pengalaman dan menerima kepelbagaian di kalangan kita bukan setakat bersikap toleran sahaja.
- Memupuk semangat menyumbang untuk kepentingan bersama di kalangan warga Singapura. Kita mahu bertanggungjawab ke atas diri kita dan masyarakat, dan membina modal sosial yang menyatukan kita bersama dalam masa-masa kesusahan. Kita mahu memulakan dan menyokong inisiatif-inisiatif yang dimulakan dari bawah ke atas yang dapat sama-sama menyatukan masyarakat kita.

JAMINAN

Warga Singapura mahukan jaminan bahawa keperluan asas seperti perumahan, penjagaan kesihatan dan pengangkutan awam dimampui dan dalam jangkauan mereka. Kita semua menyumbang secara berbeza, namun kita berharap dapat sama-sama berkongsi kemajuan negara. Kita berusaha untuk hidup secara bermaruah dan melakukan yang terbaik bagi menyara keluarga dan bersedia menghadapi masa-masa susah pada masa akan datang. Namun kita juga berharap agar adanya sokongan yang cukup bagi mengurangkan kejutan atau apabila kita perlu menangani ketidakpastian kehidupan -- contohnya, apabila orang-orang yang kita sayangi jatuh sakit atau kita kehilangan pekerjaan.

Sebagai sebuah masyarakat, kita perlu:

- Menjadikan keperluan asas seperti perumahan, penjagaan kesihatan dan pengangkutan awam dimampui dan mudah diperolehi oleh semua warga Singapura. Kita harus condong menerima perumahan awam sebagai "Pertama Rumah, Kemudian Aset".
- Terus menitikberatkan tanggungjawab peribadi dan keluarga, dan pada masa yang sama mengukuhkan tanggungjawab bersama. Kita sebagai sebuah masyarakat mesti memastikan mereka yang ditimpa kesusahan yang tidak dijangkakan mampu berdikari semula.
- Melabur dan membuat perancangan awal untuk masa depan yang tidak menentu agar kita menikmati ketenangan fikiran dalam usia senja.

SEMANGAT

Warga Singapura memerlukan sebuah masyarakat yang berpaksikan nilai-nilai bersama yang membantu mendefinisikan jati diri kita. Proses OSC telah membolehkan kita, sebagai sebuah masyarakat, membina pemahaman yang mendalam mengenai cabaran-cabaran yang dihadapi oleh watan senegara dan bagaimana kita boleh menghulurkan bantuan sebaik mungkin kepada golongan yang kurang berkemampuan dalam kalangan kita. Kita menghormati yang tua, yang kurang upaya, golongan yang memerlukan sokongan istimewa, bekas pesalah dan golongan pinggir dalam masyarakat. Kita ingin memupuk "semangat kampung" yang teguh, dan kami mahu mengukuhkan perpaduan supaya dapat membina sebuah masyarakat yang mempunyai rasa keihisanan.

Sebagai sebuah masyarakat, kita perlu:

- Memperteguh kepentingan keluarga yang kukuh, nilai-nilai masyarakat dan kesatuan sosial.
- Menjaga golongan kurang bernasib baik dan menye-

diakan sokongan yang menghormati maruah setiap warga Singapura.

KEPERCAYAAN

Warga Singapura ingin menyumbang ke arah pembinaan masa hadapan bersama. Ini memerlukan kepercayaan yang mendalam di kalangan warga Singapura dan antara pemerintah dengan warganegara. Kita menghargai keterbukaan dan pelibatan jujur, dan percaya bahawa warga Singapura yang mempunyai kesedaran sivik harus dialu-alukan untuk terlibat secara bermakna dengan para penggubal dasar dan antara satu sama lain. Proses OSC juga telah membantu memupuk pemahaman tentang minat dan keprihatinan pelbagai kumpulan warga Singapura, dan menghargai kepentingan kesepakatan dan saling bertolak ansur.

Sebagai sebuah masyarakat, kita perlu:

- Menggalakkan pelibatan warganegara secara membina dan bermakna mengenai dasar-dasar yang memberi kesan kepada masyarakat kita, dan memupuk pemimpin-pemimpin yang mampu berhubung dengan semua golongan warga Singapura dari pelbagai latar kehidupan.
- Mengukuhkan kepercayaan dan rasa kebertanggungjawaban antara pemerintah dan rakyat. Pemerintah harus menjelaskan sebab penggubalan sesuatu dasar dan mewujudkan atau meluaskan ruang bagi interaksi yang berterusan, usaha mendekati masyarakat dan perkongsian data.
- Menggalakkan pemahaman bersama antara kumpulan warga Singapura yang berlainan yang mungkin tidak sependapat dengan isu-isu yang menjadi keprihatinan kita, agar kita dapat melangkah ke hadapan sebagai sebuah masyarakat menerusi kesepakatan dan tolak ansur.

Masyarakat Singapura telah menjadi lebih rencam dari segi komposisi dan pandangan. Menerusi apa yang telah dipelajari dari OSC, kita akur bahawa warga Singapura mempunyai aspirasi dan pandangan yang berbeza serta yang dipegang teguh. Contohnya:

- Lain orang mempunyai tanggapan yang berbeza tentang erti kemampuan. Apa yang dianggap sebagai keperluan asas bagi sebahagian orang, dianggap bukan keperluan bagi yang lain (contoh: kereta, tuisyen)
- Kita mahukan definisi yang lebih luas tentang erti kejayaan, tetapi kita mempunyai pandangan yang berbeza dari segi pilihan dalam pendidikan, pekerjaan dan lain-lain.
- Kita mahu membantu mereka yang memerlukan, tetapi mempunyai pandangan yang berbeza tentang bagaimana hendak melakukannya dengan cara yang menghormati maruah diri setiap warga Singapura.
- Nilai-nilai keluarga tradisional masih penting bagi warga Singapura, tetapi ada di antara kita yang ingin menghormati mereka yang memilih gaya hidup alternatif.

OSC telah memberikan ramai daripada kita pemahaman yang lebih baik tentang apa yang kita raih dengan mendengar dan melibatkan satu sama lain secara terbuka dan sabar dalam isu-isu yang dekat di hati kita. Saya berharap ini juga akan merangsang sebahagian daripada warga Singapura untuk bertindak, untuk membantu membina Singapura yang ingin kita lihat pada masa hadapan. Sedang pemerintah menjalankan semakan dasar-dasar utama menggunakan maklumat yang dikumpulkan daripada OSC, marilah kita terus membina semangat bertolak ansur ini. Selepas setahun berinteraksi dengan warga Singapura dari pelbagai latar kehidupan, saya berasa lebih yakin bahawa perkara yang menyatukan kita semua sebagai warga Singapura melebihi perkara yang memisahkan kita. Marilah kita membina masa hadapan yang lebih baik bagi semua warga Singapura -- bersama-sama!

携手迈向 我们的愿景

历时一年的全国对话会勾画出了五大愿景，而关于这五大愿景的看法和建议，当局都会予以考虑。

“我们的新加坡对话会”是一趟学习之旅。在这个过程中，我们聆听彼此，理解彼此对各种课题的观点和对未来的期许，以及所认同的个人和社会价值观。尽管社会多元，新加坡人其实有许多共同点和共同的价值观。

我们尽力让全国对话会包含各种声音。来自社会各阶层的大约4万7000人踊跃地参与了对话。除了“我们的新加坡”委员会和秘书处主办的对话会，多个社会团体也采取主动举办多场对话会让相关者有机会发言。

全国对话会也是个互动平台，让国人对我们的共同未来畅所欲言，阐述想法。通过这个过程所收集到的意见和想法，现已转达相关的政府部门，以供参考。

“我们的新加坡”委员会根据对话会的讨论内容，总结出以下国人认为应该用以引导社会发展的五大愿景：

让社会充满机遇

国人希望有充分的机会过好日子、追求理想。眼下全球经济形势不明朗，我们必须保持经济稳定，确保劳动队伍具备竞争力，才能支持能创造更多优质就业机会的企业。我们希望每个国人，不论他们来自什么样的家庭背景，都有机会全面发挥潜能。

作为一个社会，我们必须：

- 为国人创造良好的就业环境，让国人全面发挥潜能，生活充实，而要达到这个目标，前提是国家的经济能够稳健增长，具备竞争力和韧性。
- 提供机会让所有国人得以施展抱负，在自己所选择的领域中取得优异的成绩。我们必须接受每个人有各自的专长、各自的职业选择，并且通过不同的途径来发挥潜能。
- 尊重每个人，不论他的职业、学历和社会地位如何。

同心同德，殊途同归

不论作为个人、社群中的一员或是新加坡公民，我们都希望人生有意义。经济成就以外，我们的社会也重视其他努力成果。我们也重视那些将国民联系在一起的元素，包括我们的文化传统、历史遗产、集体记忆及共同空间。我们要为下一代携手共创更美好的新加坡。

作为一个社会，我们必须：

- 扩大我们在事业和教育方面对成功的定义，并且理解人民需要平衡、充实的生活。在确保人民在职场上保持竞争力的同时，也能有时间陪伴家人。
- 加强国家认同感。更好地保存及了解我们的历史文化和集体记忆、为共同的体验提供更大的空间，同时尊重并接受彼此间的差异，而不止于互相容忍。
- 鼓励国人关怀社会，相互守望，热心公益。主动为看顾自己和社群负责，累积在困难时刻团结人民的社会资本。我们要发起及支持能团结国人的社区计划。

让生活得到保障

人民要求住房、医药保健和公共交通等基本生活需要的负担合理。每个人对国家和社会的贡献各异，但都期望能够共享国家发展的成果。我们希望自力更生，也努力照顾好自己的家庭，并会未雨绸缪以备不时之需。但是，当人生面对不测之风云，例如不幸失业或至亲患病时，我们希望能获得所需的援助以渡过难关。

作为一个社会，我们必须：

- 确保住房、医药保健和公共交通等基本生活需要保持在人民负担得起的水平，并提供足够的供应与

服务。在组屋方面，侧重于“住家为主，资产为辅”的概念。

- 在强化社会的集体承担时，继续强调个人与家庭责任，同时作为一个具包容性的社会，我们应该让陷入困境的同胞有信心，他们最终能够重新站起来。
- 提前投资与规划，以帮助国人应付人生中各种际遇，最终能安享晚年。

互相扶持，不离不弃

国人要一个以共同价值观为导向的社会，因为这些价值观突显了我们新加坡人的身份特征。全国对话会让我们更了解其他同胞所面临的挑战，也更了解我们可以如何帮助社会上较弱势的群体。我们尊重年长者、残疾者、有特殊需求者、前囚犯和那些可能在社会边缘上挣扎的人。我们希望拥有浓郁的甘榜精神，以及一个更具凝聚力、更有人情味的社会。

作为一个社会，我们必须：

- 强调稳固家庭、共同价值观和社会凝聚力的重要性。
- 照顾弱势者，让他们有尊严地得到援助。

互信互重，有所担当

国人愿意为我们的共同未来作出贡献，而这需要人民与人民之间，以及政府与人民之间建立起更深的互信。开诚布公的互动，具公民承担的国人，应该有机会同决策者及其他国人互动交流。全国对话会协助大家更了解不同社群所关注的课题及观点，并了解处理课题时互相包容、妥协、让步的重要性。

作为一个社会，我们必须：

- 鼓励具建设性和有意义的互动，让人民对会影响社会的政策发表看法，并且培养能够同各阶层人民沟通的领袖。
- 加强人民同政府之间的信任与问责关系。政府应该解释政策制定的原因，并对讨论、和信息公开给予更大的空间。
- 鼓励不同社群互相了解彼此对课题的不同看法，并互相妥协，让整个社会能够向前迈进。

新加坡的社会结构和精神面貌日益复杂。通过全国对话会，我们进一步了解到人民有不同的愿景，当中甚至有对立或矛盾的观点，例子包括：

- 可负担的价格对不同的人有不同的定义。一些人所谓的基本生活需要，对其他人而言可能是额外的奢侈品，例如汽车和补习。
- 我们渴望扩大对成功的定义，但对于扩大定义可能会对教育、事业及其他方面的抉择产生什么样的影响，持有不同的看法。
- 我们愿意帮助那些有需要的人，但对于应该如何让人们有尊严地接受帮助，持有不同看法。
- 传统的家庭价值观对国人还是重要的，但一些人同时也希望尊重那些追求另类生活的同胞。

全国对话会让我们许多人了解，针对所关心的课题进行公开的讨论并耐心聆听彼此的看法，让我们获益良多。我希望这激发了更多国人采取主动，参与建设他们未来所梦想看见的新加坡。在政府采用全国对话会收集到的意见，对主要政策进行检讨的同时，让我们大家继续加强互相求同存异、相互包容和理解的精神。这一年来同各阶层的国人进行讨论和交流后，我更坚信能够团结国人的理由远比能够分化我们的理由来得多。让我们携手为新加坡共创更美好的未来！



நம் இலட்சியங்களை நோக்கி ஒன்றுசேர்ந்து செயற்படுதல்

ஓராண்டு காலம் நடந்த கலந்துரையாடலில் இருந்து எழுந்துள்ள ஐந்து முக்கிய இலட்சியங்கள் குறித்த கருத்துகளும் யோசனைகளும் கவனமாக ஆராயப்படும்

நமது சிங்கப்பூர் கலந்துரையாடல் (ஒஎஸ்சி) ஒரு கற்றல் பயணமாக இருந்து வருகிறது. ஒருவர் மற்றவரின் கருத்துகளையும் எதிர்காலத்திற்கான எதிர்பார்ப்புகளையும், நம்மில்லும் நம் சமூகத்திலும் நாம் காண விழையும் பண்புகளையும் நாம் கேட்டறிந்து, புரிந்துகொள்ள கற்றுக்கொண்டோம். நமது சமுதாயத்தில் தனிமனிதர்களும் பிரிவுகளும் எவ்வளவுதான் வேறுபட்டு இருந்தாலும், சிங்கப்பூர்கள் என்ற முறையில் நாம் பகிர்ந்து, உயர்வாகக் கருதும் பொதுவான விஷயங்கள் பல உள்ளன என்பதை நாம் உணர்ந்து, தெரிந்துகொண்டோம்.

அனைவரையும் உள்ளடக்கி, மீண்டும் மீண்டும் நடத்தக்கூடிய ஒரு செயல்முறையாக ஒஎஸ்சியை உருவாக்க நாம் கடுமையாக செய்தோம். வாழ்க்கையின் எல்லாப் பின்னணிகளில் இருந்தும் சுமார் 47,000 சிங்கப்பூர்கள் உற்சாகமாக நம் கலந்துரையாடல்களில் கலந்துகொண்டனர். ஒஎஸ்சி குழுவும் செயல்வையும் ஏற்பாடு செய்த கலந்துரையாடல்களுக்கும் மேலாக, விரிவானநிலையில் சமூகமும் இச்செயல்முறைக்குப் பொறுப்பேற்று பங்காளர்கள் தங்கள் கருத்தைப் பதிவுசெய்ய கலந்துரையாடல்களை ஏற்பாடு செய்தது.

மேலும், குடிமக்கள் நமது பொதுவான எதிர்காலத்திற்காக தங்களுடைய யோசனைகளில் சிலவற்றைத் தெரிவிக்கவும் விளக்கவும் ஒரு கலந்துரையாடல் தளத்தையும் ஒஎஸ்சி செயல்முறை வழங்கியது. இந்த கருத்துகளும் யோசனைகளும் சம்பந்தப்பட்ட கொள்கை வகுப்பாளர்களின் பரிசீலனைக்காக அனுப்பப்பட்டுள்ளன.

இந்தக் கலந்துரையாடல்களின்வழி அறிந்துகொண்டவற்றைக் கருத்திற்கொண்டு, நம் சமுதாயத்தை வழிநடத்தக்கூடியதாக நம் குடிமக்கள் கருதும் கீழ்க்காணும் 5 அடிப்படை இலட்சியங்களை ஒஎஸ்சி குழு முன்வைக்கிறது.

வாய்ப்புகள்

நல்ல வருமானத்தைப் பெறவும் தங்கள் இலட்சியங்களை நோக்கிச் செயற்படவும் சிங்கப்பூர்கள் வாய்ப்புகளை விரும்புகிறார்கள். நிச்சயமற்ற உலகச் சூழ்நிலைகளுக்கு மத்தியில், நல்ல வேலைகளை வழங்கக்கூடிய தொழில்களுக்கு ஆதரவளிப்பதற்கு நமக்கு வலுவான, போட்டித்தன்மைமிக்க பொருளியலும் ஊழியரணியும் தேவைப்படுகின்றன. ஒருவரின் குடும்பப் பின்னணியைப் பொருட்படுத்தாமல், ஒவ்வொரு சிங்கப்பூரும் தன்னால் இயன்றவரை சிறப்பாகச் செய்வதற்கு வாய்ப்புகளை வழங்கும் ஒரு சமுதாயத்தை உருவாக்கவே நாம் விரும்புகிறோம்.

ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, நாம் செய்யவேண்டியவை:

- வலுவான, போட்டித்தன்மைமிக்க, மீள்திறன்வாய்ந்த பொருளியலைப்

பேணிவளர்ப்பதன் மூலம் சிங்கப்பூர்களுக்கு நல்ல வேலைகளை உருவாக்கவேண்டும். அதன்வழி, சிங்கப்பூர்கள் தங்கள் இலட்சியங்களை நிறைவேற்றிக்கொள்ளவும் நிறைவான வாழ்க்கையை வாழவும் முடியும்.

- எல்லா சிங்கப்பூர்களும் தங்கள் இலட்சியங்களை நோக்கிச் செயல்படவும் தாங்கள் தேர்ந்தெடுத்த துறைகளில் உன்னதத்தை அடையவும் வாய்ப்புகளை வழங்கவேண்டும். தனிமனிதர்களுக்கு மாறுபட்ட திறமைகள் உள்ளன, அவர்கள் வெவ்வேறு வாழ்க்கைத்தொழில்களைத் தேர்ந்தெடுப்பார்கள், தங்கள் இலட்சியங்களை நிறைவேற்றிக்கொள்ள வெவ்வேறு பாதைகளில் செல்வார்கள் என்பதையெல்லாம் நாம் புரிந்துகொள்ள வேண்டும்.
- ஒருவர் எத்தகைய வேலை செய்கிறார், என்ன தகுதிகளை வைத்திருக்கிறார் அல்லது சமுதாயத்தில் அவர் எந்த நிலையில் இருக்கிறார் என்பதையெல்லாம் பொருட்படுத்தாமல், ஒவ்வொரு தனிமனிதரையும் மதிக்க வேண்டும்.

செயல்நோக்கம்

தனிமனிதர்களாகவும், நமது சமூகங்களின் உறுப்பினர்களாகவும் சிங்கப்பூர்களாகவும் நாம் நோக்கத்துடன் வாழவே விரும்புகிறோம். பொருளியல் வளப்பத்தையும் கடந்து சாதனைகளைப் போற்றும் ஒரு சமுதாயத்தில் வாழ விரும்புகிறோம். நம் தேசிய மரபுடைமை, பகிர்ந்துகொள்ளும் நினைவுகள், பொதுவிடங்கள் என்று நம்மை ஒன்றிணைக்கும் அம்சங்களில் கவனம் செலுத்த விரும்புகிறோம். ஒன்றிணைந்து வருங்காலச் சந்ததியினருக்கு ஒரு மேம்பட்ட சிங்கப்பூரை உருவாக்க நாம் விழைகிறோம்.

ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, நாம் செய்யவேண்டியவை:

- நம் வேலையிடத்திலும் கல்வி அமைப்புகளையிலும் வெற்றியை மதிப்பிடும் விதத்தை விரிவுபடுத்துவதோடு, சிங்கப்பூர்கள் ஒரு சமச்சீரான, மனநிறைவான வாழ்க்கையை வாழவேண்டியதன் அவசியத்தை நாம் மதிக்கவேண்டும். நாம் ஊழியரணியில் தொடர்ந்து போட்டித்தன்மையோடு இருக்க பாடுபடும் போதிலும், சிங்கப்பூர்களால் தங்கள் குடும்பத்துக்காக நேரம் ஒதுக்க முடிவதை நாம் உறுதிசெய்ய வேண்டும்.
- ஒரு தேசமாக நம் பொதுவான அடையாளத்தைப் பாதுகாக்கவும் வலுப்படுத்தவும் வேண்டும். நம் மரபுடைமையையும் கூட்டு நினைவுகளையும் பாதுகாத்து அவற்றைப் பற்றி மேலும் அறிந்துகொள்வது, பொது அனுபவங்களுக்கான வாய்ப்பிடங்களை கூட்டுவது, வெறுமனே வேறுபாடுகளைச் சகித்துக்கொள்ளும் நிலையையும் கடந்து நம் வேற்றுமையை அரவணைப்பது ஆகியவற்றின் மூலம் இதனை நம்மால் செய்ய முடியும்.
- பொது நன்மைக்குப் பங்காற்றும் ஒரு பேரார்வத்தை நம் மக்களிடையே வளர்க்கவேண்டும். நமக்கும் நம் சமூகங்களுக்கும் நாம் பொறுப்பேற்பதோடு, சிரமமான காலங்களில் நம்மைப் பிணைக்கவல்ல சமுதாய மூலதனத்தைப் பெருக்கவும் வேண்டும். நமது மக்களை ஒன்றுபடுத்தும் அடித்தள முயற்சிகளைத் தொடங்கவும் ஆதரிக்கவும் நாம் விரும்புகிறோம்.

உத்தரவாதம்

சிங்கப்பூர்கள், வீட்டுவசதி, சுகாதாரப் பராமரிப்பு, பொதுப் போக்குவரவு போன்ற அடிப்படைத் தேவைகள் தங்களுக்குக் கட்டுப்படியான விலையில் எளிதில் கிடைக்கும் என்ற நம்பிக்கையுடன் இருக்க விழைகிறார்கள். நாம் எல்லாரும் வெவ்வேறு வழிகளில் பங்களிக்கிறோம், ஆனால் தேசத்தின் வளர்ச்சியிலும் நம் பங்கு இருக்கவேண்டுமென விரும்புகிறோம். நாம் கண்ணியத்துடன் வாழவும், நம் குடும்பங்களுக்குச் சிறந்ததை அளிக்கவும், சிரமமான காலத்திற்குத் தயாராய் இருக்கவும் கடுமியுற்சி செய்கிறோம். எதிர்பாரா நெருக்கடிகளைச் சமாளிக்க அல்லது

வாழ்க்கையின் நிச்சயமற்றத் தருணங்களை, உதாரணத்திற்கு, நமக்கு நெருக்கமானவர்கள் நோய்வாய்ப்படும்போது அல்லது நம் வேலைகளை நாம் இழக்கும்போது, போதிய ஆதரவு இருக்கும் என்று நாம் எதிர்பார்க்கிறோம்.

ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, நாம் செய்யவேண்டியவை:

- வீட்டுவசதி, சுகாதாரப் பராமரிப்பு, பொதுப் போக்குவரவு போன்ற அடிப்படைத் தேவைகள் எல்லா சிங்கப்பூர்களுக்கும் கட்டுப்படியான விலையில் எளிதில் கிடைக்கக்கூடியதாகச் செய்யவேண்டும். “முதலில் இல்லம், பிறகு சொத்து” என்ற கண்ணோட்டத்தில் நாம் பொது வீடமைப்பு வீடுகளைக் காணவேண்டும்.
- நாம் கூட்டுப் பொறுப்புடைமையை வலுப்படுத்தும் அதே வேளையில், தனிப்பட்ட மற்றும் குடும்பப் பொறுப்புடைமையையும் தொடர்ந்து வலியுறுத்தவேண்டும். எதிர்பாரா நெருக்கடிகளை எதிர்நோக்குவோர் மீண்டும் தங்கள் கால்களில் எழுந்து நிற்க முடியும் என்று ஒரு சமுதாயமாக நாம் அவர்களுக்கு நம்பிக்கையளிக்க வேண்டும்.
- வாழ்க்கையின் நிச்சயமற்ற சூழ்நிலைகளுக்காக முன்கூட்டியே முதலீடு செய்து திட்டமிடவேண்டும். அதன்வழி, நாம் நம் ஓய்வகாலத்தில் மனநிம்மதியுடன் இருக்க முடியும்.

உணர்வு

நம் பொதுப் பண்புகள் நம்மைத் தெளிவாக எடுத்துக்காட்ட உதவுவதால், இந்தப் பண்புகளில் வேரூன்றிய ஒரு சமுதாயத்தைச் சிங்கப்பூர்கள் வேண்டுகின்றனர். ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, சக சிங்கப்பூர்கள் எதிர்நோக்கும் சவால்களை ஆழமாகப் புரிந்துகொள்ளவும், நம்மிடையே வசதி குறைந்தவர்களுக்கு எவ்வாறு ஒரு சிறந்த வகையில் உதவிக் கரம் நீட்டலாம் என்பதிலும் ஒள்சி செயல்முறை நமக்கு உதவியுள்ளது. முதியவர்களையும், உடற்குறையுள்ளோரையும், சிறப்புத் தேவைகள் உள்ளோரையும், முன்னாள் குற்றவாளிகளையும், சமுதாயத்தின் விலிம்பில் இருக்கக்கூடியவர்களையும் நாம் மதிக்கிறோம். ஒரு வலுவான “கம்பத்து உணர்வு” இருக்கவேண்டும் என ஆசைப்படுகிறோம், நமது ஒற்றுமை உணர்வை வலுப்படுத்த விரும்புகிறோம். அதன்வழி, நம்மால் ஒரு பரிவுமிக்க சமுதாயத்தை உருவாக்க முடியும்.

ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, நாம் செய்யவேண்டியவை:

- வலுவான குடும்பங்கள், சமூகப் பண்புகள், சமுதாய ஒற்றுமை ஆகியவற்றின் முக்கியத்துவத்தை வலுப்படுத்தவேண்டும்
- வசதி குறைந்தவர்களைக் கவனித்துக்கொள்வதோடு, ஒவ்வொரு சிங்கப்பூரின் கண்ணியத்தை மதிக்கும் விதத்தில் அவர்களுக்கு ஆதரவளிக்கவேண்டும்.

நம்பிக்கை

நம் பொதுவான எதிர்காலத்தை உருவாக்குவதில் சிங்கப்பூர்கள் பங்களிக்க விரும்புகின்றனர். இதற்கு, சிங்கப்பூர்களிடையே மற்றும் அரசாங்கத்திற்கும் குடிமக்களுக்கும் இடையே ஆழமானதொரு நம்பிக்கை தேவைப்படுகிறது. வெளிப்படையான, உள்ளார்ந்த ஈடுபாட்டை நாம் மதிக்கிறோம். சமூக உணர்வுமிக்க சிங்கப்பூர்கள் தங்களுக்குள்ளும் கொள்கை வகுப்பாளர்களோடும் அர்த்தமுள்ள வழியில் ஈடுபட வரவேற்கப்படவேண்டும். பல்வேறு பிரிவுகளைச் சார்ந்த சிங்கப்பூர்களின் நாட்டங்களையும் அக்கறைகளையும் கூடுதலாகப் புரிந்துகொள்ளவும், இணக்கம் காணுதல், விட்டுக்கொடுப்பது ஆகியவற்றின் முக்கியத்துவத்தைப் போற்றவும் ஒள்சி செயல்முறை உதவியுள்ளது.

ஒரு சமுதாயமாக, நாம் செய்யவேண்டியவை:

- நம் சமுதாயத்தின்மீது தாக்கத்தை ஏற்படுத்தும் கொள்கைகள் குறித்து ஆக்கரமான, அர்த்தமுள்ள குடிமக்கள் ஈடுபாட்டை ஊக்குவிப்பதுடன், வாழ்க்கையின் எல்லாப் பின்னணிகளில் இருந்தும் வரும் சிங்கப்பூர்களைப் புரிந்துகொள்ளக்கூடிய

தலைவர்களைப் பேணிவளர்க்கவும் வேண்டும்.

- அரசாங்கத்திற்கும் மக்களுக்கும் இடையே நம்பிக்கையையும் பொறுப்புடைமையையும் வலுப்படுத்த வேண்டும். கொள்கைகளுக்குப் பின்னால் இருக்கும் காரணங்களை அரசாங்கம் பகிர்ந்துகொள்வதோடு, நடப்பிலுள்ள கலந்துறவாடல்கள், உதவி வழங்கும் முயற்சிகள், தகவல் பகிர்வு ஆகியவற்றுக்காக சந்தர்ப்பங்களை உருவாக்கிட அல்லது மேம்படுத்தவேண்டும்.
- நாம் அக்கறைகாட்டும் விஷயங்களில் வேறுபட்ட கருத்துகளைக் கொண்டிருக்கக்கூடிய பல்வேறு பிரிவுகளைச் சார்ந்த சிங்கப்பூர்களிடையே பரஸ்பர புரிந்துணர்வை வளர்க்க வேண்டும். அதன்வழி இணக்கம் காணுவது மற்றும் விட்டுக்கொடுப்பது மூலம் நம்மால் ஒரு சமுதாயமாக முன்னோக்கிச் செல்ல முடியும்.

சிங்கப்பூர் அமைப்பிலும் வெளித்தோற்றத்திலும் அதிகம் மாறியுள்ளது. ஒன்றாக இழையோடும், சில சமயங்களில் போட்டியிடும் இலட்சியங்களையும் உணர்வுபூர்வக் கருத்துகளையும் சிங்கப்பூர்கள் கொண்டிருக்கிறார்கள் என்பதை நாம் ஒள்சி மூலம் தெரிந்துகொண்டுள்ளோம். எடுத்துக்காட்டுக்கு:

- கட்டுப்படியாக்கக்கூடிய தன்மை என்பது மக்களுக்கு மக்கள் வேறுபடும். சிலரது அத்தியாவசியத் தேவைகள் மற்றவர்களுக்குக் கட்டாயமற்ற தேவைகளாக இருக்கக்கூடும் (எ. கா, கார்கள், துணைப்பாட வகுப்புகள்).
- வெற்றி என்பதற்குப் பரந்த அளவிலான அர்த்தங்கள் இருக்கவேண்டும் என்று நாம் விரும்புகிறோம். ஆனால், வாழ்க்கை விருப்பத்தேர்வுகளான கல்வி, வேலை மற்றும் அதற்கும் அப்பாற்பட்ட விஷயங்கள் குறித்து நாம் வெவ்வேறு கருத்துகளைக் கொண்டுள்ளோம்.
- நாம் வசதி குறைந்தவர்களுக்கு உதவிக் கரம் நீட்ட விரும்புகிறோம், ஆனால் அதை எவ்வாறு ஒவ்வொரு சிங்கப்பூரின் கண்ணியத்தை மதிக்கும் விதத்தில் செய்யலாம் என்பது குறித்து மாறுபட்ட கருத்துகள் இருக்கின்றன.
- பாரம்பரியக் குடும்பப் பண்புகள் இன்றுவரை சிங்கப்பூர்களுக்கு முக்கியமாக இருக்கின்றன, ஆனால் நம்மில் சிலர் மாற்று வாழ்க்கைப் பாணிகளை மேற்கொள்பவர்களையும் மதிக்க விரும்புகிறோம்.

நமக்கு மிகவும் முக்கியமான பிரச்சினைகள் பற்றி மற்றவர்கள் கூறுவதைக் கேட்பதாலும் வெளிப்படையாக, பொறுமையாக ஈடுபடுவதாலும் நாம் பெறும் பயனைப் பற்றி ஒள்சி நம்மில் பலருக்கு நன்றாகப் புரியவைத்துள்ளது. மேலும், எதிர்காலத்தில் தாங்கள் காண விரும்பும் சிங்கப்பூரை உருவாக்க உதவுவதற்குச் சில சிங்கப்பூர்களையும் அது செயல்பட ஊக்குவித்துள்ளது என்று நான் நம்புகிறேன். ஒள்சி மூலம் திரட்டப்பட்ட கருத்துகளைப் பயன்படுத்தி அரசாங்கம் முக்கியக் கொள்கை மறுஆய்வுகளை நடத்துகிறது. இதனிடையே நாம் விட்டுக்கொடுத்து வாழும் உணர்வை தொடர்ந்து வளர்ப்போம். வாழ்க்கையின் எல்லாப் பின்னணிகளில் இருந்தும் வந்த சிங்கப்பூர்களுடன் ஓராண்டு காலமாகக் கலந்துறவாடியதில், நம்மை வேறுபடுத்தும் கூறுகளைவிட சிங்கப்பூர்களாக நம்மை ஒன்றிணைக்கும் கூறுகளே மேலும் அதிகமாக இருக்கின்றன என்று முன்பைவிட இப்போது நான் கூடுதலாக நம்புகிறேன். எல்லாச் சிங்கப்பூர்களுக்கும் ஒரு மேம்பட்ட எதிர்காலத்தை ஒன்றுசேர்ந்து உருவாக்குவோம்!



OSC MILESTONES

OSC: A year in the making...

Policy announcements in the past year

1

22 Jan 2013
Ministry of Health (MOH) announces extension of MediShield coverage to congenital and neonatal conditions – a concern that had surfaced in OSC dialogues.

2

25 Feb 2013
Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam delivers Budget Speech 2013. He refers to a common set of aspirations and a common vision of the future that Singaporeans want, which had emerged through OSC.

3

6 Mar 2013
OSC committee member and Member of Parliament Denise Phua shares “Perspectives Arising from Our Singapore Conversation” in Parliament.

Significant dates of the OSC journey

26 Aug 2012	26 Aug 2012	8 Sep 2012	2 Oct 2012	13 Oct 2012	13 Oct 2012	3 Nov 2012
Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong announces the decision to start a national conversation at the 2012 National Day Rally.	The Our Singapore Conversation (OSC) Facebook page and website go “live”.	The 26-member OSC Committee is announced.	Phase 1: 1 st OSC dialogue at Yuhua Village Market and Food Centre with senior citizens.	Phase 1: 1 st public dialogue organised by OSC Secretariat at National Library Board (NLB).	Phase 1: 1 st ground-up dialogue by SINDA Youth Club, Mendaki Club, Young Sikh Association, Chinese Development Assistance Council (CDAC), and Eurasian Association.	Phase 1: 1 st overseas, ground-up dialogue by overseas Singaporeans in London.

OSC EXHIBITION

Summing up our aspirations

This illustration portrays the five core aspirations of Singaporeans – Opportunities, Purpose, Assurance, Spirit, Trust – that have emerged from the Our Singapore Conversation (OSC). Designed for the National Day Rally exhibition on 18 August 2013, this illustration will be shared at some public libraries after National Day Rally 2013.



4

11 Mar 2013

Ministry of National Development (MND) announces policy allowing singles earning up to \$5,000 per month to buy new 2-room HDB flats and commits to organising ministry-led OSC discussions on housing issues. Affordable public housing was a key concern during OSC.

5

12 Mar 2013

MOH refers to OSC in Parliament and the intention to review Healthcare Financing. Accessible and affordable healthcare were top concerns of many Singaporeans, especially the elderly and their caregivers, during the OSC.

6

13 Mar 2013

Ministry of Education (MOE) refers to OSC in Parliament and highlights key areas to recalibrate the education system, which includes centering holistic education on values and refreshing approaches to achieve basic goals of education.

7

15 March 2013

Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) announces free entry to all national museums and heritage institutions. Strengthening national identity and rekindling the "kampong spirit" were important to many OSC participants who felt this could begin with greater awareness of our history and heritage.

8

16 April 2013

Ministry of Transport (MOT) introduces free off-peak travel for a one-year trial period from 24 June 2013 to reduce peak hour train congestion. Quality and accessibility of public transport were common discussion topics among OSC participants.

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

1 Feb 2013	13 Feb 2013	2 Mar 2013	13 April 2013	20 April 2013	11 May 2013	14 May 2013	June 2013	10 Aug 2013
Phase 1: MOH begins dialogues on healthcare issues.	End of OSC Phase 1: OSC releases "Perspectives Arising from Our Singapore Conversation" that captured the common ideas and views from the initial dialogues.	Start of Phase 2: OSC begins Phase 2 public dialogues along the themes of home, heart and hope.	Phase 2: MOE begins public dialogues on education issues.	Phase 2: MND begins dialogues on housing issues.	Phase 2: MOH holds its first vernacular dialogue on its Healthy Lifestyle Master Plan.	Phase 2: Final public dialogue organised by OSC Secretariat.	Phase 2: Ministry of Manpower (MOM) holds dialogues on lifelong learning and giving Singaporeans fair consideration for jobs.	Release of OSC Reflections.

ILLUSTRATION: OXYGEN STUDIO DESIGNS PTE LTD.



Sceptical but still hopeful

Artistic director Kuo Jian Hong explains why she agreed to become an OSC committee member

When the government announced its plan for a national conversation, scepticism abounded in various quarters. Many prominent bloggers wondered if the initiative was mere “wayang” – Singlish for “putting up a front” – that will deliver no real results in the end. But it wasn’t just the online community that had doubts.

Kuo Jianhong first heard about the OSC after she was invited to join the OSC committee. “My first thought was, ‘About time!’ I thought it would be good for the government to learn how to listen to and communicate with the people,” said Ms Kuo, artistic director of The Theatre Practice.

“But I was also sceptical if it would work, if the efforts were sincere, or if there were other ulterior motives.”

Ms Kuo, daughter of the late theatre doyen Kuo Pao Kun, had reasons to be sceptical. Both her parents were once detained under the Internal Security Act in the 1970s.

Initially hesitant to join, she began to consider the invitation after Education Minister Heng Swee Keat called to share his ideas. “One point that stood out ... was that he didn’t have a total plan as to how OSC would proceed,” she said, referring to Minister Heng. “He was going to set some things into motion, and evaluate the possible steps to progress along the way with the committee.

“In other words, it sounded more like ‘look and see’. Perhaps to many people, this sounds disorganised. To me, it was a glimmer of hope.”

Her curiosity piqued, Ms Kuo wanted to find out if the government would truly “allow a process to happen more organically”.



She had reasons to be sceptical but she still joined OSC as a committee member and has gained insights into the workings of the government.



As clichéd as it sounds, big changes take time. I am still holding on to hope.

“There are many things I believe are wrong with the Singapore we live in today,” she said. “However, as long as this is a home that I care about, a place I have chosen to raise my child, I need to be optimistic and pro-active.”

She also decided to regard the government as a separate entity from the ruling party, which has policies and positions she does not agree with. “I chose to join the committee [which is not part of the ruling party] with the intention of serving the people.”

With her mother’s blessings, she finally decided to give it a go.

As part of the 26-member committee, Ms Kuo met and listened to a diverse range of Singaporeans through the many OSC sessions she attended and facilitated. She shared that she has since gained more insights into the workings of

the government.

“One good thing that [has] come out of this process is seeing many Singaporeans [make] the effort to express their beliefs and to learn to listen to different, or even opposing, opinions,” she noted.

While she has seen sincere effort by the government to engage its citizens, she thinks there is still a need to rethink the relationship between government and people, as well as to build deeper trust between them.

“Most important of all, action needs to be taken after lots of talk,” she said. “All these need time, and at this point, I can’t tell you if OSC has been effective on that level.

“However, as clichéd as it sounds, big changes take time. I am still holding on to hope.”

THEY WERE ALSO SCEPTICAL

How will the data from OSC be used?



PHOTO: MCI

“Some people say Singaporeans are emotionless. You wouldn’t think that way if you’ve been a facilitator at one of the OSC events!” said Goh Hong Yi, who volunteered as an OSC facilitator. The occupational psychologist also had doubts initially so he attended a dialogue session as a participant to see if it was a “wayang” show. That experience convinced him to help as a facilitator later on. “Though my opinion of the exercise has improved, I am still partially sceptical on how the information collected will be put to actionable plans,” he said.



Though my opinion of the exercise has improved, I am still partially sceptical on how the information collected will be put to actionable plans.

Make OSC part of national agenda

Chua Bee Kwan had mixed reactions when she first heard about the OSC but since volunteering as a facilitator, her views have changed. “The initial scepticism about the authenticity and viability of such a massive exercise evaporated during my involvement. Not only did I see the contents of the OSC evolving, but what [also] stood out for me was the caring and respectful atmosphere of participants during the session.” To Ms Chua, OSC is the seed of a new culture of Singaporeans talking, sharing and engaging one another to build a common future. “It should be institutionalised as part... of our national agenda. This will allow the people a voice and an avenue to participate actively in nation building. If this is in place, then whatever misgivings the public may have... will be dispelled.”

What should the OSC be like?

Singaporeans shared their views via emails to the OSC Secretariat and also through social and mainstream media when OSC was first announced

From OSC email inbox



“I think 2030 may be a little late for us to imagine the future Singapore. The date should be brought forward earlier. Most of what people want is already known and discussed. The question is not so much what kind of Singapore we want but rather how to achieve it. We have achieved the basic needs in life such as food, clothes, shelter, transport, work and recreation. Yet when we sing ‘Count on me, Singapore’ every National Day, we leave behind mountains of rubbish for foreign workers to clean up. People also don’t give up their seats for the old and disabled. We need to educate our children from an early age in values, behaviours, civic mindedness and care of the environment.”

– Dr Chee, Psychiatrist

“My wishlist for the national conversation: First, the focus should be on Singaporeans and Singapore. Any attempt to turn the content into political football from anyone or any group should be avoided. It is timely to reassert issues or matters for the people and the nation, and politicising them would not be fruitful. Second, some issues may be based on perceptions rather than on facts and figures probably because the public does not have easy access to information. Such issues should still be investigated by the relevant authorities, rather than the authorities insisting on solid facts and figures from the public before taking action. As we explore ways to engage folks to be involved, we may come across an array of aspirations and some ‘duelling’ might ensue. Singaporeans should remind ourselves that while we may hold dear our opinions, we are but one person in the sea of many. Meaningful outcomes are likely to emerge from a constructive and relaxed atmosphere of sensible discussions, graciousness, mutual respect of differences, and a willingness to explore “beyond the box”. Also important is to add candour and humour in our interactions.

– Tan Tiong Hock, Retiree

Personally I feel that as a Singaporean, we should craft all initiatives together for a Singapore that we, our children and our generations want to live in. We need to be more of a realist than a dreamer. I appreciate if I could be invited for any future dialogue sessions.

– Idris bin Basok



“Hi Mr Heng, Here are some of my thoughts as you create a platform/process for this review. I think Singaporeans have to feel heard and some of their constructive responses/suggestions should be made public. For example, a housing policy that was changed as a result of a suggestion from a Mr Tan who lives in a 4-room flat in Ang Mo Kio would resonate with Singaporeans. Many Singaporeans have the perception that ministers live in a world of their own – sheltered from the realities of life. Therefore, apart from a group of young ministers, you might want to get some representatives from different levels of society and ethnicities to be involved as a separate subcommittee. Imagine a taxi driver or neighbourhood store owner giving you his frank views. If policies are created for Singaporeans, then it should be by Singaporeans.”

– Jeffrey Khoo,
Private Equity Director

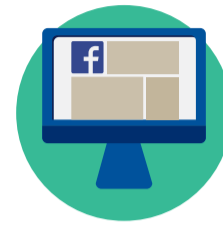


Ultimately, how we arrive at a consensus on contentious matter is more critical than the consensus itself. The government needs to keep faith by showing that every view is taken seriously.

“A national conversation should be characterised by robust debates, in which groups and individuals contest each other based on their competing, sometimes conflicting, needs and aspirations. I hope we can, in the process, nurture a healthy culture of debate in an environment of civility, respect and tolerance. This is crucial for Singapore as our society becomes more diverse, complex, and ever-changing. Even if we do not agree, we should seek to understand the basis for the other party’s views. Agreeing to disagree is not necessarily a poor outcome, and we should not be unduly fixated with harmony. Ultimately, how we arrive at a consensus on contentious matters is more critical than the consensus itself. The government needs to keep faith by showing that every view is taken seriously. Where certain views or proposals cannot be accommodated, the government should try to be as comprehensive in explaining why, so that people will believe there is a serious effort to engage them. Otherwise, the OSC will only exaggerate the cynicism level and undermine the nation-building potential of a national conversation. It is also important to reach out to the silent majority so that no one group dominates. It will promote the spectrum of views that is the lifeblood of a maturing democratic entity. Ultimately, the OSC should be the start of many other conversations between Singaporeans. Only then can we better appreciate the need to recognise the commonalities that bind us as Singaporeans and to nurture the ties towards Singapore and other Singaporeans.”

– Eugene Tan, Associate Professor of Law
Singapore Management University

From OSC Facebook page



“I would like our leaders to actually talk to everyone, not just only to those who speak well or are intellectual or have money or run some organisations but to those in the lowest rung of society, if these people want to talk! For they also have their stories, problems and aspirations of the future. It takes all sorts of people to make Singapore today, not just the people constantly quoted in the news.”

– Amir Wan

In the mainstream media



“The OSC should focus... on questions about the kind of Singapore we want. For example, how many people can live sustainably on our small island with a desirable quality of life?”

– Corinna Lim, Exec Director,
AWARE, Straits Times, 4 Sep 2012

On the web



“[OSC should] bridge the divide between the average Singaporean and the academics, political elite, those with economic/statistic/political know-how. How do we share knowledge, perspective and wisdom? How do we have conversation that is more thoughtful and civil? How do we move away from wanton flaming and hate speech?”

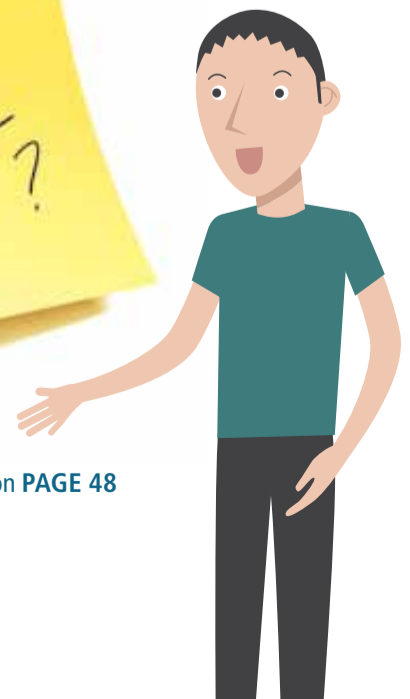
– www.visakanv.com

“A truly heartfelt engagement is a rare and precious thing, even amongst couples married for many years. It will be even more difficult between citizens and the government. But we owe it to ourselves to try to put our prejudices aside and have a real national conversation. It is our Singapore, and we are in it together after all.”

– sgthinker.wordpress.com



» Stanley Chia reflects on PAGE 48





20,600 speak up for education

With over 300 schools, 500,000 students and over 33,000 educators in tow, it is no wonder that the Ministry of Education's (MOE) OSC sessions had to be run so extensively. MOE covered the spectrum of educators, policy planners, academics, parents and students to ensure all their stakeholders were heard.

The 20,600 who joined the sessions spoke on a range of issues from teaching values, to kindergarten curriculum and skills training for employability. Most gravitated to the thorny topics of stress and examinations, and social mobility. And almost all spoke about the challenges the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) and streaming posed. Central to their concerns was that education is becoming too high a stake at a young age.

Some pointed to the mechanics of using PSLE results for streaming and secondary school posting as the source of much unhappiness. Others cited societal perceptions and expectations, as opposed to systems, as the cause of stress. Conversations also dived deep to question how the society's narrow definition of success drove up stress levels. Parents spoke about the need to build strong supportive families to nurture confident children. Employers called for room to dream so that they could

have a creative, self-driven workforce. The divergent views made for a fascinating exchange.

To ensure the discussions were rich and the information captured well, MOE deployed 400 principals, vice-principals, teachers and senior HQ staff to facilitate and scribe the sessions. The views and suggestions have been fed back into the various policy reviews in MOE.

Noted OSC participant Ian Tan, 36, father of two: "There was a good exchange of views; however, I felt that many people tended to come with just their own perspectives and I hope they realised that the education system requires a proper balancing of multiple views.

"Overall, I think there was much effort by the ministry to take in feedback and to prioritise what needs to be done. If we don't continue to speak up and push for change, then this whole exercise would have been in vain."



Some pointed to the mechanics of using PSLE results for streaming and secondary school posting as the source of much unhappiness.

Students from NorthLight School defined their idea of success from a larger perspective of contributing back to society.

PHOTO: MOE

Overseas dialogues

IN LONDON

In November 2012, 33 Singaporeans living in the UK met in London for a dialogue. Many were professionals in sectors like medicine and law, as well as from creative fields; others were undergraduates and PhD students. A predominant theme was the need to address current socio-economic issues, such as the widening income gap, with increased government support and ground-up efforts. Many believed in a more inclusive and gracious society that has a place for all. They also observed that Singaporeans, as a workforce, were often seen as an economic entity of the country, which resulted in a mindset that allowed little room for failure.

IN WARWICK

In February 2013, 34 Singaporean students from the University of Warwick, UK, shared their biggest concerns about returning to Singapore after their studies. They articulated the need to broaden the definition of success, such as looking beyond the traditional courses of specialisation, and the lack of a safety net for those who choose non-mainstream routes. They also suggested exposing the younger generations to political education, so they can feel a sense of ownership in their country.

IN SAN FRANCISCO

A lively debate ensued in San Francisco in November 2012 when 37 overseas Singaporeans deliberated on the future of Singapore. Participants were vocal and passionate, especially when suggesting that Singapore revive the "kampong spirit" of community and sharing. Many also believed that Singapore should learn from Silicon Valley, whose society promotes inquisitiveness, an open knowledge-sharing/tech-savvy culture and pursuit of excellence.

» Executive chef Nora Haron-Dunning, who took part in this dialogue, shares her views on [Page 20](#)

IN BEIJING AND SHANGHAI

Two dialogues were held in China in November 2012. Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Ministry of Communications and Information and Ministry of Education) Sim Ann, also an OSC committee member, attended both the Shanghai conversation at the Singapore Consulate and the Beijing discourse at the Singapore Embassy.

» For more on the China dialogues, turn to [Page 26](#)

Elderly share their views at Yuhua



PHOTO: MCI

Organised for elderly citizens in the Yuhua constituency in October 2012, OSC's first dialogue session attracted 150 seniors who shared their concerns with Ms Grace Fu, Minister in the Prime Minister's Office, in Mandarin and the principal Chinese dialects. One key issue raised was how rising medical costs and insufficient healthcare subsidies might be contributing to a sense of insecurity. Many also recommended that community facilities be adjusted to better serve the elderly, including extending the duration of traffic light crossings to give them more time to cross the road. Social cohesion, the academic stress of their grandchildren and the rising cost of living were some other major topics that emerged. A skit was performed in Hokkien, Teochew and Cantonese to help the elderly participants identify with the themes of the dialogue.

Most familiar face at dialogues



Kiong Choon Neng, 56, signed up for OSC by calling the REACH hotline. The courier for a local bank became a familiar face after attending numerous dialogues in Phase 1 and Phase 2. He never failed to ask OSC volunteers in Mandarin: "When is the next dialogue? I want to come for it."



PHOTO: MCI

Delving deeper into the issues in Phase 2

After studying the general sentiments that surfaced in Phase 1, OSC launched more focused and in-depth discussions in Phase 2 to explore specific topics and generate actionable policy suggestions. One such dialogue was held at Singapore Management University (SMU) on 23 March 2013, delving into the three issues of “kampong spirit”, ageing and helping the disadvantaged.

Participants who explored the revival of the “kampong spirit” discussed how citizens could strengthen their sense of togetherness and commitment to take responsibility for the community. It was agreed that one could start by making active efforts to integrate immigrants into the community. The loss of the “kampong spirit”, they concluded, was linked to rising home prices that have created a competitive lifestyle.

The second group focused on the subject of ageing gracefully in Singapore, with most of its participants being senior citizens. Many lamented the perception of the elderly as burdens in nuclear families. One participant said, “We use the word ‘burden’ everywhere. We don’t hear the word in the Nordic countries. We must love and respect [the process of] ageing and never think of it as a burden.”

Another issue close to Singaporeans’ hearts was the need to support the disadvantaged, such as those with disabilities and ex-convicts. The group discussing this issue felt that government and societal support for the disabled and their families could be strengthened, in light of rising inflation and increasing economic pressures on the marginalised communities.

● ●
The loss of the “kampong spirit”, they concluded, was linked to rising home prices that have created a competitive lifestyle.



PHOTO: PA

Indian community on the future

Narpani Pearavai (The People’s Association’s Indian Activity Executive Committees Council) organised a dialogue for grassroots leaders from the Indian community, which saw participants voting on issues they felt were of top priority for the Singapore Indian community. Held in English and Tamil, the dialogue saw discussions on topics such as the preservation of the Tamil language, as well as the relationship between local-born Indians and newer arrivals from India. Beyond these issues, participants also exchanged ideas about tackling Singapore’s widening income gap, and improving the socio-economic status of the poor.

OSC IN PHOTOS



Left: Participants discuss issues such as education, housing and employment at a public dialogue organised by Malay newspaper Berita Harian on 6 July 2013.

PHOTO: REACH



Above: ITE students envision a Singapore that is fun, green, and has strong family bonds in the future, during an OSC dialogue on 18 January 2013.

PHOTO: ITE

In brief

MALAY-MUSLIMS ON SINGAPORE

Chaired by Speaker of Parliament Madam Halimah Yacob, this conversation in December 2012 brought together different generations of the Malay-Muslim community to discuss their aspirations for Singapore. Several noted a lack of patriotism among Singaporeans, who do not take pride in the country and its values. They felt that Singapore’s achievements should not be taken for granted and hoped that more would appreciate them better. Participants also expressed hope that future generations will understand the importance of the country’s multi-religious and multi-racial heritage and continue to uphold it as a foundation of Singapore.

DEBATING IT OUT

OSC was conducted debate-style when 30 student and alumni debaters of Anglo-Chinese Junior College came together to articulate their views on Singapore’s future. The speakers went through three rounds of debate on the following motions: “Singapore has focused too much on economic issues”, “A smaller government will be good and better for Singapore” and “Singaporeans need to start acting more like citizens and less like shareholders”. The debate format managed to tease out the intricacies and dilemmas inherent in opposing views, a unique way to gain a balanced perspective on these significant issues close to Singaporeans’ hearts.

DIALOGUE ON CULTURE AND THE ARTS

The aspirations of the arts community were heard when 52 participants came together in April 2013. The participants ranged from theatre directors, visual artists, writers, filmmakers, journalists, arts educators to fashion designers. Hosted by Nominated Member of Parliament Janice Koh, the session had participants visualising the characteristics of a thriving arts-and-culture scene. The issue of arts education in schools emerged as a prominent one, as many believed that assessment should be restructured to nurture imagination, expressiveness, critical thinking skills and empathy.

PRIVATE SECTOR DIALOGUE

KPMG Singapore gathered employees younger than 35 to discuss national identity and the day-to-day issues of being Singaporean in January 2013. Some participants noted the lack of depth in the Singaporean identity, while others believed that being Singaporean was actually advantageous in the global market. The issue of immigrants was also brought up, with some highlighting how foreign workers contribute to the crowding in trains and higher prices, yet many also believed a balance needed to be struck as foreigners are integral to Singapore’s economic success.

» Go to bit.ly/osc_conversations for more coverage on past conversations.

He came prepared

Before attending a dialogue, retired teacher **Tan Teck Kwong, 72**, researched policies and spoke to families and friends to get their views. He came with a four-page write-up of suggestions on immigration, public housing as well as healthcare policies for the elderly.

Nurturing the habit to speak up and listen will be a mark of OSC's success



By Kenneth Paul Tan

Inclusiveness is one of the most important qualities of public deliberation. As a national-level public engagement exercise, OSC needs to be a space where as many representative voices as possible are heard, taken seriously and engaged with openly. This gives the people of Singapore a basis for regarding its discussions and decisions as legitimate.

When I was first introduced to OSC, I thought that it had begun on the wrong foot. Its claim to inclusiveness was compromised, at least in terms of the composition of its committee, by the unmistakable exclusion of opposition politicians, prominent activists, and public intellectuals known for their more controversial views.

Nevertheless, I accepted the invitation to volunteer on its committee with the hope of contributing positively to a process that was, even with the best of intentions, bound to be complicated for political as much as practical reasons.

I later understood that OSC's idea of "inclusiveness" was actually tied to its efforts to engage with Singapore's "silent majority", a borrowed term that originates from the ideologically partisan world of American politics.

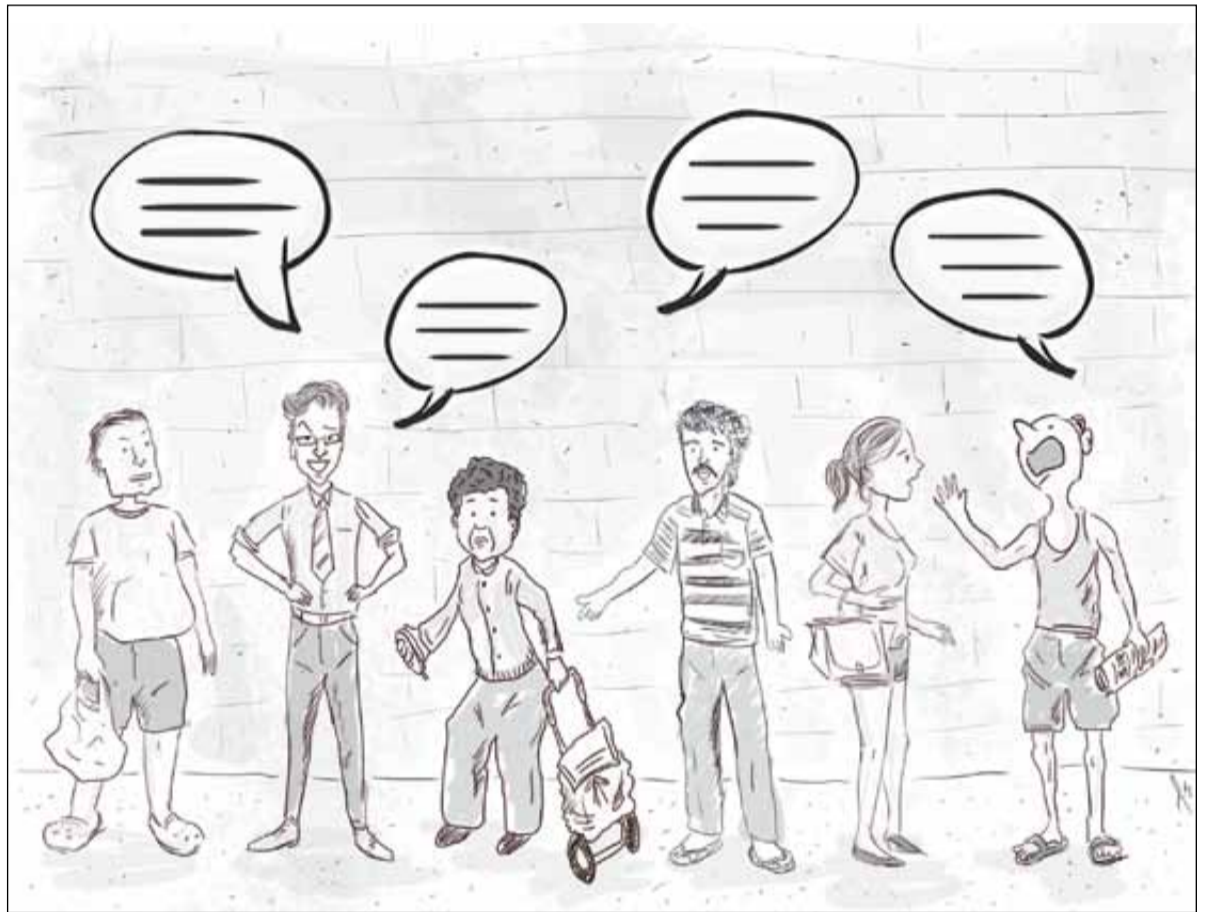
On one level, the silent majority is a romanticised construct. Projected onto the political landscape, it is an imaginary image of a mass of people whose views, interests and values are somehow authentic, moderate and conservative, but whose voices remain unheard. Lacking the motivation, the ability or the courage to speak in the public sphere, the silent majority is unable, maybe just unwilling, to raise its voice above the more articulate, often agitated, and sometimes shrill tones of a "vocal minority".

On another level, the silent majority and vocal minority are ideological constructs, an invented dualism that enables politicians to assume moral authority by claiming to protect the "moderate" interests of a majority against the "extremism" of sectarian interests. Politicians around the world have often taken the liberty of speaking on behalf of the so-called silent majority. Through tokenistic gestures, some politicians have invited the participation of acceptable people they claim to be representative of this silent majority.

An invented silent majority can thus become a useful ideological resource for justifying resistance to pressures for change, while maintaining political paternalism without sacrificing democratic credentials.

It is therefore hardly surprising that the notion of the silent majority should emerge in Singapore as a counterpose to the recent rise of anti-establishment views expressed especially well in the alternative media.

But if it seeks to engage the silent majority while visibly excluding the so-called vocal minority, OSC runs the risk of becoming an ideological instrument of the political establishment. Given the sharpened critical sensibilities of the public today, this will not go un-



missed. And, in the worst case, will lead at the end of the year-long process to cynicism, political divisiveness, and an erosion of public trust and social capital.

So rather than target an imaginary group of Singaporeans, a less divisive approach might be to focus on removing barriers to entry and enriching the quality of public engagement when it happens.

While structured citizen dialogues and sharing sessions may be among the most efficient modes of en-



We need to create new spaces, practices, and even rituals for public engagement and citizen activity – spaces that are non-intimidating, authentic to the diverse groups of Singaporeans.

gaging Singaporeans and extracting information and insights from each conversation, the formal nature of these activities may actually turn off those who communicate better in a vernacularised and less directed way. They could also be intimidating for people who are not used to standing up to make an argument, supporting it, and then defending it against the criticisms of others.

It is clear to me that the organisers have been extremely mindful of this challenging problem and have creatively employed a range of devices to stimulate dialogue and imagination, for instance, by introducing the element of "play" in the design and facilitation of these discussions.

And yet, Singaporeans can also be a very practical people impatient for results. They might prefer

to get to the point in a more results-driven discussion. If OSC does not efficiently record their concerns and yield the best ideas for policymaking, participants may disengage, convinced that the whole exercise is a waste of time.

But what we really need, beyond organising a mechanism for collective decision-making, is to enrich the quality of public life, impoverished by decades of political paternalism and the kind of political apathy that is said to have resulted from material success and affluence. To do this, we need to create new spaces, practices, and even rituals for public engagement and citizen activity – spaces that are non-intimidating, authentic to the diverse groups of Singaporeans whose identities and interests are increasingly complex, and motivated as much by citizens themselves as they are by centralised committees.

Instituting the habit of public participation and nurturing the skills to do this well are, in my view, a more important contribution of OSC than recording the aspirations that will feature in the final report. The enrichment of public life helps us build social capital. With more social capital, we can better build on Singapore's successes and transcend the worst forms of polarisation and the excesses of populism. This is not to say, of course, that we should be blindly conformist in our individual contributions to the common good. But rather than get entangled in deliberative knots, public discourse should rise above conventional wisdoms and platitudes that can emerge from both the establishment and anti-establishment. The success of OSC, far beyond the technical achievements of its final report, will partly be defined by this.

Kenneth Paul Tan, an OSC committee member, is Associate Professor and Vice Dean (Academic Affairs) at the National University of Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy.

ABOUT VOICES

Singaporeans from all walks of life shared their aspirations and concerns for the future during OSC dialogues. While many agreed on a common set of values, others expressed competing aspirations and outlooks. This section is a snapshot of the diversity of perspectives amongst Singaporeans.



Choo Kah Ying, seen here with her 16-year-old son Jean-Sebastien, is determined to find support for individuals with moderate to severe autism.

PHOTO: JEROME POUDEVIGNE

A Mother's Wish: a supportive community for autistic son

By Angelina Dass

Choo Kah Ying had taken away her son's iPod. Upset, the 16-year-old struck his mother, leaving her in despair and wanting to give up on creating a programme to help him and others with moderate to severe autism.

Tearfully she had asked her boyfriend, "Why would I want to help him and others like him when he can be so awful?"

She soon realised, though, that if she did not understand or support her son, Jean-Sebastien, no one else would.

Determined to help her son and other families in similar plights, the 41-year-old editor and freelance writer initiated "A Mother's Wish" – a campaign to create a community of love and understanding for children with moderate to severe autism.

She began by publishing her ideas on her

website, awakeningminds.sg, in January 2013. Eventually, they have evolved into a structured three-pronged programme: to provide affordable quality learning and care programmes for people with moderate to severe autism, and professional training to caregivers; build a community that engages people with autism and their families; and raise public awareness of autism.

Ms Choo has shared her campaign proposal with independent service providers in the special needs sector and key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Social and Family Development.

The campaign's three goals, especially the first which would require significant funding and commitment, could prove challenging. "Singaporeans seem to have lost their sense of humanity and caring for people," Ms Choo said, noting that Singaporeans who hold a meritocratic view of success tend to judge achieve-

ment in terms of paper qualifications.

She is not alone in this observation. In the two OSC sessions she attended, she got to meet others who shared her concern about the kind of country Singapore was becoming and who, like her, wanted to stand up for the less fortunate.

"Kindness and compassion were words that I heard spoken so much more at the OSC sessions than anywhere else in Singapore," she said.

Looking ahead, Ms Choo believes there is room for greater collaboration between the state and caregivers of people with autism. For example, caregivers, with their wealth of experience, could help train professionals in the field.

"We [caregivers] have experiences that you'll never find in textbooks," she said.

"We live with them, sleep dreaming about them, talk about them and think about them all the time. This is why we are experts... we have to be experts of our autistic children."

● ●
Singaporeans seem to have lost their sense of humanity and caring for people.

"We must ask ourselves what we can do"

By March Ong

"I was a most unwilling volunteer," confessed lawyer and President of the Society for the Physically Disabled (SPD) Chia Yong Yong.

Ms Chia, 50, first got roped into helping with the society's legal work more than 15 years ago. She had not planned on getting more involved.

But as she got exposed to its efforts to integrate those with physical disabilities into the mainstream, her eyes were opened to two things: there are needy people who fall through the cracks; and every individual can do something about it.

This got her thinking that she, and others, could do more.

Ms Chia's own muscular disease, which leaves her wheelchair-bound, may have influenced her dedication to helping the disadvantaged, be it through physical disability, age or socio-economic standing.

She sees herself as one of the blessed ones, since she has been given the ability to help others.

To help the disadvantaged, she wants to see all those with disabilities who can work, get support to work. Where a family cannot support itself despite its best efforts, she wants to see the state step forward, not simply with "dollars in the bank" but with more home help and caregiver support. There should also be medical insurance for the vulnerable with pre-existing conditions. And the Ministry of Education (MOE) should teach children the right values to care for the disadvantaged.

Noticing that there were numerous calls during OSC dialogues for the state to provide solutions, Ms Chia shared another confession: "I used to be really typical. I used to say Government must do this, Government must do that."

But she views things differently today after more than two decades of helping the disadvantaged.



"We can't always ask what others can do. We must ask ourselves what we can do," said the once unwilling volunteer.

As an OSC committee member, Ms Chia's hopes are as much directed towards fellow Singaporeans as at the state. She hopes that those who genuinely require help need to know it is not shameful to ask for it and neighbours need to be more aware of those around them who are not coping.

● ●
I used to be really typical. I used to say Government must do this, Government must do that.



Nelson Ong took part in an OSC dialogue organised by ISCOS (Industrial & Services Co-operative Society), a social organisation that supports ex-offenders and their families. He hopes the government will take the lead in giving ex-offenders a second chance.

PHOTO: MCI

Keep the doors open for us

By Satish Cheney

The day he left prison in 2007, Nelson Ong had a bit of a shock. He couldn't recognise his own country: the curves of the skyline were different and there were ever more shiny new malls everywhere.

Coupled with the spike in living costs, it wasn't the same Singapore he knew just before he was jailed for drug-related offences in 2001.

To make matters worse, he had to take care of his parents with no savings in the bank. But the ex-offender, who scored seven straight As in his O-level examinations taken in jail, was set on turning his life around.

Still, it was a massive uphill task to get a job.

"When I went for interviews, after I had filled up the forms, the interviewer would only focus on my criminal offence. They would never try to find out how I could contribute to their company," said Mr Ong.

He eventually found short-term employment at two companies before becoming a freelance graphic designer. By the end of 2012,

he was keen to try again for a full-time job.

But he realised that the stigma of a criminal record was hard to overcome – even if it had already been five years since he stepped out of the Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School).

"I sent my resume to [several] government organisations. The roles I applied for were mainly administrative ones. But still, I kept getting turned down," he said.

"It'd be good if government agencies can open up their doors to ex-offenders and be a forerunner in this. They can show to the rest of the corporate world by example. We need someone to kick-start this."

But he is glad there are initiatives like the Yellow Ribbon Project and that in general, more Singaporeans are receptive to giving ex-offenders a second chance.

After months of searching for a job, Mr Ong finally joined the Singapore Corporation of Rehabilitative Enterprises (SCORE) as an Executive Officer (Aftercare) in April. SCORE helps ex-offenders with rehabilitation and aftercare services including helping them

to get work, among other forms of assistance.

"SCORE is the first statutory board... to employ ex-offenders and is leading by example. I definitely wish to see more following suit," he reiterated.

His hard work and persistence over the last few years have paid off – not just in terms of his career. He met his wife in 2008 when he decided to upgrade his skills by pursuing a diploma in business administration. They now have a 21-month-old son.

"Family support is crucial for ex-offenders. If family members remain suspicious, it will break the ex-offender's morale," he said.

He recalled a nervous encounter with his fiancée's mother when the couple tied the knot.

"I told her I was an ex-offender and had a criminal record. But she was very calm and said let's not dwell on the past, and [that] what is important is the future and what lies ahead of me," he said.

There's no doubt, Mr Ong wishes more companies and employers can adopt the same mindset as his mother-in-law.

Family support is crucial for ex-offenders. If family members remain suspicious, it will break the ex-offender's morale.

Agreeing to disagree is a useful outcome

By March Ong

This became clear to full-time special needs volunteer Denise Phua when she sat in on multiple public dialogues with Singaporeans from a range of backgrounds.

"While many agree on having a common set of core values, they differ in how values can be applied and lived out," said Ms Phua, who is also an OSC committee member.

For example, people who agree that strong families are a pillar of Singaporean society may differ over the definition of a family. Ms Phua, 53, witnessed some heated arguments between those who believed in a traditional family nucleus of man, woman and kids and those who want to include same-gender couples and kids. Even when it comes to caring for the disadvantaged, those who agreed it should be done disagreed over the extent and the allocation of finite resources and attention to different groups.



that some families did not know about policy changes in the last decade. The lack of knowledge stoked these families' fears over their children's futures. It showed that policymakers and voluntary welfare organisations could do more to reach out and plug information gaps.

Another cause of tension in dialogue was imperfect knowledge, or policy implementation that is lacking. At an OSC discussion of families affected by disabilities, a topic very close to Ms Phua's heart, it became clear

Despite, or perhaps precisely because of, the tensions, Ms Phua believes that the OSC process is essential for understanding and solving problems.

Indeed, during this year's Budget debate, Ms Phua highlighted in Parliament the shared aspirations of the more than 16,000 Singaporeans who took part in the first phase of OSC. She put her finger on the challenge of trying to fulfil the hopes of many when she said, "There are infinite needs and wants, sometimes conflicting ones."

But she also urged Singaporeans to join in the dialogue, and to continue adding to the diversity of views and aspirations.

Through this process, she hopes that Singaporeans will arrive at some fundamental principles and solutions. "Even if there were no conclusion," she says, "agreeing to disagree amicably and respecting that we are not all the same are useful outcomes."

While many agree on having a common set of core values, they differ in how values can be applied and lived out.



Faith Lim, who became a school counsellor after her divorce, with her three children.

PHOTO: MCI

Exercise more flexibility for those in need of housing

Single parent Faith Lim shares her experience of being caught in a housing bind

By Chen Jingting

When Faith Lim's marriage began to break down about four years ago, a pressing issue on her mind, amidst the emotional turmoil, was that of housing.

As she owned a landed property with her then-husband, she was not allowed to rent or buy a Housing and Development Board (HDB) flat at the same time. But she and her three children – one entering university and the others in secondary school – desperately needed a new roof over their heads. Thankfully, a friend who had a 4-room HDB flat offered them temporary shelter.

Meanwhile, Ms Lim had to singlehandedly

raise her children. Again, her friends quickly stepped in with emotional and financial support. "That helped to ease my burden [so that I could] focus on my immediate needs, like looking for housing," said the 52-year-old.

According to HDB's policies, she could neither qualify for its Public Rental Scheme nor buy a resale flat from the open market as she had not yet begun divorce proceedings.

Caught in a limbo and anxious to give her children a permanent home, she made the painful decision to file for divorce in late 2010. "To be honest... the housing problem was one of the important factors that caused me to make a decision fast about my marriage," she said.

Officially divorced in 2011, she could finally purchase a resale flat, with money from the sale of the property that she owned with her former spouse of 23 years.

Ms Lim felt that housing is one of the key issues commonly faced by families going through breakups. Perhaps HDB could exercise more flexibility in such cases, she suggested. The marital breakdown inspired Ms Lim to quit her job as an administration officer in the government after 20 years to become a school counsellor.

Believing that problems in families are usually caused by the irresponsible decisions of adults, "it's important that we impart the right values to our children so that they would become responsible adults who would take care of their families," she said, explaining the career switch.

Ms Lim hopes that through her work, she is able to provide guidance and support for children, especially those with family issues, and to play a small part in preserving families. Her desire is to see strong families in Singapore, for generations to come.

It's important that we impart the right values to our children so that they would become responsible adults who would take care of their families.

OSC SURVEY



The top three concerns of the 4,000 Singaporeans surveyed were **public housing**, **public healthcare** and **job security**.

>>> Turn to page 32 for the details.



Despite being financially secure, Mr Mong has continued to upgrade himself professionally. He has recently earned a real estate agent licence and has sold three flats to date.

PHOTO: MCI

Contented but he continues to strive

By Lin Wenjian

Unlike most Singapore parents who tend to be anxious about their children's education, taxi driver Mong Kok Chong, 44, has a more laid-back attitude.

"When my elder daughter sat for her PSLE [Primary School Leaving Examination] last year, we sent her for tuition classes but in the end she became too stressed," he said. "So we decided to let her study at her own pace. I told her that as long as she did her best, it did not matter even if she had to repeat her PSLE. No big deal."

He laughed off the suggestion that his relaxed approach might cause his two daughters, aged 13 and five, to lose their drive for success.

"It's not that I don't want them to chase higher targets and dreams," he explained. "But

if the targets are set too high, it may be too difficult to sustain the momentum in the long run. I'd prefer them to 知足常乐 [be content with their lot]."

Nodding in agreement, his wife, Madam Liu Chun Xang, 43, added in Mandarin: "To me, as long as my daughters can find a job and live simply, that is already success."

A cabby of three years, Mr Mong himself has worked hard for the comforts that his family enjoys. Home is a fully paid-for four-room HDB flat in Sembawang. And when he is not driving his taxi, Mr Mong zips around in a nifty Hyundai hatchback.

Yet, the sense of security he feels has not stopped him from upgrading himself profes-

sionally. Last year, he earned his real estate agent licence and has sold three flats to date.

"Having one more professional licence is always good," said the eldest of three children who, as a child, helped out at his grandmother's drinks cart to earn more for the family.

Asked if he thought he was successful now compared with his younger days, he smiled and shook his head: "I am neither poor nor rich."

"As long as I can put food on the table, pay for my children's school fees and make ends meet, *mai hiam* ['should not complain' in Hokkien] already [sic]."

He also has no complaints with the way Singapore is run, even though the current crunch in transportation and housing has not escaped him.

"No one is perfect," he said matter-of-factly. "They [the government] are already trying their best, and building the infrastructure will take time."

"Our government is good compared to many other countries... I know not many people will agree with me. If I say these things online, I will definitely get 'whacked'," he laughed, using a colloquial term for being attacked.

I told her that as long as she did her best, it did not matter even if she had to repeat her PSLE.

"As parents, it is our duty to help our three sons"

A cabby is working to safeguard his children's future

By Lin Wenjian

By his own account, Raymond Ong is a typical well-meaning father who puts his children's happiness at the top of his list of priorities. The taxi driver of 12 years is so intent on safeguarding his children's current and future needs that he sets aside up to 60% of his and his wife's combined monthly income for them. This includes paying for their education, life insurance and saving for their future needs.

When asked why, the 54-year-old said: "As parents, it is our duty to help our three sons... especially since competition for them will be more intense when they start to work and inflation will be high."

Like many Singaporeans, he also fears his sons will face far tougher challenges than he did when they eventually join the workforce after their studies: "Young people like my sons have bigger aspirations now. I tell them to work and live within their means, but they may sometimes disagree," he candidly revealed.

"Compared to the past, they may also face



PHOTO: MCI

competition for jobs from foreigners who are equally qualified but are willing to accept a lower salary."

For now, Mr Ong's three sons – aged 24, 19 and 12, respectively – live with their parents in a five-room housing board flat in Simei. He points out that the stressful situation is exacerbated by rising property prices, which he accepts as an "understandable" development in today's world.

"The cost of construction will go up as building materials are more expensive and

land is scarce in Singapore. So I intend to help my sons with the down payment when they buy their properties," the mild-mannered man revealed. While he is concerned about rising costs, Mr Ong does not agree that property prices should be artificially pushed down as many Singaporeans have suggested: "Doing that will create other problems. The existing property owners will complain because the value of their homes will go down."

But he is glad that more Singaporeans are becoming vocal and unafraid to express their thoughts, as "everyone has the right to voice their views." Mr Ong added that he will not hesitate to present his view on national issues if opportunity arises.

"The government needs to do more to help the lower-income group cope with the higher cost of living," said Mr Ong who had joined a *kopi* talk, organised by the National Taxi Association to engage cabbies in the national conversation. But Mr Ong is not calling for welfare to be handed out. Instead he, who is the second youngest of eight children of a fishmonger and a housewife, believes in the virtue of saving for rainy days and living within one's means.

Compared to the past, they may also face competition for jobs from foreigners who are equally qualified but are willing to accept a lower salary.

Rebalancing life isn't the same as downgrading

By Satish Cheney

Don't let Donald Wyatt's age fool you. The 78-year-old is still sharp as a tack, just like in the late 1960s when he became the first uniformed public relations officer in the then Ministry of Interior and Defence. He also had a short stint as a reporter and later, a long and fruitful career in the international logistics industry.

Now in his silver years, what with six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, Mr Wyatt's mantra is all about "rebalancing life", which means to reassess one's priorities and abilities. "Let's face it. You can't do what you used to when you were 21," he said.

"The government says when you retire and need funds, you can always monetise your property," said Mr Wyatt, referring to the HDB Lease Buyback Scheme, which gives low-income elderly the option to sell back part of their home lease to HDB in return for a life-long retirement income.

He has no issue with this advice but expressed concern that the word "downgrading" is too often used when referring to seniors who move to smaller homes. "Don't say to a senior citizen who is moving... to a smaller [home] for [various] reasons that he or she is 'downgrading', it comes across as offensive as it suggests that the person is now a lesser being."

Instead, Mr Wyatt suggests reframing the issue as one of rebalancing needs, expectations and priorities. He also added that information on the various HDB schemes should be made more accessible to seniors, and the complexities better explained.

One thing that perplexes him is that only those with a three-room or a smaller flat can

enjoy HDB's Lease Buyback Scheme.

"What's the rationale? Why can't I do this if I live in a four-room flat?" asked Mr Wyatt, who helped to organise an OSC dialogue on elderly issues for members of the National University of Singapore's Senior Alumni Group.

A commonly surfaced issue at the dialogue was that of the cash-poor, asset-rich elderly. "How many of the folks who live in HDB flats, who have paid up all their housing loans, will have anything left in their CPF at the end of the day to keep them alive till God decides their fate?" While he had the foresight to invest in an annuity plan a long time ago, he worries for seniors who are not financially prepared.

Besides the economic worries, more seniors are also living on their own, he observed in his estate. Thus, a strong community spirit and efforts to get the elderly to stay connected will become more important. Why not a TV channel with the elderly in mind, he suggested. Programmes that are tailored for the silver tsunami may engage them more effectively and keep their minds active.



Retiree Donald Wyatt thinks HDB schemes can be better explained to the elderly.

PHOTO: MCI

How many of the folks who live in HDB flats, who have paid up all their housing loans, will have anything left in their CPF at the end of the day to keep them alive till God decides their fate?

"Why don't we take responsibility for our own lives?"

A self-motivated 72-year-old wants to continue working to stay independent

By Tay Qiao Wei

For at least two days a week, Quek Soo Chair works as a playgroup teacher, encouraging toddlers to use Mandarin through songs and play. Married with four children, the 72-year-old wants to keep working as long as her health holds up, even though her children have asked her to retire.

They give her enough money to maintain a simple lifestyle but she still prefers to have a job. "I don't want to be over-dependent on them," she said, adding that her children have their own families and commitments to take care of.

She copes with rising living expenses by being more frugal – choosing cheaper (albeit less nourishing) food, for instance. In fact, by doing so, she is able to use the extra income

from her job to help the needy. Once, she donated most of her salary to a family that faced financial difficulties after their breadwinner passed away.

The generous senior also volunteers with NTUC Eldercare occasionally, helping out at day care centres. She hopes that her five grandchildren will join her to do the same one day, but she admits it is increasingly difficult to connect with them.

"I think many young people are too pre-occupied with their digital devices," she said. She hopes young Singaporeans can be less self-absorbed and more respectful to others. She suggests stepping up efforts in schools to promote important values such as compassion, by organising more volunteering activities, for example. Quoting a Chinese proverb: "上梁不正下梁歪" (if elders set a bad example, the young will follow suit), she acknowledges that parents also have a part to play in a child's character development.

She shared that she tries to set a good example by returning her trays after eating at hawker centres, even before the tray return initiative

was launched. She even collects drink cans from her family members for recycling. To Mdm Quek, inculcating positive habits must start early.

She recounted, with regret, that she did not keep a closer eye on her children when they were young as she had to juggle three jobs to support the family. Her youngest son picked up the smoking habit in secondary school after mixing with the wrong company. Now, Mdm Quek tries to instil in her young grandchildren the importance of morals and exhorts them to do good ("只能做好事, 绝不坏事").

When she attended an NTUC-organised OSC dialogue in October 2012, Mdm Quek had the chance to hear more about her fellow citizens' hopes for the future. While she agrees with some of their concerns, she feels Singaporeans should cut down on complaining and take charge of their own lives.

"I think the government is already trying their best to help," said the senior. "Instead of depending on them to solve everything, why don't we take responsibility for our own lives?"

I think the government is already trying their best to help. Instead of depending on them to solve everything, why don't we take responsibility for our own lives?

Support sustainable living in Singapore

Overseas Singaporean believes it's good for health, environment and the economy

By Lydea Ishak

Nora Haron-Dunning moved to the United States with her American husband in 1998. When she developed food allergies for the first time, she began to question how food is grown and processed.

Today, Ms Haron-Dunning, 38, advocates for eating local food that has been organically grown from sources that practice sustainable farming as these foods have the least negative impact on human health and the environment.

The Dunnings also practise food sustainability by planting vegetables and raising chickens in their home in California.

"I believe so much in teaching children the fundamentals of sustainable living that I head the Edible Schoolyard Projects in our local



PHOTO: TORA ROCHA

schools where I teach children to grow and cook their own food," she said. Interested Singaporeans who live in smaller spaces could join community gardens or grow herbs at home for a start, she suggested.

An executive chef of a restaurant in Oakland, California, she uses only local and seasonal organic ingredients from sources that practice sustainable farming. The restaurant's food wastes are composted and eventually goes back to the farming cycle.

While she knows it's impossible for Singapore's farmers to feed the whole nation, more could be done to promote the consumption of locally grown food, both to consumers and restaurants, which "are still importing expensive produce from... outside... Asia", she said.

I've learnt a lot in the time I lived outside of Singapore. [Now] I want to go back and contribute in other ways that Singapore can progress...

Keeping more of our "food dollars" at home, she added, will benefit local farmers resulting in higher quality and sustainably grown food at lower prices.

Last November, Ms Haron-Dunning joined an OSC dialogue in San Francisco where she had raised her pet topic of food sustainability. She also recalled other discussions about national service and a businessman who was having a hard time returning to Singapore, as he could not secure loans for his new business.

Months on, she wondered what is next: "We can talk all we want, but after that, where does it go? What I would really like to see is an effective follow-up from these conversations."

Having lived in the US for 15 years, Ms Haron-Dunning is ready to come home to spread the word on food sustainability.

"I've learnt a lot in the time I've lived outside of Singapore. [Now] I want to go back and contribute in other ways that Singapore can progress, like making [Singaporeans] more aware that, yes, we have come this far economically, but now is the time to be more environmentally aware of how we are living our lives."

Respect the workers who take on jobs that others won't

By Lydea Ishak

"We pride ourselves in being... green, clean and safe. Unfortunately many people don't realise that these three... traits that we use to brand Singapore are possible because [of people like cleaners, gardeners and security guards] who have the lowest paying jobs in Singapore," said Veera Seekaran, managing director of Greenology Pte Ltd, which specialises in urban vertical greenery.

The business owner thinks there should be greater respect and better pay for these workers. "Stop calling them low-level jobs or workers and brand them as low-paying jobs. If you say it too often, it will become exactly that," he urged.

For him, the idea of a low-paying, labour-intensive job that gets little respect is what deters most Singaporeans from applying for jobs in the greening industry. This was a concern he shared during an OSC dialogue with unionists and business owners.

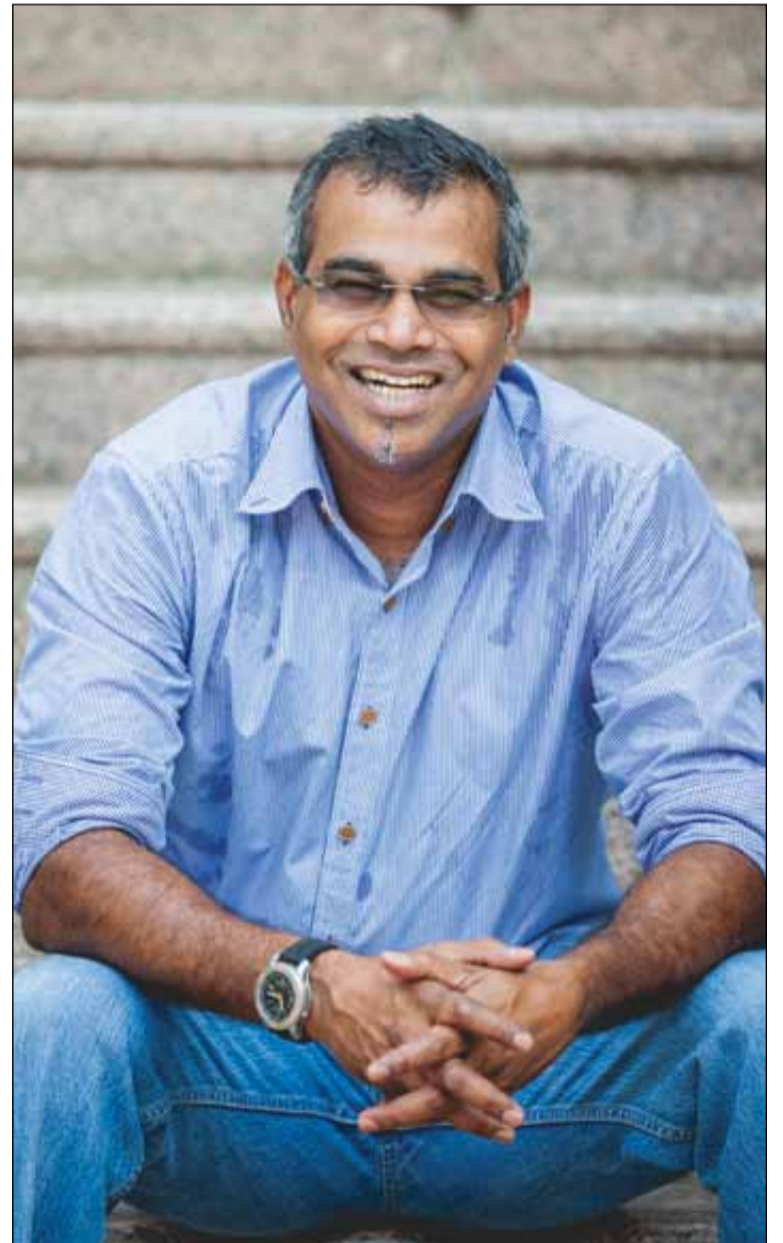
To attract Singaporeans, there must be a mindset change from clients who award jobs to contractors with the lowest bids, he said. This practice puts contractors who hire quality staff with higher salaries at a disadvantage.

As for contractors who are truly sincere in hiring locals, they would have to focus on training their staff and raising productivity in order to stay competitive. He said: "The Singaporean worker needs to be ready to multi-task and raise their productivity so that it justifies the higher pay."

Mr Veera prefers employing locals: "[They] are a lot more stable. I want to teach locals and pass knowledge to them so that there is continuity in what I do, and for Singapore's sake."

Another point he raised is about Singapore's competitive edge. Its young entrepreneurs should be given more guidance to avoid repeating the mistakes of the previous generations. "We need to find like-minded people who're willing to share their knowledge and experience. Those who want to join the industry will then be able to meet people who are already established in it, so that they pass on their knowledge to them. Unfortunately, with any industry, culture or society, there will be people who are selfish. Very few want to share their knowledge."

The business owner openly shares knowledge with his staff and whoever goes to him for advice. However, he clarified that his competitive advantage will always stay with the company and will be passed on only to key employees.



"The intention is for the next generation to come up and be better than you. If they're going to go through the same mistakes, something is wrong. The next generation should have a shorter learning curve. Our collective institutional knowledge is Singapore's competitive edge. This is very important for us to build a core of local talent."

Business owner Veera Seekaran is calling for greater respect and better pay for workers who keep Singapore clean, green and safe.

PHOTO: MCI

The intention is for the next generation to come up and be better than you. If they're going to go through the same mistakes, something is wrong.



Banker Raja Sridhar Athreya believes that having common goals helps to overcome differences between individuals and narrows cultural gaps.

PHOTO: MCI

Cultural training for new citizens? He thinks otherwise

Instead, new citizens should reach out and engage the community

By Chen Jingting

Banker Raja Sridhar Athreya first came to Singapore in early 2000 and became a Singapore citizen in late 2004. Together with his wife and two children, he returned to Singapore last year after spending 18 months in Amsterdam, where he had been posted for work.

The decision to make Singapore his home was easy – the meritocratic system, and the government’s strong commitment to engage the private sector and to ensure economic growth, attracted him.

While the banker has met many locals who hold biased views of Indian nationals, he hasn’t allowed the negativity to stop him from integrating into the community.

In May 2013, Mr Athreya took part in an OSC dialogue to discuss new citizen integration in Singapore. He recalled: “Someone said that they should give us (new citizens) training in Singapore culture, but that doesn’t make sense!”

Instead, he believes new citizens should “make an effort to find out the reasons people behave [the way they do] and engage [them] more actively.”

That is why Mr Athreya is happy to be part of the parent support group of the school that

his seven-year-old daughter attends. Having a common goal to improve the school helps to overcome differences between individuals and narrows any cultural gaps, he said.

While he acknowledged the OSC is a positive step towards greater engagement of citizens, he felt that more could be done. For instance, the government could do a better job communicating the reasons behind its actions to citizens.

It also needs to do more to ensure that Singapore’s economy stays competitive. “There are a lot of other cities coming up that could give Singapore a fair run for its money,” said Mr Athreya, who previously held directorial positions in GE Capital’s banks, and is currently consulting for a bank in Vietnam. He is

also an active investor and consultant for small businesses in the region.

He felt that while Singapore has to continue to welcome foreign talent in order to stay competitive, the education system also needs to study how it can spark the entrepreneurial spirit in locals so that more can go on to become better business leaders.

He said: “Many multinational companies in Singapore struggle to find good quality, homegrown leaders. Many of my foreigner friends ask me: ‘Where are the Singaporean business leaders?’”

The solution, he proposed, is “not by pushing companies to hire Singaporeans, but by ensuring that Singaporeans are ready for [leadership]”.



There are a lot of other cities coming up that could give Singapore a fair run for its money.

“Helping to protect nature and making people happy... creates happiness in me”

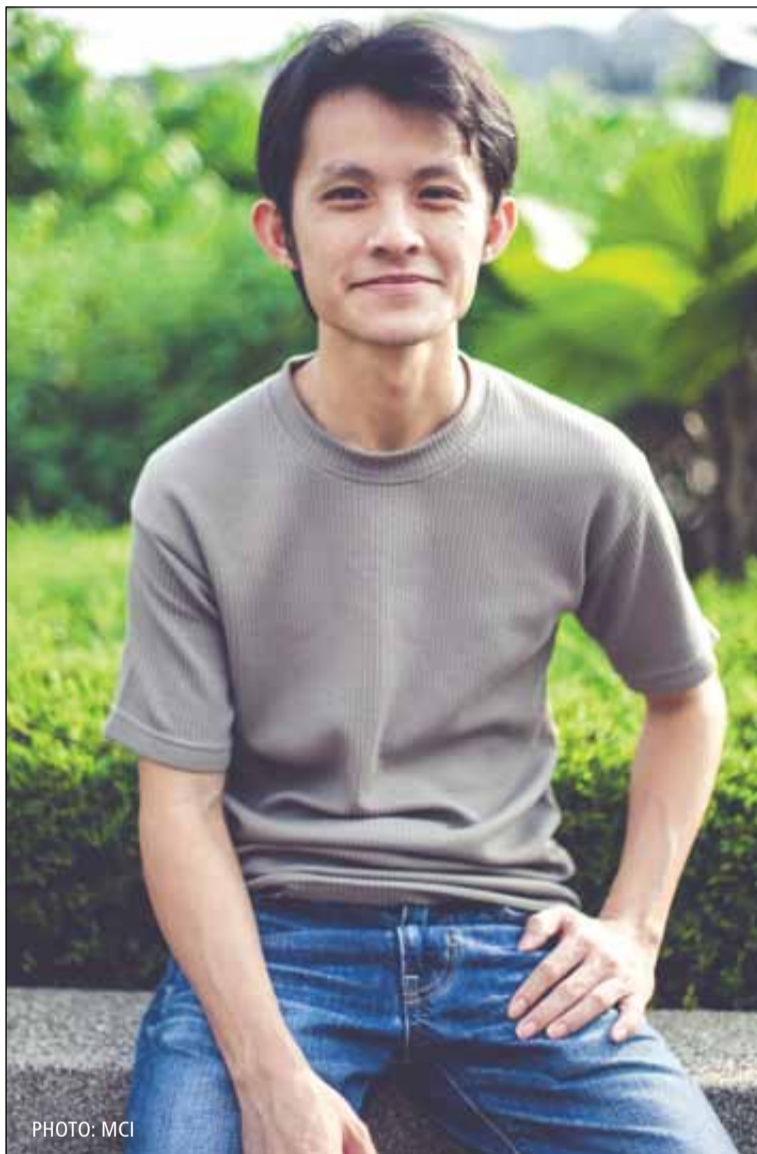


PHOTO: MCI

A young social entrepreneur and environmentalist finds joy in a path less taken

By Satish Cheney

When Soh Ju Hu graduated with a mechanical engineering degree in 2010, he worked as a “Kampung Manager” for two years at an eco-village called Kampung Temasek. The eco-village, complete with vegetation, ponds and animals, is 10 acres (40,000 m²) in size and located in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

“Most of my friends went to work at corporations. Some thought I was crazy,” said Mr Soh. “I come from a low- to middle-income family [so] bringing back money is quite important to me. I was glad that Kampung Temasek could contract me using a grant it received so I could be paid but definitely below what my friends were earning.”

The 29-year-old is dedicated to social enterprises as he believes that businesses should create goodness. “This is the kind of values that keeps me going. Otherwise, I would just work in any corporate job. I treasure the people around me in my line of work and the space and nature I get to work with.

“Helping to protect nature and making people happy... creates happiness in me. I need this to continue moving forward.”

Now, Mr Soh is a director at SHFT (pronounced “shift”), a social enterprise he set up to design and develop learning programmes. Currently, SHFT is working on ways to help people grow some of their own food at home.

Another project of his is Ecosystem – a co-working space for the green community – that aims to increase collaboration between different entities. But collaboration doesn’t always come easy, especially with the government.

“We had spoken to the National Environment Agency (NEA) about Ecosystem. We understand their focus currently is on specific environmental issues so they offer grants for environment initiatives that tackle these issues, such as the anti-littering campaign. Right now, we’re still exploring the opportunity to work with NEA.”

He hopes that the authorities can be a bit more flexible when it comes to collaboration with the green scene.

“We understand that the government can’t be responsible for implementing and directing all the green initiatives. It depends on the grassroots. [But] we need the government’s help in terms of resources, connections and reducing red tape to push things forward,” he said.

Efforts are also needed to ensure conversations (that go beyond OSC) continue so that the government can support the grassroots in overcoming the complex and dynamic challenges involved in implementing green initiatives.



We understand that the government can’t be responsible for implementing and directing all the green initiatives.

“When you do something you enjoy, you don’t feel tired”

A husband supports his wife to pursue her dreams

By March Ong

“I’m actually envious of my wife,” admitted the banker. Just what does his wife have that Ismail Hussein wished he could have too?

The freedom to define her own success. Five years ago, Mrs Rashidah Ismail left her teaching job to start her own tuition centre. She had to brave the resistance of their family and conventional preference for an iron rice bowl.

Her income and hours are now better. “More importantly,” said Mr Ismail, “she likes it and her students do well. When you do something you enjoy, you don’t feel tired.”

But this could not have happened without a joint strategy casting Mr Ismail in the role of stable breadwinner. In order for his wife to take a risk, someone still had to foot the bills for a family of five.

Nor will this stop anytime soon, as the 49-year-old anticipates higher healthcare ex-

penses in their old age.

Little wonder then that the issue of cost of living is top of mind for Mr Ismail, who has repeatedly emphasised its importance as an OSC committee member.

As Mr Ismail sees it, higher cost of living prices the freedom to pursue one’s dreams out of people’s reach. If families can cover their basic needs more easily, he said, “It gives you more time to look into areas you aspire to for your own fulfilment.”

But the path to this outcome is not in slowing the pace of economic growth – an idea that Mr Ismail has heard raised in the OSC dialogues. “Now we are dealing with the stress of our work,” he observed. “If we become complacent and our economy loses out to our competitors, then we’ll be dealing with the stress of being unemployed.”

Instead, policy measures to contain the cost of major items are needed. While families must be responsible for their own finances, Mr Ismail thinks that if housing and transport could be made more affordable, the overall cost of living could be



If we become complacent and our economy loses out to our competitors, then we’ll be dealing with the stress of being unemployed.



PHOTO: MCI

more manageable.

For now, Mr Ismail waits his turn, getting misty-eyed recalling his youthful days of writing and performing in a band. With sufficient planning now, he hopes to have the time for more creative pursuits in his retirement years.

"Success to me means..."



Bonn Lin Lian Hao, 17
ITE College Central

My definition of success is to have a perfect job, a job that I want to do and can make my future family happy, while providing a good living. If I love my job, I'll be able to get promoted quickly and I won't get tired of the work. For Singapore, my definition of success is to be a popular country that is good for business. To be a safe and protected country, with good salaries for the workers.

PHOTOS: MCI



To be a safe and protected country, with good salaries for the workers.



Cheryl Tham, 17
Hwa Chong Institution

I believe that success is like a sweet spot where one's values are upheld. For me, I feel for the dignity of migrant workers in Singapore and so my success encompasses an active role in advocating this cause. Also, success is tied to the eventual mastery of a craft. As a student, I value academic excellence as part of my success. Finally, I believe that success includes the liberty of pursuing one's interests. I enjoy watching and playing tennis, jogging, indulging in ice-cream and reading. Whenever I have the luxury of time to engage in these tasks, I feel accomplished.



Sri Amalinah Suhairi, 18
Nanyang Polytechnic

Success is knowing what you want and achieving it. In my opinion, to be successful, you need to make your own wise decisions even if you know there will be challenges ahead. Once you have accomplished something, be it big or small, be thankful. Success brings you happiness that no words could ever describe, so take a moment and be grateful to those who have been by your side since day one. Moreover, success also does not mean that you need to have everything in your hands. If you are able to bring a smile to your loved ones, I believe, this could be a form of success too. Singapore's success, to me, is defined by having good prospects, and most importantly, by providing a high quality of life to all its residents.



Ng Jia Ni, 15
Pei Hwa Secondary

In Singapore, when we talk about success, most of the time it's about material success, for e.g., the Singapore dream of owning fancy bungalows and cars. I've had an interest in current affairs since I was 14, and my dream is to be able to pursue a career in journalism that can take me to new places to write and bring about justice by exposing war crimes, even if I have to put my life at risk. That is my definition of success. To bring justice to the victims with my moral courage, and change the world for the better.



Muhammad Hasif Faris bin Hairudin, 15
Bedok Secondary School

For me, success is when you have happiness in your heart, satisfaction in your mind and you are achieving specific targets in life. Success is also when you have worked to the best of your ability. In order to be a successful person, we must have a plan, time management, determination and achievements. Happiness, satisfaction and hard work will lead to success. Being rich is not success because wealth is not always a measure of ability and money can't buy happiness.

From diverse views to core aspirations

It seemed an impossible mission: to gather thousands of people to share their thoughts about Singapore's future with one another through a national conversation and then distil what they had to say into something tangible, so that further discussions could be carried out and policy reviews could be made.

With an open-ended format, the Phase 1 dialogues gave Singaporeans an avenue to share their concerns, hopes and aspirations. Some said it was their first time they had sat down with strangers to talk about a wide range of issues.

A multitude of concerns and views emerged, with differing views of how Singapore should become in 2030.

Despite the diversity, there were still common perspectives that emerged after the OSC Secretariat had interacted with participants and had gone through the extensive notes taken from dialogues, emails and Facebook messages.

These 12 perspectives were published in "Perspectives Arising From the OSC" in February 2013. The interim document was meant to inform other Singaporeans, who had not yet participated in dialogues, about the key issues that were discussed.

The 12 perspectives were then used to guide the design of the Phase 2 dialogues, and participants discussed them in greater depth between February and June 2013. Views were split on some issues for example, what were basic needs to some, could be discretionary wants for others, such as cars or tuition. Many desired broader definitions of success, but held different views on what this means in terms of our life choices for education and work. Singaporeans said they want to extend a stronger helping hand to those in need, but have different views about how to do so without eroding self reliance and dignity.

From these discussions, five core aspirations that capture key directions that citizens feel society should move towards have emerged: Opportunities, Purpose, Assurance, Spirit and Trust. Turn to the following pages for more on each of the aspirations.

THE 12 PERSPECTIVES

A Singapore that is affordable to live in

A society with a greater sense of togetherness

A society with strong families

A society where government and the people have a more collaborative relationship

A society anchored on values

A Singapore with a strong and vibrant economy

A Singapore with a competent and trustworthy government

A society with diverse definitions of success

A Singapore with a more fulfilling pace of life

A Singapore for Singaporeans

A society that takes care of the disadvantaged

A society where everyone can age with dignity

OPPORTUNITIES

- Good jobs in a resilient economy
- Different ways of fulfilling potential
- Respect for all, regardless of jobs and qualifications

PURPOSE

- Broader definitions of success
- Shared identity, embracing diversity
- Passion to contribute

ASSURANCE

- Affordable and accessible basic needs
- Collective responsibility
- Early investment for life's uncertainties

SPIRIT

- Strong family and community values
- Care for the disadvantaged, respect for every Singaporean's dignity

TRUST

- Constructive and meaningful citizen engagement
- Trust and accountability
- Mutual understanding between Singaporeans




 OPPORTUNITIES

Singaporeans desire opportunities to make a good living and pursue their aspirations. Amidst global uncertainties, we will need a strong, competitive economy and workforce to support businesses that provide good jobs. We want to build a society where all Singaporeans have chances to realise their potential, regardless of their family background.

"It's imperative that we continue to exercise vigilance and stay abreast of the economic and financial environments, and be prudent and savvy with our good fortune."

– Email contribution

"Singapore's growth and stability can't be taken for granted. We're too small to take the punches and recover quickly. Other countries are improving and we must continue to stay five or 10 years ahead to find new growth areas."

– Email contribution

"Singapore's stable political situation and low corruption provide Singaporeans with a sense of security and increased business opportunities from overseas investments. Well-developed infrastructure in Singapore promotes accessibility and efficiency as a financial hub."

– Email contribution

"Singapore has to stay globally competitive in order to ensure that Singaporeans' aspirations remain fruitful. If the country opts out of the global competitiveness, we will see asset values in Singapore, for example, the property market, going in a downward trend."

– 26 January 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We need to create good jobs for Singaporeans by nurturing a strong, competitive and resilient economy.

We want to ensure that we and our children can continue to have good jobs and opportunities. We want to have security in our jobs. We want to be able to continue to provide for ourselves and our families.

We know that we will need a strong and resilient economy in order for us to have these opportunities. Singapore remains an attractive place for doing business today, despite strong competition from around the world. This is because we have always sought to stay relevant and to punch above our weight in order to stay competitive, since we have no natural resources to depend on. We know we need to maintain our strong foundations in infrastructure and human capital because they will help enable us to provide for ourselves and our families, now and in the years to come.



Rankings vs. Ranklings

Two contesting themes emerge from OSC dialogues

In the Rankings corner, there was the recognition of Singapore's constant quest for quality growth and quality jobs. The sentiment was that we strive for excellence in the face of stiff competition from other economies, and we take justifiable pride in how well we rank globally for economic vibrancy and quality of life.

But in the Ranklings corner, participants expressed unease over what may sometimes appear as an overemphasis on economic growth, and a sense that not everyone has benefited proportionally from Singapore's economic success. Many agreed that the mark of sound economic growth is whether we have good, meaningful jobs that allow us to live with dignity and provide for our families with pride.

The good news is that today, we enjoy a stellar reputation in and outside of Singapore. Many value Singaporeans as colleagues and partners because of our education, dependability, hard work and integrity. But participants at the overseas OSC dialogues in Shanghai and Beijing worried that Singapore is becoming more vulnerable to the quickening global competition and could soon be outstripped by the talent and ambition emerging from the rest of the world.

For many of them, the experience of the global mindset and the competitiveness of workers and students overseas also came as a shock. One participant said: "I thought I could survive [in China], and quite easily, but I was wrong."

She and others like her believed that Singapore must work hard to find a place for itself alongside economic giants. Participants highlighted some global trends that could have an impact on Singapore: China's ascent, a more volatile global economy, risk of regional instability and the impact of new technologies.

At the Singapore Institute of International Affairs Future 50 panel discussion on outlook for Singapore and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the next 50 years, OSC committee member and Member and Speaker of Parliament Halimah Jacob shared how aspirations emerging from the OSC must be situated in the broader context of how rapidly the world is changing, Singapore's susceptibility to regional conflicts, resource scarcity and climate change. Panellists agree that these are important reasons why we cannot become complacent in our growth efforts. Singapore must remain internationally competitive, and Singapore-based businesses – small and medium enterprises and larger companies – must have the right environment to succeed. Our economy depends on our trade and financial connections with our neighbours and major economies like China, India, Japan, the United States and Europe.

The participants also pointed out that beyond vulnerabilities, opportunities abound. Singapore is the third largest economy in ASEAN. In a rising Asia, Singapore is well poised to play a bigger role in ASEAN, including providing leadership and exporting technological and infrastructural services to a developing region.

I thought I could survive [in China], and quite easily, but I was wrong."

Overseas Singaporeans participating in an OSC dialogue held in Shanghai on 22 November 2012.

PHOTO: OVERSEAS SINGAPOREAN UNIT, NATIONAL POPULATION & TALENT DIVISION


OPPORTUNITIES
MERITOCRACY

“I agree that streaming maximises the potential of each individual, but it should not determine the course of their lives.”

– 13 April 2013
MOE dialogue

“We should address the perception that meritocracy means the weaker pupils are left behind. While few parents in Singapore might aspire to send their children to the ITE [Institute of Technical Education], I have spoken to an overseas parent who said that his dream was to send his child to Singapore’s ITE.”

– 27 October 2012
public dialogue

“When students are streamed according to abilities, you lose the opportunity to understand one another.”

– 13 April 2013
MOE dialogue

FAIR CONSIDERATION

“Have policies to make employers look into the local pool of workers first. It should be policed – and not just additional paperwork, which is just a show.”

– 15 June 2013
MOM dialogue

“The government should enforce and check on all complaints of discrimination and penalise those who do so, but let the economy find its own footing. Let the employers decide for themselves. They should be able to hire people based on the skill set required. The government should step back and just focus on enforcement and act on those who infringe.”

– 4 February 2013
Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) dialogue

“Singapore will go downhill if we have an ‘entitlement mentality’. The US has been successful for 200 years because they take people from everywhere in the world, always renewing itself.”

– 15 June 2013
MOM dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We should provide opportunities for all Singaporeans to pursue their passions and excel in their chosen field, regardless of background or financial resources.

We reaffirm the relevance of meritocracy as a principle intended to distribute rewards and opportunities fairly. But perhaps we need to recalibrate how we define merit today. Our system rewards too narrow a selection of abilities – how can we better recognise and reward talents not captured by academic subjects?

While as individuals we naturally want to ensure that our children have the best chances possible, as a society we should ensure that opportunities do not stay entrenched among the more privileged.

In the job market, we should also create and sustain a level playing field between Singaporeans and foreigners even as we continue to be a global hub for talent.

Singapore can do better in education and meritocracy

What have we got right? Education and meritocracy. The first enables social mobility; the second promotes a good work ethic, diligence and resilience.

Where can we do better? Education and meritocracy too. The former should allow for achievement to be recognised beyond academic excellence; the latter must be maintained by ensuring a level playing field across the socio-economic spectrum.

Thus spoke Singaporeans at dialogues by the education and manpower ministries held from April to June 2013. Singaporeans saw unequal opportunities from as early as preschool, as richer parents purchase a head start for their children through expensive tutors and enrichment programmes.

OSC participants called for a recalibration of the way we practise meritocracy, especially in our education system. Most felt that our current approach to the PSLE as well as primary and secondary school admissions tie students down to rigid pathways too early in life, and fuels a national obsession with grades and brand-name schools. Many wanted a review of how examination scores are used for school admissions, but most did not agree with proposals to remove exams and completely randomised school postings.

At the same time, participants recognised that broadening our definition of success beyond the academic and financial realms cannot be done by adjusting the education system alone, but requires deep mindset changes in our students, parents, educators and employers.



Top: Acting Minister (Manpower) Tan Chuan-Jin giving his closing remarks at an MOM dialogue.

PHOTO: MOM



Left: A participant shares his views at an MOE dialogue for the public, at Manjusri Secondary School. Participants had discussed issues such as school stress, an excessive focus on academics, social mobility, and inclusiveness.

PHOTO: MOE

Views got more mixed when it came to the workplace. Participants shared that unfairness extends into the workplace, where Singaporeans are sometimes less desirable in the eyes of employers because of their National Service and family commitments, compared with foreigners without these responsibilities. Some felt that employers should be left to recruit solely based on merit, while others pressed for government measures to compel employers to actively consider local workers first.

Even though participants acknowledged the challenge in deciding what constitutes discrimination by employers, there was broad agreement that fair employment is important, and that government intervention is needed to uphold it.

ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITIES

“We are not rich but we spend most of my salary on my child’s education. I never told my son about our financial situation as I don’t want him to worry about money at this age.”

– Email contribution

“While the track is the same for everyone, some people are fitted with Nike trainers while others have to make do with Bata shoes.”

– Email contribution

“The system of Primary 1 registration, in particular the alumni system, encourages social segregation. If you’re coming from a well-to-do background, you will most probably mix with the same kind of people. Why not let everyone have the same opportunity in primary schools?”

– 13 April 2013
MOE dialogue

“Can the government provide the same opportunities for everyone in the community?”

– 30 January 2013
public dialogue

“Having equal opportunities for all sounds like a good thing, but there is a potential flipside to this – if everyone has the same opportunity, pay, etc., there would be no incentive for the more capable ones to perform better.”

– 26 February 2013
public officers dialogue





“Respect for all working people. Every working person has his or her pride; every job has its dignity. If a cleaner chooses to be a cleaner, there is nothing wrong with that.”
Examples of how sometimes we don't show respect to certain occupations:

Customers vs cleaners: “Why should I return the tray, his job what.”

Patients vs nurses: “Since I am paying for my bed, the nurses are my maids!”

Students/parents vs teachers: “The teacher punish you? I report police!”

Commuters vs bus captains: “Why should I thank him, I pay my fare what.”

Younger workers vs seniors: “His time has passed, it's my show now!”

– 27 November 2012
NTUC Phase 1 Round-up dialogue

“There is a lack of respect for others. For example, treating domestic helpers badly. There is also a lack of respect for teachers nowadays.”

– 16 November 2012
NTUC dialogue

“As a society, we are very obsessed with the haves and have-nots. Regardless of the job we do, we should have respect for one another.”

– 9 July 2013
NTUC Phase 2 Round-up dialogue

“If people are not given a chance but continue to face prejudice and are alienated by society, how do they maintain their dignity and self-esteem? How do they make a decent living if nobody gives them a chance? What is the point of rehabilitation if they remain ‘condemned’ and ostracised even after they have served out their sentence?”

– 4 February 2013
Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) dialogue

“Success is being able to humble yourself to help others in need regardless of your social position or wealth.”

– 13 April 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We should respect every individual, regardless of the job he does, qualifications he holds or his position in society.

Every Singaporean has his or her pride; every job has its dignity. No matter our background, our education or the jobs we hold, we are Singaporeans who can make a difference and contribute to society. We all have unique stories to tell.

We want to appreciate individuals who keep our services running smoothly and those who build and maintain our infrastructure for us. We want to create a society where we respect every elderly person as if they were our grandparents, and treat every child as if they were our own sibling or child.

“Regardless of race, language or religion...”

The timeless line from our national pledge is a hallmark of our society and where we stand as one, no matter who we are.

But have we really done our best to build a society where everyone can pursue their own brand of happiness without judgment or criticism? And can we, with our hand on our heart, say that we have not, at some point, let age, income, education, job or other markers influence our treatment of one another?

OSC participants did some serious soul-searching over these questions and concluded that we need to show more respect for one another's career and life choices, as well as support and empathy for one another's difficulties.

On one level, some take the path less trodden to pursue specialist careers, such as teaching, nursing or social work. We recognised that many among them are driven by passion rather than money, and we should celebrate such daily heroes in our midst.

On another level, it often falls to the older or less educated among us to take on menial jobs that many of us shy away from. At times, participants admitted, we forget to look past their age or qualifications to see that these are fellow Singaporeans who face their duties with dignity, and so deserve our respect too.

OSC participants spoke of feeling pained when those of us with menial jobs are treated poorly. We were in favour of systemic support that will help these workers cope with the rising costs of living, as well as get respect from society for their efforts.

Simply put, as was said at one dialogue, “We may be nobody in the hierarchy, but actually we are somebody in our own right.”



Participants at the NTUC OSC Labour Movement Series Heart dialogue discuss topics such as “Respect for all working people” and “Pro-living, Pro-family Society”.

PHOTO: NTUC

BE THE CHANGE EXPO

Some 300 students showcased their social change initiatives at this annual event in November 2012. An OSC booth was also set up to get students to share their vision of Singapore in 2030.



PHOTOS: SOCIAL CHANGE IN ACTION



PURPOSE

We want to live purposefully – as individuals, as members of our communities, and as Singaporeans.

We want to live in a community that celebrates achievements beyond the economic. We want to look to the things that link and bind us – our national heritage, shared memories and communal spaces. We want to create a better Singapore for future generations – together.

DEFINITIONS OF SUCCESS

“Everything in Singapore is turned into a measurable KPI [key performance indicator] but not everything meaningful can be measured. In fact, I don’t want to live by other people’s KPI.”

– 19 February 2013
Republic Polytechnic dialogue

“Our society has shaped the way our parents view jobs and they have fixed views on the type of careers they want their children to have.”

– 25 January 2013
Students’ Care Service (Hougang) dialogue

“I want the arts to be legitimised; I mean they should be accepted as a fundamental part of life, well-being and progress, and accepted as much as the sciences and business are.”

– 13 April 2013
Dialogue on culture and the arts

PURPOSE & PASSION

“Living a life passionately, developing your passion and focusing on your passion will inevitably result in living a life well. We should not be bound by monetary targets. We should ensure that we have a balanced family life.”

– 22 January 2013
public dialogue

“We should stop stigmatising failure, and equip pupils with fundamental skill sets and awareness of their interests and passions.”

– 13 April 2013
MOE dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We need to broaden how we assess success and appreciate the need for Singaporeans to lead a fulfilling life.

We study or work very hard as we want to realise our dreams and secure the best possible future for our families and loved ones. But work only has meaning if we feel a sense of purpose and passion in what we do, and if we have the opportunity and time to enjoy the fruits of our labour with our families and friends.

We want to broaden our definitions of success and celebrate achievements beyond material progress, and to include different pathways to fulfillment both in our education system and the workplace.

Let’s broaden how success is defined

Ask a young person to describe success. The answer may not be the typical riches or honours you would expect.

For 16-year-old Abigail Wee, her parents are her picture of success, “because they wake up every morning to go to work so they can support my sisters and me”.

Fourteen-year-old Mohammad Afiq does not let others write him off as “no hope” because his grades are not great. He shared: “I think I can be a successful cook and cook for the needy in future.”

They reflected the views of the 90 students who joined in OSC dialogues held at NorthLight School and Assumption English School. Rather than see their futures as limited by their school grades, they know what their dreams are and have every intention of pursuing and achieving them.

Across many OSC dialogues, participants expressed hope for a society that does not judge success only by academic grades, but also by excellence in other areas like sports and the arts, as well as by how well we care for our families and communities. Some spoke with passion and conviction about social causes to which they have



committed their time and energies. Others shared personal stories about sacrificing their careers to care for loved ones. The common thread through their unique stories was a recognition that success in life goes beyond material possessions and achievements.

The desire for a fulfilling life was also voiced often, even as we take pride in our “can do” spirit. For many of us, choosing between career ambitions and family time is a challenge.

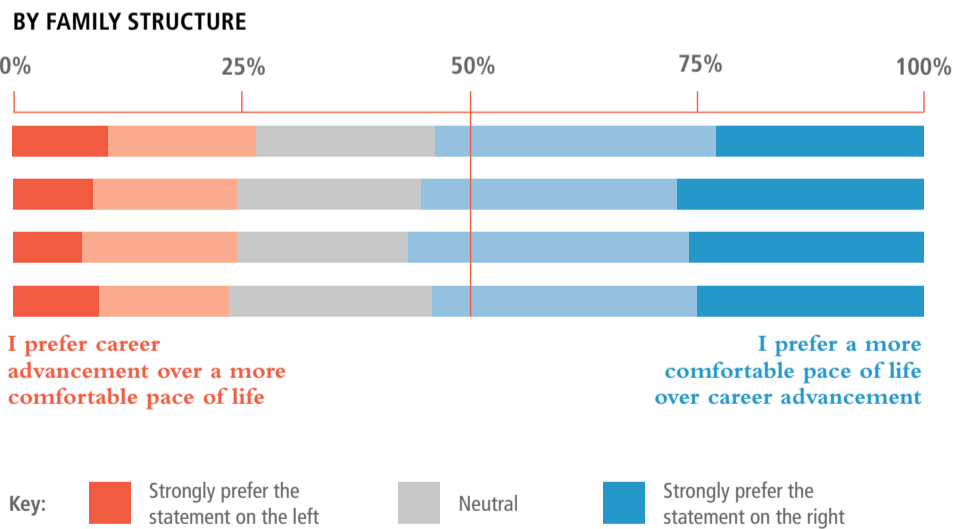
For all the debate over what makes for success or a fulfilling life, one thing is clear for many OSC participants – we want to live purposefully and provide a good life for ourselves and our families.

Students discussing what success means to them at an OSC dialogue organised by NorthLight School on 2 May 2013.

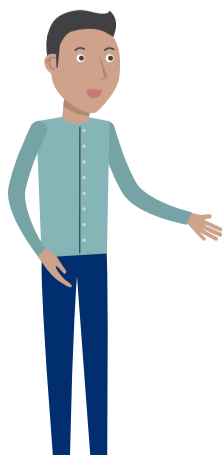
PHOTO: MOE

OSC SURVEY

Pace of life
Singaporeans, especially those married with children, would choose a more comfortable pace of life over career advancement. This may suggest that family comes before career for these groups.



FULFILLING PACE OF LIFE



“Government shouldn’t over-legislate certain policies like work-life balance or pro family measures. It will put a strain on employers.”

– 8 November 2012
MND internal dialogue

“Promote work-life balance so people have time to enjoy and to relax.”

– 27 October 2012
public dialogue



PURPOSE

STRENGTHENING IDENTITY

“Using Singlish could be embraced as an identity because all the races speak it.”

– 9 October 2012
nEbO dialogue

“Tearing down of iconic buildings such as the National Stadium and the National Theatre has greatly contributed to the loss of memories and heritage.”

– 5 April 2013
public officers dialogue

“Singaporean identity and culture need not be centred on icons, be it buildings, historical figures or heritage sites such as the Singapore Botanic Gardens. Instead, it could be the things that Singaporeans do and our way of life that defines the Singapore identity.”

– 5 April 2013
INSPIRIT/NYC dialogue

“Culture grows on you. You cannot teach me culture. It is something that we pick up naturally as we live in the area and interact with the people.”

– 17 April 2013
public officers dialogue

EMBRACING DIVERSITY

“Continue the one united people policy regardless of race, language and religion as Singapore’s diversity is our strength. Everyone is different in the way we live and celebrate festivals.”

– June 2013
Facebook comment

“In an increasingly diverse Singapore, there is no way that Singaporeans could have a common set of lifestyle choices.”

– 15 February 2013
public officers dialogue

“I would like to see more opportunities for the less advantaged and the elite to mix. The lack of opportunities has inevitably led to the widening of divisive lines between the various social strata.”

– 17 January 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We would like to strengthen our identity as a nation by preserving and learning more about our heritage and collective memories, expanding the space for shared experiences, and by embracing diversity in ways that go beyond merely tolerating differences.

In Singapore, things change fast. Roads, industrial development and the modernisation of Singapore’s landscape have helped bring about many of the benefits we enjoy today. But it can feel disorientating. We feel nostalgia for the places where we grew up, and we reminisce about shared experiences and memories.

In an increasingly interconnected world, some of us may also feel more connected to other global citizens than with fellow Singaporeans. We are exposed to a wider spectrum of values and ethics. Alternative lifestyles and varied family structures that were once rare are becoming more common.

Celebrating diversity while strengthening a common national identity may seem paradoxical but it is not impossible. We have come to recognise what is uniquely Singaporean. It may be difficult to express in words what this identity is about. But it’s in our attitudes, memories and experiences; it’s in our food and lifestyle; it is in our work ethic and our style of speech.

We want to step up our cultural development, and continue to uphold this ideal of a society that embraces diversity, rejects discrimination, and strives for harmony.

What makes a Singaporean

What makes a Singaporean – where he was born, how he speaks, the memories he keeps?

The answer is all of the above, even if these differ from one Singaporean to the next.

Indeed, in the course of the OSC we affirmed that it is precisely the embracing of our differences that makes us one. But with rapid change, the income divide, local-foreigner tensions and differing definitions of family, even different memories of the same place, the potential for societal fissures is also there.

We bemoan the loss of iconic landmarks, worrying that if we have no connection to our land, past or culture, it would be our identity that suffers. Said one older Singaporean, “Younger Singaporeans might not be able to relate to our past heritage, and individuals do not feel connected to the nation.”

And while many feel that green spaces and heritage buildings are important, putting preservation ahead of more transport links or public housing was not a choice that all of us could make.

OSC participants raised ideas for more integration programmes between citizens and new citizens, and occasions for mixing of children from different socio-economic backgrounds.

It was not easy either for minds to meet over fundamental life choices. For instance, some said our laws should be more supportive of unconventional families, such as those with single parents



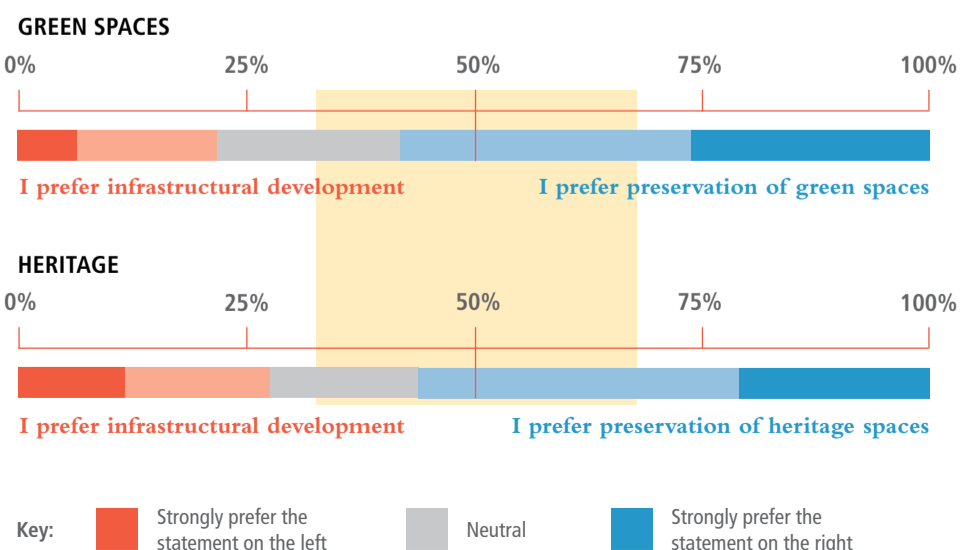
Young working adults discuss the development and preservation of Singapore’s culture and heritage at the INSPIRIT OSC dialogue on 4 May 2013.

PHOTO: NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

OSC SURVEY

Green heritage / space

Singaporeans ranked housing, healthcare and transport as priorities, which require infrastructural solutions. At the same time, they expressed a preference for some balance, showing support for the preservation of green and heritage spaces.





PURPOSE

“Where is the passion and spirit we had in 1965 when we rallied together and moved forward in one way? We fight over petty things like Hello Kitty and seats on MRT. Now, we are pulling in different directions. Where is the unity as a nation?”

– 9 October 2012
nEbO dialogue

“Instead of ‘the minister, the government, Singapore must do this for me’, we can look at how we can work together.”

– 22 October 2012
NTUC Women’s Committee

“We should shift from ‘Individual reservation’ to ‘Individual initiative’.”

– 1 April 2013
public officers dialogue

“We need to feel that no matter what background we are from, no matter whether we are educated or not, we can be someone who makes a difference.”

– 24 November 2013
public dialogue

“Set up a community time bank. Residents would provide information on skills that they possess, for example, fixing a leaking pipe. When other residents are in need of a skill or service, they could contact the resident with the appropriate skills. The provider would then earn points or time, which they can then use to barter for other skills or services.”

– 12 April 2013
public officers dialogue

“Support community-driven initiatives like ‘Chope Food for the Needy’. I think it is good that it was carried out without the involvement of the government.”

– 12 April 2013
public officers dialogue

“Singapore is my country and I have a stake in its future. It’s my responsibility to play a part and contribute.”

– 27 March 2013
public officers dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We would like to be passionate and active in contributing to the common good, to take ownership for ourselves and our communities, and to build a resilient Singapore society.

Against all odds. From the Japanese Occupation to SARS and most recently, the transboundary haze, we have overcome major crises with resilience and a “can do” spirit. What are the stories of personal triumphs against overwhelming odds that will be written in our history books in 2030?

We sometimes have a tendency to think that someone else will solve the problems in our community. But we forget that communities are ultimately made of people, and thrive on the gifts and skills of its members. At the end of the day, it is the things that we have a hand in building that we cherish the most.

Some Singaporeans have started to initiate positive movements, in the spirit of “you can, I can, we can”. Sometimes, big changes can happen because just one or two individuals decided to make a small change – as the saying goes, the journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. How will you play a part?



Taking action first instead of waiting for others

The OSC process went from just talk, to walking the talk.

Take, for instance, some grassroots leaders at dialogues held by the People’s Association (PA), who thought up a community directory to match residents with needs, with those who can help them.

Rather than wait for others to do it, they got started as soon as they stepped out of the dialogue sessions. And not a moment too soon, as community groups were able to tap on these directories when the haze hit, to identify the residents most in need.

Another example is the group of senior volunteers known as RSVP Singapore. Not only did they organise an OSC dialogue for seniors, they turned the ideas they heard into reality. Arising from the dialogue, RSVP was encouraged to take action to re-model and re-launch their “Mentoring Programme”, where volunteers act as “grand-parents” to mentor underprivileged primary school students. In the same vein, RSVP offered to Senior Activity Centres a set of structured activities designed to appeal to wide segments of our senior community.

By taking the initiative to kick-start their own projects, these groups showed a strong spirit of “doing our part”. It was a response to the ob-

ervation that “people have become over-reliant on the government ... Singaporeans have to step forward.” In fact, many felt that “the people sector” is best placed to take community action, since “sometimes the government does not have the best information – we may know the situation on the ground better.”

A young nurse at one dialogue homed in on the importance of personal responsibility with this statement: “We cannot be just a shiny piece of hardware, it’s also about the ‘heartware’ that comes from individuals and homes to spread to the society. When there was an economic crisis in Korea, Koreans took out their own savings to contribute to the country. Will Singaporeans be able to band together, to take care of each other in a crisis?”

Ultimately, we hope for a resilient society that can stand strong through crises.

At the PA OSC dialogue held at Sembawang GRC, participants, including Senior Parliamentary Secretary (Education) Hawazi Daipi, discuss what kind of home, society and people they would like to be in 2030.

PHOTO: PA

Many felt that “the people sector” is best placed to take community action...



Singaporeans want assurance that basic needs such as housing, healthcare, and public transport are affordable and within their reach. We all contribute differently, but we hope to share in the nation's progress. We strive to live with dignity and to do our best to provide for our families and prepare for a rainy day. But we also hope for adequate support to buffer shocks and weather life's uncertainties – for example, when our loved ones fall ill or when we lose our jobs.

“To call a place our home for many years to come after we get married. Not so much as an asset, but more as a comfortable roof over our heads. HDB flat as an asset is a plus, not a necessity! HDB flats should remain affordable, whether they are resale or not.”
 – MND OSC microsite on housing issues

“Despite the introduction of Medisave and various medical insurance schemes, the amount available for average Singaporeans for their healthcare expenses will most probably be insufficient if they have to make use of Medisave to pay for the medical bills of their parents.”
 – Email contribution

“How about a Minimum Wage? That would help poor Singaporeans as well as make it less profitable for employers to use cheap foreign labour.”
 – Facebook comment

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We should ensure that all Singaporeans have access to affordable basic needs such as public housing, healthcare and transport.

On a philosophical level, we agree that many needs are indeed basic – including housing, healthcare and transport. But agreeing on the details is not so easy. For example, what is a “basic” level of medical care? As society progresses and becomes more affluent, our definition of what “basic” is evolves too.

Many of these choices are dependent on our lifestyle, family needs and personality. A car may be deemed essential for those with young children or elders to care for, but is less important for others. Many feel that it is highly important to own their own home, while others may prefer to spend their money elsewhere.

What we can all agree on, though, is that every Singaporean should be able to afford a home and quality healthcare.

A home or an asset?

The home-or-asset question came up throughout the OSC. A Ministry of National Development (MND) poll showed that most Singaporeans hope for their HDB flats to remain as both their homes and assets (see pie chart). Among them, six in 10 said they wanted their flats to be first and foremost homes, then as assets that they could use for building a better life or for retirement.

Many parents worried that their next generation would not be able to afford their own homes, and that singles would further delay marriage if they could not afford their first flats.

Younger Singaporeans worried about meeting their aspirations in the face of hefty prices. Said one new husband who gave up on being a social entrepreneur: “Things changed when I got a flat.”

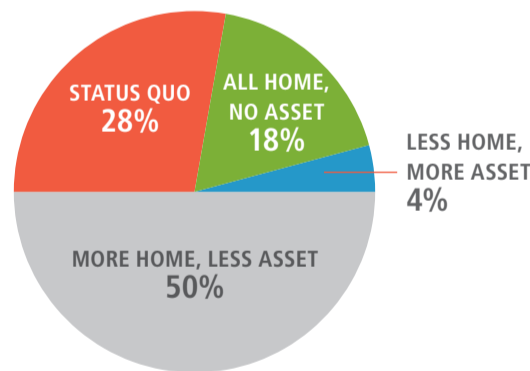
While many agreed on the need for affordable new flats, there were various suggestions as to how this should be achieved while maintaining fairness to past buyers. At MND's dialogues, some supported selling the flats back to the government, while some disagreed as they wanted to enjoy its asset value. Other suggestions included extending the Minimum Occupation Period to reinforce the principle of owner-occupation, returning a portion of the sale proceeds or net profit to the government when the flat is sold in the open market, and shortening the current 99-year lease provided home owners can extend it when their finances improve.

Many recognised that reversing the current housing policy, such as by disallowing flat owners from re-selling their flats in the open market, could jeopardise the prospects of those who have ploughed their earnings into their flats over the years.

One mother summed up the paradox well: “I want my son to have access to a cheap flat when



GOING FORWARD, SINGAPOREANS THINK A HDB FLAT SHOULD BE:



he gets married, but I don't want the price of my own property to drop.”

To meet the hopes of the son for a home or those of the mother to grow her asset – that is the million-dollar question.

Top: Participants discuss housing affordability at an MND OSC dialogue held on 23 May 2013.

PHOTO: MND

Left: MND online OSC survey.

SOURCE: MND

OSC SURVEY

Public housing, public healthcare and job security emerged as top priorities today, across most income levels.

Singaporeans ranked the top three issues which were of greatest concern

Breakdown by monthly income

- <\$1,000
- \$1,000-\$2,999
- \$3,000-\$4,999
- \$5,000-\$6,999
- \$7,000-\$9,999
- >\$10,000

	Top	2nd	3rd
<\$1,000	Public housing	Public healthcare	Caring government
\$1,000-\$2,999	Public housing	Public healthcare	Job security
\$3,000-\$4,999	Public housing	Public healthcare	Job security
\$5,000-\$6,999	Public healthcare	Public housing	Job security
\$7,000-\$9,999	Public healthcare	Job security	Safe and secure environment
>\$10,000	Public healthcare	Job security	Safe and secure environment


ASSURANCE

“Today there’s a lot of fear that medical bills will bankrupt us. When there is catastrophic illness, who will help us? We will just go through our life savings till we have no more money.”

– 12 April 2013
public officers dialogue

“What happens to the middle income who cannot afford private nursing homes, but do not pass the means-testing requirement?”

– Email contribution

“Singapore does not have a good structural support system that can help caregivers cope when there is a loved one struggling with mental illness.”

– Email contribution

“How can Singaporeans afford flats that require 30 or more years of mortgage on a dual income? Do we have employment support or an insurance scheme that can sustain us through accidents, sickness, misfortune, for 30 years of our working life?”

– Email contribution

“Unemployment insurance could help allay people’s concerns about their inability to service mortgages.”

– 23 May 2013
MND dialogue
on affordability


WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We should continue to emphasise personal and family responsibility, while strengthening collective responsibility as an inclusive society, so that we can assure those who meet with unexpected shocks that they will be able to get back on their feet.

To the best of our ability, we take steps to ensure that we can weather life’s surprises – we save up for a rainy day, and most of us have some spare savings to spend on insurance. We are independent people and feel that it is important to be personally responsible for the lives of those dear to us.

But sometimes life throws us a curve ball that may be too hard to handle on our own. Many of us have anecdotes to share about others who have met with unfortunate circumstances, be it an accident, terminal illness or retrenchment. Some land very hard and are unable to cope; others struggle through. As a society, we can manage our risks better together. We can assist one another, and use mechanisms such as risk pooling.



What is Singaporeans’ No. 1 hope?

That would be to have a sense of assurance that we can all have access to quality healthcare, particularly for the socio-economically vulnerable and those facing dire circumstances, such as terminal illness or job loss.

Each layer of society has its concerns. Working adults feel sandwiched between childcare and eldercare pressures. Some give up their careers to become full-time caregivers for their parents, as they feel unsure about the quality of local nursing homes. Others struggle to figure out how to provide good care for family members who have mental illnesses such as dementia. Elderly Singaporeans in the lower-income group hope that the community and the government will not let them go under in times of catastrophe.

“I often hear complaints from senior citizens that MediShield and Medisave are too inflexible. They feel they don’t really have a say in how they want to use their savings,” said OSC committee member Lin Ru Ping, who facilitated two vernacular dialogues for the elderly organised by the Yuhua constituency and the Lions Befrienders.

The sentiment, “Why bother to plan ahead when I don’t even know if I will survive this

round of illness?”, resonated with several participants who worried about both large hospital bills and smaller but recurrent long-term care-related costs, such as transport fares and adult diapers. While participants agreed that we needed to take personal responsibility in managing our own health and leading healthy lifestyles, they also felt that the government could do more to help those who had fallen ill and were in need.

Participants at the Lianhe Zaobao dialogue suggested making MediShield compulsory, or even introducing a type of family insurance. Other suggestions included changing Medifund and Medisave rules to avoid overly burdening adult children with their parents’ healthcare costs, and to have individuals pay higher Medifund and Medisave premiums during their youth so that they can pay less when they are older.

But complications crept into discussions too. Several were wary about abuse in a welfare system, and understood that more subsidies meant higher taxes. Some worried that using Medisave and MediShield to pay for their medical bills would mean increased monthly premiums. Doubts about the idea of compulsory MediShield arose, with some asking who would pay the bill for those who cannot afford their premiums.

The Ministry of Health is reviewing the subsidies and 3Ms framework. In the meantime, how to ensure that everyone gets the sense of assurance, and how to divide the bill for this sense of assurance, will be the questions to address.

OSC committee member Lin Ru Ping with participants at the Lions Befrienders dialogue held on 3 December 2012.

PHOTO: MCI



“The degree, the certificate – they have an expiry date. On the other hand, lifelong learning should be from cradle to grave.”

– 8 June 2013
MOM dialogue on lifelong learning

“I was retrenched in October 2010 and thought I should be able to get another job of a reasonably lower pay, but to my surprise I was jobless for nine months. I lowered my expectations, but still got no offer on my application. I had to resort to working overseas in the Middle East, leaving my wife and kids.”

– Facebook comment

“With half a million of our population going up to 65 years old, how do we manage their chronic diseases? In the hospital, I have seen patients warded in the corridor, and this makes me very worried.”

– 1 February 2013
Ministry of Health dialogue

“A lot of people only think about ageing when they grow old. But it’s happening to us right now. I think people need to focus on retirement adequacy, for example, taking care of their own health even before they grow old.”

– 4 December 2012
public officers dialogue

“We don’t understand personal costs involved in ageing. We think we’re well prepared, but we need to plan ahead of time. Self planning is a skill, and we have to start 20-30 years in advance.”

– 23 March 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We should invest and plan for life’s uncertainties early so that we can enjoy peace of mind in our golden years

Thinking about the future can be a scary thing. What helps us sleep more soundly at night is the knowledge that we have done what we can to prepare for our future and that of our dependants – be it in spending wisely, saving or investing in things that will pay off in the long term, like education and lifelong learning.

As we age, we worry that our skills may become obsolete, or we will need more money for long-term care during our retirement years. For those of us who have dependants with special needs, we worry about their future. We try to prepare early but worry that we will fall short of what we need. Regardless, we all need to take responsibility for investing early in preparation for our golden years.



Be ready for the future with lifelong learning

OSC participants discussed Singapore’s future with a real fear of its uncertainties. These uncertainties cause anxiety for Singaporeans who hope to provide for their families no matter what the future brings.

At seven dialogues organised by the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC), worries about competition from cheaper foreign labour and wage deflation ultimately boiled down to whether Singaporean workers can increase their productivity and earn higher wages by their own merits.

Workers attending Ministry of Manpower (MOM) dialogues said that more support and understanding from their employers for their Continuing Education and Training could help them get more future-ready.

Both employers and workers agreed: lifelong learning matters. Now, much less in the future, it is impossible to learn one skill and stay in just one job for the rest of our lives.

Hence skills upgrading was something that older Singaporeans valued, as they recognised that the speed of technological change could render their skills obsolete. Women who had left the workforce for some time were also concerned about having adequate skills if they were to return to the workforce to support their families.

Even those in their golden years were worried about the future. Many seniors called for more senior employment schemes to strengthen retirement adequacy, and for holistic housing with integrated recreational, social and healthcare elements.



Top: What does lifelong learning mean to you? Participants discuss this question at the MOM dialogue on 8 June 2013.

PHOTO: MOM

Left: A young NTUC activist shares her thoughts at the NTUC dialogue held on 24 November 2012.

PHOTO: NTUC



Skills upgrading was something that older Singaporeans valued, as they recognised that the speed of technological change could render their skills obsolete.


 SPIRIT

Singaporeans want a society anchored in our common values, as these values help define us. The OSC process has enabled us, as a society, to develop a deeper understanding of the challenges that our fellow Singaporeans face and how best we can extend a helping hand to the less advantaged among us. We respect the elderly, the disabled, those with special needs, ex-offenders and others who may be at the margins of society. We aspire to a strong “kampong spirit”, and we want to strengthen our sense of togetherness and build a compassionate society.

“The current environment is relatively safe but I do not take it for granted. Government has to continue to maintain this safe environment for the people.”

– OSC survey

“Singapore will become a gracious society; people are outward-looking and open-minded, and willing to serve.”

– OSC survey

“As a resident of Singapore and potentially, a mother to a Singaporean baby, I will first make sure that my family, especially my kid, feels proud to be Singaporean. This is very important because the family is a building unit, making up one country.”

– 19 February 2013

Republic Polytechnic dialogue

“Create more free or affordable family-friendly places such as parks.”

– Email contribution

“Sports are a good medium to rally the citizens. To bring back the ‘kampong spirit’, there should be less reliance on institutions so that people will engage in play spontaneously, for example, playing football with neighbours, rather than signing up for a session at a CC.”

– 15 December 2012
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We aspire to have a strong “kampong spirit” in our society, and to build our society on a foundation of strong families and community values.

In today’s society, it is easy to get caught up in our individual lives and ambitions, at the expense of caring for others. Technology is a double-edged sword – it allows us to connect with one another in the virtual world and helps us to mobilise the community into action, but it can also narrow our circle of friends if we choose to socialise only with those who share our outlook.

We want to see a spirit of caring and sharing in our neighbourhoods; where our coffee shops, void decks, playgrounds, football fields, parks and other community spaces are places where we can gather, interact and form shared memories. We value a safe and secure community, and reaffirm the importance of honesty, kindness and graciousness towards one another.

But these values are fostered, not forced. We want to continue to support strong families that can nurture the next generation of Singaporeans, who will in turn have the values to build the Singapore society that we want.

Let’s reconnect

Many Singaporeans want to see a strong “kampong spirit”

A common refrain heard during the OSC was this: “Bring back our ‘kampong spirit’”. To be accurate, it is not the old zinc roofs or uneven mud paths that we want to bring back. Indeed, OSC participants stressed that our living conditions today have improved tremendously since our kampong days.

Rather, it is the spirit under those roofs and the connections along those paths that we would like to see alive and well, because we worry that the demands of work are making us more ambivalent towards one another. Many shared this young Singaporean’s hope: “A community where people look up and greet one another instead of looking down at their electronic devices.”

OSC participants called for a more caring, gracious and warm-hearted society, where in every

community conversations and compassion flow naturally, and “neighbours become friends and help each other tide over difficult situations”. We also want our society to remain safe and secure with low crime rates, where we look out for one another and maintain a peaceful environment.

At the core of the “kampong spirit” is how we treat our families. From the OSC survey, family and community values remain important, in particular filial piety, honesty, politeness and graciousness. Dialogue participants said that it is only when our family ties are steadfast that we can have strong social cohesion.

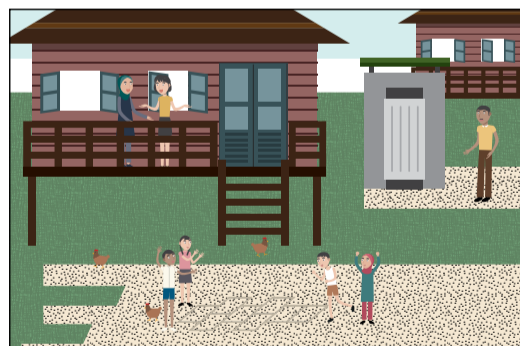
Ideas for strengthening our “kampong spirit” ran freely, from setting up community time banks to pre-buying food for the needy, building multi-generational homes and organising more community sports activities.

But the question of how to strengthen the “kampong spirit” in an urban setting drew divided answers. Some instinctively said the job is the government’s, but upon reflection, it was agreed that the effort must ultimately come from ourselves, and not from institutions.

The “kampong spirit” is willing, but is the flesh weak? The answer lies in our actions.

EVOLUTION OF THE KAMPONG

From past to present and into the future



Past kampong:

When people interacted and played together

“My grandma used to reminisce about kampong life and said that the trust was so strong that neighbours seldom, if ever, locked their doors.”

– 3 December 2012

Lions Befrienders dialogue

“‘Kampong spirit’ could mean different things to different people. Kampong could also connote negative impressions such as income disparity, poor standard of sanitation and inward-looking views. A contextualisation of ‘kampong spirit’, such as a caring and gracious society, is important.”

– 18 January 2013

public dialogue



Present kampong:

Everyone holed up in tiny HDB flats with their gadgets

“People are more self-centred now and focus on ‘me’ rather than ‘we’ – the Singapore mentality of ‘who cares?’ and ‘it’s not my problem’.”

– 12 April 2013

public dialogue

“There is a sharp sense of loneliness felt despite being in a city of 5 million. Face-to-face interaction is gradually lost, though ironically we are more connected online.”

– 10 November 2012

public dialogue



Future kampong:

How would you define it?

“‘Kampong spirit’ should be self-motivated, coming from the ground, and not cold-hearted and mechanical.”

– 14 November 2012
public officers dialogue

“We have a lot of foreigners here now... how can we make Singapore into one big kampong, without the need for labels such as ‘foreigner’, ‘PR’, ‘Singaporean’?”

– 12 March 2013

public dialogue



•••••
SPIRIT

“I hope to see more nursing homes being built as elderly singletons with no children would have increased need for them.”

– 28 February 2013
The Salvation Army dialogue

“Have you considered how a 70+ man/woman can push his/her spouse up the wheelchair ramp without the assistance of a maid/younger family member? Even if he/she succeeds in the ascent, do you think he/she can restrain the wheelchair from accelerating during the descent?”

– Email contribution

“We need to make it a way of life for the young to integrate and care for the elderly and not view them as a burden... Teach the young to value and treasure the old as they too will face a similar situation when they age.”

– Email contribution

“From my work with the elderly, they don’t want charity. They want to preserve their dignity – and I believe we should give freely to this group. For we will all grow old eventually.”

– Email contribution

“Singapore sees things divided. We care about people at the bottom as an act of pity, an act of charity, and not as a social service. We need to see it as a social service and give them dignity.”

– 30 April 2013
public dialogue

“Caring is not simply about creating a service; we need to journey with the disadvantaged.”

– 30 April 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We want to provide support to Singaporeans who are disadvantaged, in a way that respects each person’s dignity and desire to be self-reliant.

Many of us want to help those who are less fortunate, and we often think that the simplest way to do so is to donate money. But there is more we can do, and it begins with developing a deeper understanding of the challenges that our fellow Singaporeans face so that we can know how best to extend a helping hand.

We want to honour our elderly who have helped build the strong foundations of Singapore. We want to give those who have failed and made mistakes chances to start life afresh, and respect their dignity in doing so. We want to provide hope and a chance to gain independence for those who are born with, or develop, special needs.

No one should be left behind and everyone should be treated with dignity.

Love us and respect us

Seniors at various OSC dialogues speak up on what frustrates them

“They show their pet dogs more care than they do their own parents.” This was shared by an elderly person at a dialogue organised by the Lions Befrienders for elderly living in rental flats. More heart-rending than the observation was the fact that several around the room nodded in recognition.

Others spoke of children who would put more energy into funeral preparations than into visiting their parents while they are still alive, or who only value their elderly parents as childcare help.

Elderly OSC participants said that even though they are prepared to take on hard jobs to support themselves, doors to new jobs remain relatively closed to them.

One retiree said, “The moment you are 60, many employers won’t consider you. Also, the type of work for the elderly is often menial, such as cleaning.”

For those elderly who can overcome their strong independent streak to accept support from the government, several things about public assistance schemes make things harder.

Some were candid that, as the cost of living increases, the amount of financial aid they get from the state is insufficient to meet basic needs like utilities, food, rental and conservancy fees.

Another tension point: means testing. One senior said, “Means testing is very difficult. I have a lot of trouble getting my children to turn up for interviews. They told me to get a family court order. But how can we ask our children to go to court?”

Between rising costs, unwilling employers and disengaged relatives, some of our elderly are having a hard time passing their golden years with independence and dignity. A better home for our elders will have to be built, not by the government alone, but also by employers, families and the community.

BUILDING A “VERTICAL KAMPONG”

In the past, kampongs typically surrounded a courtyard, an open space that encouraged interaction and helped to build a sense of community. Today, there are no more kampongs, but what about creating a “vertical kampong”? The idea was discussed at an OSC dialogue organised by the National University of Singapore’s Senior Alumni.

In a “vertical kampong”, the courtyard would be a central open space in a medium- to high-rise HDB block, surrounded by modular housing units of different sizes that could be arranged in various configurations. The size of the space would depend on the types of activities preferred by residents. The design of “vertical kampongs” could be modified to fulfil seniors’ needs. To boost interaction among senior residents, more healthcare facilities could be located at the void deck. Other amenities such as markets, shopping centres and clinics should also be nearby.

Participants welcomed the proposal and added that seniors who own existing HDB flats could be allowed to sell their current flats to buy the cheaper modular units. There was also a suggestion for the government to sell these units with a basic healthcare plan for seniors, such as a health screening programme and a national health insurance scheme.

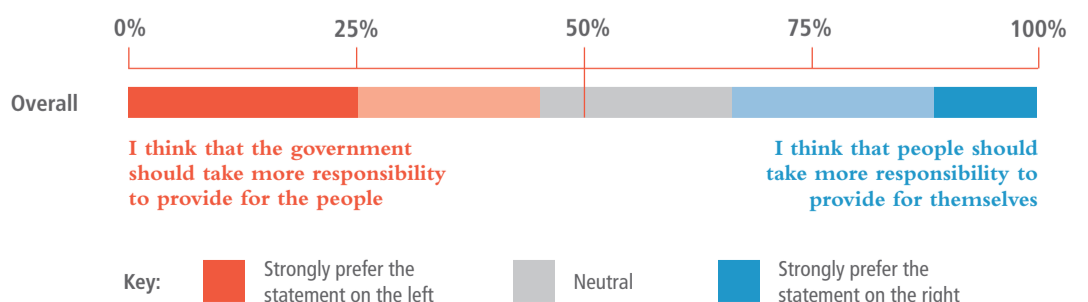


Left: Participants discuss their concerns at the Lions Befrienders dialogue held on 3 December 2012.

PHOTO: MCI

OSC SURVEY

Singaporeans had diverse views with regard to how much responsibility the government should have in providing for them.




 SPIRIT

“Usually the stigma is not from inside prison, but outside. Society needs to be educated. If not, we will still be going back to our old path.”

– 4 February 2013
Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) dialogue

“We [ex-offenders] want to be useful to society. All we need is a second chance.”

– 4 February 2013
SANA dialogue

“I hope Singaporeans will be more forgiving ... so that one day we can remove the stigma of criminal and ex-offender records, tattoos, black marks in job application, and be reborn.”

– 4 February 2013
SANA dialogue

“We should see the community as a safety net, not just an artificial safety net, depending on our budget.”

– 30 April 2013
public dialogue



“Punish me but don’t break me”

This was the plaintive cry of a former drug offender who had served his sentence, but who still felt punished after he left prison.

At the dialogue by the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) and Industrial & Services Co-operative Society (ISCOS), ex-offenders shared their hope for a Singapore that is kinder and more supportive to those who have made mistakes in the past, but would like a chance to re-enter society.

Not surprisingly, obtaining employment is a big part of their rehabilitation. But most said they could not even land an interview as they had to declare their criminal record in the application. The need to take whatever job they can find often results in having to put up with discrimination, such as less pay for the same work. If only the state would take the lead in employing ex-offenders, they added.

Social stigma lingers despite the longstanding work of the Yellow Ribbon project in placing many ex-offenders back in jobs.



Ex-offenders’ stories revealed a life where even the most basic things are difficult. After years in prison, some found themselves confounded by what many of us take for granted, the moment they left prison. One said he embarrassed himself repeatedly as he did not know that taps in public toilets are now automatically activated, and he did not know how to top up his MRT fare card.

Ex-offenders shared that healthcare and housing costs were major concerns for them as they were unable to build up their Central Provident Fund accounts when serving their prison terms.

Their hope is for halfway houses to get more support to assist ex-offenders in the re-integration process, and for families too to be involved in welcoming them back, so they can re-enter society, confident that we want them with us.

Top: Staff at the ISCOS OSC dialogue held on 27 April 2013. Participants at the dialogue had discussed issues such as fair employment opportunities for ex-offenders.

PHOTO: ISCOS

Left: Participants of the SANA OSC dialogue, held on 4 February 2013, discuss issues related to SANA beneficiaries. Many had expressed hope that by 2030, Singapore would be a more forgiving and caring nation, and that ex-drug addicts would be given more opportunities in life so as to become useful citizens.

PHOTO: SANA



What was Nelson Ong’s experience after he left Kaki Bukit Centre (Prison School)?
Turn to page 16 to find out.



"We always say that it is the government's problem, that's what we are paying them for, but we don't offer any solutions."

– 30 April 2013
public dialogue

"An improvement in waiting time, for example, so that the procedure and assessment can be quickened, as most of the time, people only seek social services as a last resort and may be in dire straits by then."

– 28 February 2013
The Salvation Army dialogue

"I don't want my autistic child to wear a label. I want him to blend into mainstream school and society."

– Email contribution

"It's back to economics. When we don't support persons with special needs, this prevents the entire family from growing."

– 1 May 2013
public dialogue

"If society can't make a sacrifice for those with special needs, then this doesn't bode well for society."

– 1 May 2013
public dialogue



Thinking about the future for those with special needs

“Our hearts are on the floor.” This was how a parent of a child with intellectual disabilities felt on the day of his graduation from special education school. While the occasion seemed to be a cause for celebration, the parent felt that it was “the start of all the problems”.

Parents of children with special needs worry about the hostility and lack of understanding that their children may face in the working world upon leaving school.

Their concerns were aired at dialogues held by Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore and Asian Women's Welfare Association (AWWA).

They shared that making an independent living is made harder by the scarcity of jobs for those with special needs. They believed that many industries, such as food and beverage, manufacturing and retail, could do more to create opportunities for Singaporeans with special needs.

Participants shared that young adults with special needs who cannot get work sometimes have to be placed in Training and Development Centres or day-care centres, but the fees are not cheap and there are often long waiting lists.

The darker cloud on the horizon for caregivers was what would happen when they themselves grew old. They worried about funds for retirement and healthcare after a lifetime of spending more on their children with special needs. They feared that there would be no one to look after their children after they passed on.

Heartened that MediShield is now extended to cover congenital and neonatal conditions at birth, many caregivers hoped for the pre-existing condition clause to be removed, so that their children could be covered by insurance for their pre-existing disabilities.

Many who spoke about Singaporeans with special needs came across as more inspirational than helpless. Other dialogue participants thanked them for opening their eyes to their difficulties, and for showing them the power of their love for their children.



Many who spoke about Singaporeans with special needs came across as more inspirational than helpless. Other dialogue participants thanked them for opening their eyes to their difficulties, and for showing them the power of their love for their children.

AWWA beneficiaries share their dreams and aspirations for Singapore at a dialogue on 19 January 2013.

PHOTO: AWWA



Choo Kah Yng wants to create a supportive community for people with autism

Turn to Page 15 to find out.


TRUST

Singaporeans want to contribute towards building our common future. This requires deepening trust among Singaporeans and between the government and citizens. We value open and sincere engagement, and believe civic-minded Singaporeans should be welcomed to engage meaningfully with policy makers and with one another. The OSC process has also helped foster understanding of the interests and cares of different groups of Singaporeans, and an appreciation of the importance of compromise and give-and-take.

“The messaging of unpopular but salient policies needs to be better conceived and communicated. The leadership should not appear to be ‘talking down to the people’ from an ‘I know better’ stance.”

– Email contribution

“By all means listen to the public, but do not give in to unreasonable demands.”

– Email contribution

“In a world of scarcity, people need to be logical and know that every demand has other trade-offs.”

– 20 November 2012
public dialogue

“We need our leaders to evolve. They need to be less ‘iron-fisted’ and more ‘human’ in the way they engage with the people.”

– 27 March 2013
public dialogue

“If we expect government to consult more, we should accept that government’s responses and reactions might become slower. We need to be more tolerant and patient, and accept that changes take time to take hold and bear fruit.”

– 19 February 2013
Republic Polytechnic dialogue

“If everyone gives feedback, the government obviously can’t respond to all of us at once. We need to be realistic and moderate our own expectations.”

– 6 April 2013
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We would like to participate in constructive and meaningful engagement on policies that impact our society, and to work with leaders who can connect with Singaporeans from all walks of life.

As citizens, we sometimes feel that the government could trust us more. At the end of the day, we may not always agree with the government’s decisions. But we would like to have more information to make an informed assessment, and to arrive at conclusions of our own.

Beyond the “hardware” of running a global city effectively, leaders also need to tend to the “heartware”, and stay in touch with the day-to-day concerns of every Singaporean. In order to better appreciate the growing diversity of Singapore society, and represent the needs and aspirations of Singaporeans more meaningfully, our leaders need to bring a diverse range of skills and experiences to the table, be willing to learn from others and see things from different perspectives.

Excellence is not good enough

We need to be engaging and empathetic too

When it comes to governance, OSC participants agreed that Singapore has delivered on fundamentals well. Indeed, the quality of governance in Singapore is a source of pride. To oft-voiced statements like “there is food to eat and a place to live in... there is law and order in Singapore”, OSC participants agreed heartily that these factors make us glad we live in Singapore.

Beyond fundamentals, however, some felt that our governance approach needs to be updated for the next lap of ever more complex challenges. As the nature of governance changes, so too must the talents and temperaments of those involved.

For many participants, the ideal government has more readiness and aptitude to invite and take on board diverse points of view. One participant said, “While our current system is effective, it has also sidelined many Singaporeans who can contribute positively to the nation.”

We look forward to a government that is made up of people who understand the challenges of the average citizen, and can take a genuine tone of empathy and openness when engaging with us. This will encourage us to step forward with our ideas more willingly, participants said.

We recognise there is tension between being more consultative and getting on with the business of government, especially when it comes to making hard trade-offs using scarce resources. Indeed, some cautioned quite strongly against a government that gets mired in consultation and fails to take necessary action or show leadership.

Participants agreed that the OSC itself has explored new ways to listen closely to citizens’ views. As the process continues, our honest feedback, and our commitment to playing a meaningful role in a lasting conversation, will help negotiate this narrow strait between engaging with empathy and acting with decisiveness.



Some felt that our governance approach needs to be updated for the next lap of ever more complex challenges.



Top: Minister of State (Finance) Josephine Teo in conversation with residents at the OSC dialogue held on 25 November 2012 at Bishan North.

Bottom: Minister (Prime Minister's Office) Grace Fu speaking with residents at the OSC dialogue held on 2 October 2012.

PHOTOS: MCI

TRUST

“The relationship between the government and the people is like a parent-child relationship. If you want the child to grow up and contribute more to the family, the parents need to let go and allow the child to have more say.”

– 5 April 2013
public dialogue

“The one who has the hearts of the people shall be the one who rules. (得人心者得天下)”

– 2 February 2013
Special Assistance Plan Alumni dialogue

“Singapore is my country and I have a stake in its future. It’s my responsibility to play a part and contribute. I don’t want to be just a follower.”

– 27 March 2013
public dialogue

“Some issues [raised by citizens] may be based on perceptions rather than on facts and figures. This is probably because the public may not have easy access to info.”

– Email contribution

“Even with a small group, we had diverging opinions on the vision of the future and even where we agreed, we had diverging opinions on the prioritisation. This is not negative feedback but just reflects the reality that building a consensus is difficult and may take some time.”

– Email contribution



WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We would like to strengthen trust and accountability between the government and people.

Historically, we have left the business of governance to the country’s leaders. But increasingly, many of us desire to contribute more to policy making, as we want to help shape and build our country. To do so meaningfully, we will need to access information and data relevant to our national policies.

For a start, the government can share more facts and raw data with us, to help us appreciate why certain policies and decisions are made, and enable us to give more meaningful suggestions. Not everybody will be able to contribute in exactly the same way, but that is okay. Researchers and academics may use the more technical bits of information to engage the government on certain decisions. Community leaders may be able to build on some of the points raised by the government, to give more targeted feedback about how policies are actually received on the ground.

At the end of the day, it takes two hands to clap. If we really want positive change in Singapore, we each have a role to play too, whether it is participating in a discussion, contributing specific ideas to fine-tune policies – or simply staying engaged with issues affecting society and our communities, and speaking up if something goes wrong.



Sceptics join in the dialogue

If you pictured OSC dialogues as genial chats among like-minded people who were already fans of the process, that was far from the case.

The dialogues were enlivened by an interesting breed of Singaporeans: the open-minded sceptic.

As a member of this group put it, “Earlier attempts at a national dialogue were not taken seriously. So it is unsurprising that we are more cynical now and unwilling to give the government another chance.”

There was a general sense that the trust between government and the people can be deepened, and greater transparency of information would help facilitate collaboration. “When there is more transparency, there will be more trust for the government,” said a few. As one public officer suggested, “To truly empower the citizens and encourage more citizen ownership, the government needs to provide greater access to policy data to allow them to gain insights to how the policy was made and the trade-offs that were weighed. This access to the information will also curb the general population from criticising the government unfairly. With data access, the citizens can make informed choices, suggestions and recommendations, that may aid policy-makers to make fairer policies”.

Some pointed out that debate in the public sphere can get skewed or overly negative as



a result of institutions’ tight hold over information. A moderate voice said: “Singaporeans in general are a polite and careful bunch who don’t like to speak up without having a sense that they have the knowledge they need to base their opinions on.”

At the same time, there were worries about the ramifications of an unchecked release of all information. It was pointed out that if we rush the process, we could end up losing more in the global context than we stand to gain in our internal relations between the state and the people.

For all their reservations, the open-minded sceptics still joined in the conversation, and still contributed their suggestions in hopes of a stronger social contract between the state and the people in the future.

Top: A participant shares her thoughts at the 27 March 2013 public dialogue. Amongst other topics, participants had discussed how more collaboration can be fostered between state and society.

Bottom: Participants in discussion at the 27 March 2013 OSC dialogue.

PHOTOS: MCI


TRUST

“Singapore thrives on structures and uniformity. There is a low tolerance for uncertainties and differences.”

– 27 September 2012
U Family dialogue

“Singaporeans should... learn to set aside their ego and pride in order to hear what others have to say.”

– 27 April 2013
public dialogue

“I would like to see more conversations organised to engage citizens to share, exchange and learn from one another. Most importantly, to promote all as active contributors to shaping Singapore and its future leaders.”

– 27 April 2013
public dialogue

“For the more focused discussions, it would be useful to have some data or details to help provide context for the discussion.”

– 27 April 2013
public dialogue

“This was an opportunity to meet people beyond my normal interactions and understand the concerns of people from all different backgrounds.”

– 24 November 2012
public dialogue

“I must say that my experience of the SG Conversation opened my eyes to other Singaporeans. For one, I didn’t realise that the elderly in Singapore felt such a sense of dispossession and rejection until one elderly gentleman from my group said his piece.”

– Petunia Lee, 13 October 2012, blog entry

“We should continue to develop such conversations because it is only through listening to others and discussing about issues that we can find a way to discover not just what we want for ourselves but for the people who make Singapore what it is. The key here is balance and understanding.”

– 20 November 2012
public dialogue

WHAT SINGAPOREANS SHARED

We need to build trust with each other so that we can make difficult decisions together as a community.

We like to talk. About ourselves, our families, our jobs, our pet topics... (And the list goes on.) But in a conversation, there needs to be a listener. How good are we at listening when other Singaporeans speak?

Listening is complicated by our different backgrounds. Because we have developed different instincts, reflexes, values, preferences and priorities in life, we may not always agree with other perspectives. Even when we are headed towards a common destination, we may not agree on the route to take. Likewise even when we care about the same issues, we may see different sides and solutions.

With a more diverse society, our conversations will be richer and at times more heated. Apart from the government playing the role of mediator, we should seek to trust and understand each other more so that collective compromises can be made. Someone else’s interests might be served before ours but that’s okay. Perhaps decisions will become less cut-and-dried as “I agree” or “I disagree” but more complex like... “I agree to disagree”.



Continue the national conversation, urge dialogue participants

“I am as anti-government as one can get. But here I am!” So said a feisty lady at an OSC dialogue, to chuckles all around.

She added: “I enjoyed this and hope the conversation will go beyond OSC to be a regular mechanism for the government to receive feedback and for Singaporeans to hear other perspectives.”

She and many others called for the national conversation to continue.

Our conversation muscles – already robust when amongst our friends and family – got further honed over a year of intensive national dialogue. Though it was a first-time experience for most who came to the OSC, they took to the open discussions with gusto. Indeed, it took hardly any time for participants to go from “I’ve

never done this before” to “We should do this more often, and here’s how the organisers can do things better”.

In fact, it was not so much our conversation muscles, but our instincts for understanding differences that grew. This gave some participants the confidence to believe that we can simply talk things over and settle neighbourly disputes over noise pollution or inter-religious practices through better mediation processes.

We appreciated hearing different voices at the dialogues, and the refreshing perspective that this brought. A common OSC experience was the revelation that, even when we agree that an outcome is a common good for society, we do not always agree on the allocation of finite resources or our respective responsibilities.

At times, participants were moved and inspired by what other Singaporeans have done in serving the community and standing up for specific causes, such as animal protection, conserving the environment. More than once, after a dialogue ended, one participant would go to another with this shy opening: “What you said just now... I want to know how I can help.”

We also understand that conversations are not, and produce no, magic bullets. Conversation is but the process through which we better understand and negotiate our problems. And, it seems, many are prepared to join the conversation with our own “Here I am!”

Participants in conversation at the 27 April 2013 public dialogue held in Bukit Merah Library.

PHOTO: MCI

Joining the dots to make voices heard

What truly made OSC take off were volunteers who spearheaded ground-up dialogues and rallied their network of contacts

By Siti Maziah Masramli

For a while, Gan Su-lin was “utterly miserable” in Singapore. Back home after 11 years abroad, the public officer could not wait to leave again. Then she realised that in order to put an end to her unhappiness, she had to be part of the change she wanted for her country. This was some years ago; since then she has been active in community projects and events.

Volunteering for OSC became another way for her to contribute to that change. Having served as a facilitator at national-level forums, Dr Gan welcomed the invitation to do likewise for OSC.

She also pulled in two friends from different statutory boards to join her. Their varied travels and exposure to services and policies in other countries lent a wider world view to their roles as facilitators, she said.

It was volunteers like Dr Gan who were instrumental in getting OSC off the ground. They came as facilitators and note-takers, sometimes roping in their own friends and family. Many even organised their own spin-off dialogues.

Apart from those spearheaded by individuals and small groups, organisations like Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore (MINDS) and NTUC also held their own dialogues, with support and resources from the OSC Secretariat.

These ground-up, community-led dialogues reached out to approximately 4,000 Singaporeans.

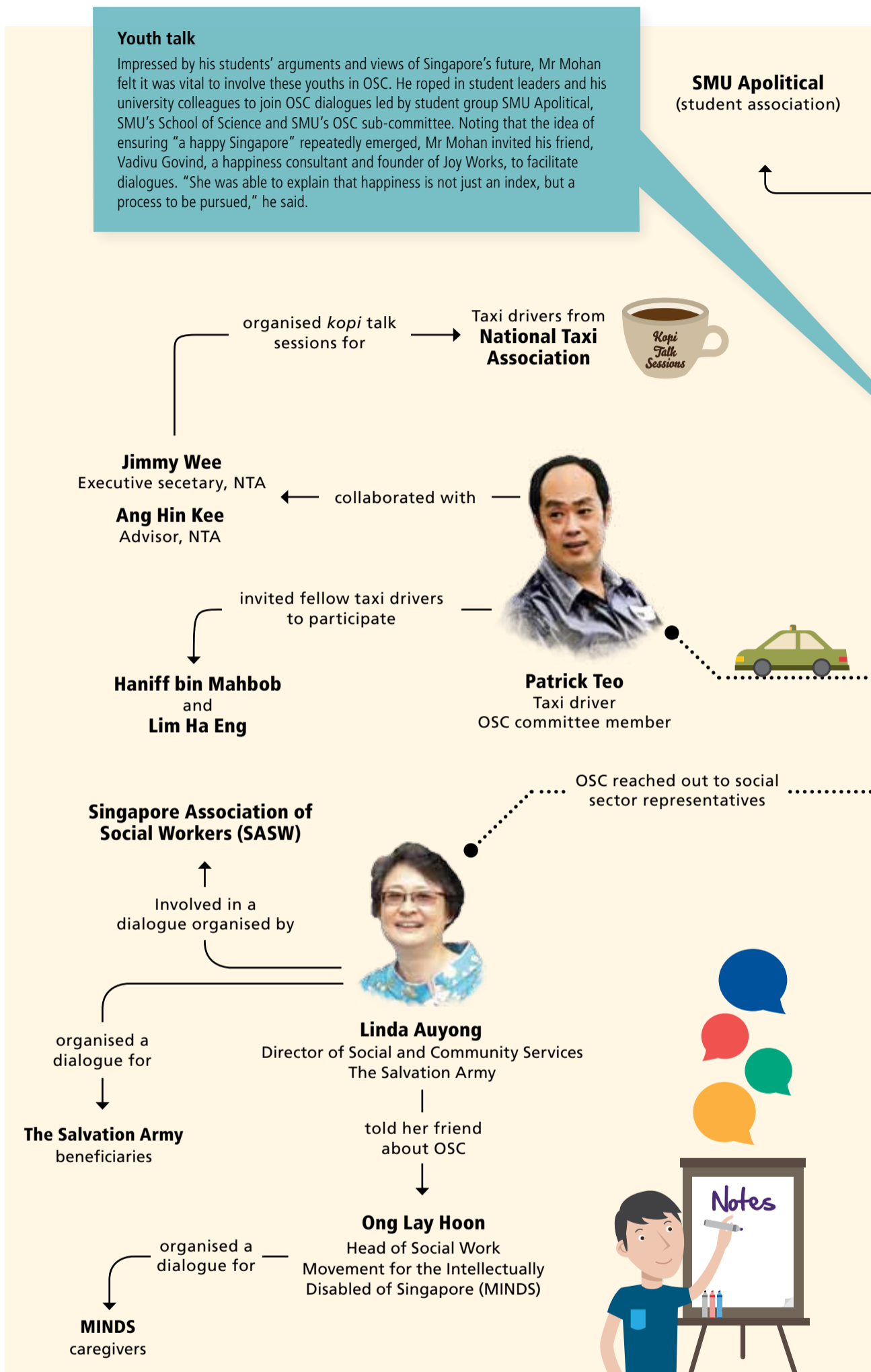
Giving a voice to the disadvantaged

Over at The Salvation Army, Linda Auyong, who is its Director of Social and Community Services in Singapore, helped to organise a dialogue with its beneficiaries. Disadvantaged youths, the elderly and family members of prison inmates were encouraged to speak freely.

The dialogue had such a positive impact on its participants that Ms Auyong introduced the OSC Secretariat to MINDS. She had previously worked at MINDS and knew they would benefit from having a dialogue of their own.

“My heart is still with persons with intellectual disability,” she said. “They have a lot of things to give feedback on... and really need more opportunities to do so.” OSC, she added, gives a voice to those who have been rarely asked to speak up or are reluctant to air their views.

Ms Auyong was also involved in a dialogue with the Singapore Association of Social Workers. “Social



workers work a lot with disadvantaged groups, so it's good to hear their perspective.”

The voice of the people

The voices of taxi drivers also came through loud and clear in OSC. One reason could be that Patrick Teo was on the OSC Committee.

The candid cabby, who has been driving for 16 years, initially thought being a committee member merely meant that he needed to “say a few things”. But when news of his role in OSC broke, union members thronged to him. That stressed him: “They all think I can do something. More of my hair dropped out!”

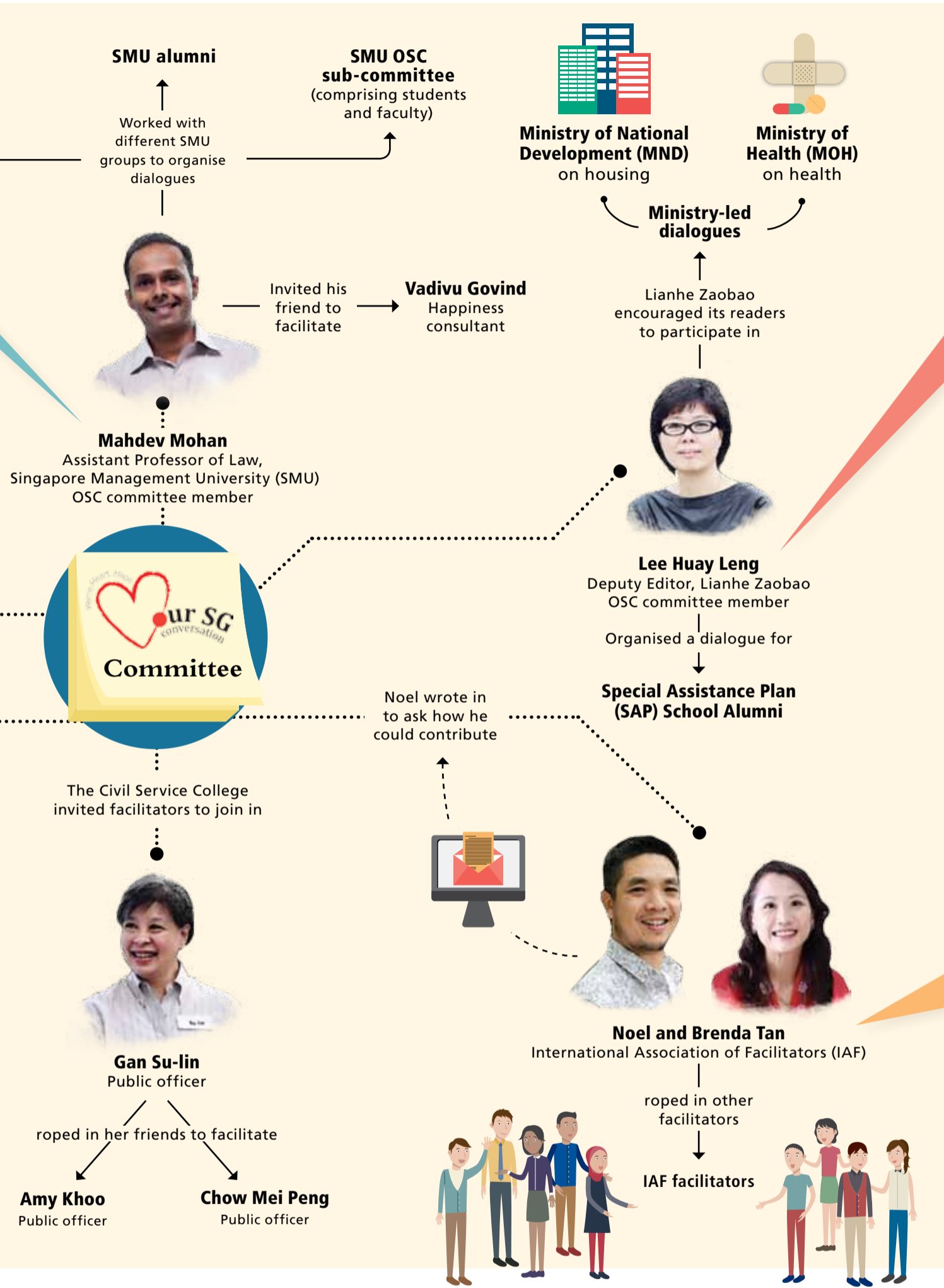
Nevertheless, he does believe that taxi drivers, who interact with passengers from all walks of life, could genuinely reflect the voices of Singaporeans. “People

face a lot of pressure and they always tell us,” he said. “But they are not complaining because they expect us to help. They are doing it to release stress!”

He also urged his taxi driver friends to take part in the discussions, but only two attended the centrally organised dialogues. This was because time spent off the road hurts the income of cabbies. So Mr Teo brought the conversation to the taxi driver community.

He worked with the National Taxi Association (NTA) to organise four *kopi* talk sessions at coffee shops. More than 90 cabbies dropped in during their lunch breaks to discuss issues such as road regulations and protecting the self-employed, as well as broader topics like Singapore's culture and caring for the elderly.

He also invited Education Minister Heng Swee Keat to a lunch with NTA senior members. Over *zhup*



Looking outwards

The CHIJ St Nicholas “old girl” reached out to her fellow alumni from Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools to discuss education, Singapore’s political landscape, caring for vulnerable groups and other issues. About 70 representatives from 11 SAP schools turned up, conversing in English and Mandarin.

Observing that earlier OSC dialogues had focused on Singapore’s future as though “we exist[ed] on our own in a vacuum”, Ms Lee also invited a China-based alumnus to share insights on Singapore’s external environment. Nominated Member of Parliament Teo Siang Seng, a former student of Maris Stella High, also joined in.

Husband-and-wife pair keeps the conversation flowing

Professional facilitators Noel and Brenda Tan believe in the merit of facilitated discussions. When they learnt of OSC, they were keen to contribute their skills. Mr Tan is Singapore’s representative in the International Association of Facilitators (IAF). Through him, eight IAF members, including his wife Brenda, came on board OSC too. Mrs Tan, a graphic recorder for OSC, shared: “It’s not enough for us to just say, ‘This is what should be done.’ If we have the means of helping out, then let’s do it!” For Mr Tan, who saw “a cry of disconnection” in 2011 and growing discontent online, OSC was a timely opportunity for both the state and its citizens to communicate better and “get the engagement right”.

Through OSC, he hopes to see Singaporeans shift from a primary mode of consumer behaviour (“I don’t get what I want, I just complain”) to being more active citizens. By interacting with diverse Singaporeans unlike themselves, participants could recognise their personal needs and aspirations, and at the same time accept that another person’s needs and wants are perhaps more critical. Being able to hold this tension is an essential mark of citizenship, explained Mr Tan. The spirited couple feels that OSC is a “first step” towards a more understanding Singapore and hopes the conversation will continue.

chai peng (“economical rice”), they chatted about the lifestyles of taxi drivers and the occupational hazards they face.

“That was the first time a Minister had joined us to *lim kopi* [drink coffee],” shared Mr Teo. “To see [him] make time to come eat with us, that’s enough! Whether he can do what we ask ... that’s another thing.”

Despite his initial qualms, Mr Teo wants the engagement to keep going: “Singapore is changing so rapidly, you need people to support the changes along the way.”

A mark of home

Dr Gan feels that OSC has drawn a variety of views, concerns and desires. To her, the views of sceptics and cynics on social media are just as valuable, even if they may be sometimes painful to read.

It’s not enough for us to just say, “This is what should be done.” If we have the means of helping out, then let’s do it!

What set OSC apart from the other discussions she had facilitated were its facilitators – many of them critical, yet believing that Singapore can indeed be a great place to call home.

Dr Gan even had OSC souvenir mugs made for some of her fellow volunteers. She wanted a reminder of her “wonderful, wacky and sometimes weird” OSC experience, as well as to thank the facilitators who inspired her.

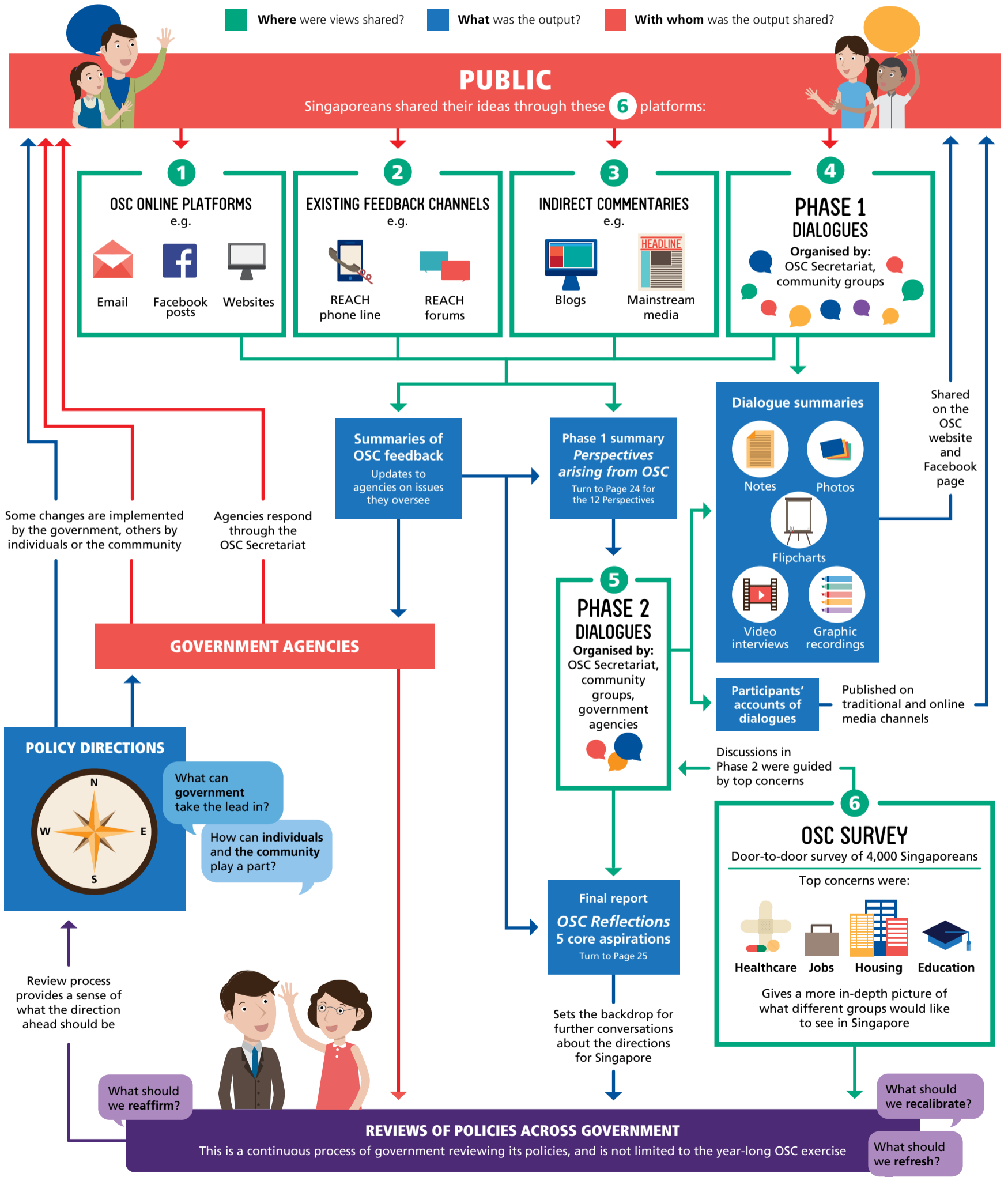
“These were folks who touched me in some way with their passion, perseverance, and amazing power of belief that, together, we really can ignite the spark of positive change for Singapore.”

WHAT HAPPENED TO YOUR IDEAS?

They didn't get sucked into a black hole, really. Follow this flowchart to see their journey in OSC.

Key:

- Where were views shared?
- What was the output?
- With whom was the output shared?





Thank you / Terima Kasih / 谢谢 / நன்றி

OSC couldn't have reached out to more than 47,000 people without you! Thank you for stepping up to organise dialogues that got Singaporeans talking and thinking of the future. The conversations were also made richer as a result of volunteers like facilitators, note-takers and committee members who devoted so much time to the process.

Partners

Agency for Animal Welfare
 Asian Women's Welfare Association
 Berita Harian
 Chinese Development Assistance Council
 Fly Entertainment Pte Ltd
 Green Future Solutions
 Industrial & Services Co-operative Society Ltd
 KPMG Singapore
 Lianhe Zaobao
 Lions Befrienders Service Association
 Mendaki Club
 Movement for the Intellectually Disabled of Singapore
 Ms Janice Koh and members of the creative industry
 Nanyang Confucian Association
 National Debate Team Alumni
 National Taxi Association
 National Trades Union Congress
 NUS Senior Alumni
 NUSS Alumni
 RSVP Singapore
 Salvation Army
 SAP School Alumni
 SINDA Youth Club
 Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association
 Singapore Association of Social Workers
 Singapore Federation of Chinese Clan Associations
 Singapore Institute of International Affairs
 Singapore Kadayannallur Muslim League
 Singapore Scout Association
 SMU Apolitical
 Social Change in Action
 Students Care Service
 TEDx Singapore
 The Eurasian Association
 United Kingdom Singapore Students' Council
 Young Sikh Association
 YMCA Singapore
 All participating MOE schools and Institutes of Higher Learning

Volunteers

Volunteer Facilitators

Volunteer Note-takers

Committee Members:

Ms Cham Hui Fong
 Mr Chan Chun Sing
 Mr Stanley Chia Ding Li
 Ms Chia Yong Yong
 Ms Noorul Fatha As'art
 Mdm Halimah Yacob
 Mr Heng Swee Keat
 Mr Ismail Hussein
 Ms Indranee Rajah
 Mr Shaikh Ismail Sathakuthamby
 Ms Kuo Jian Hong
 Ms Lee Huay Leng
 Mr George Lim
 Mdm Lin Ru Ping
 Mr Mahdev Mohan
 Mr Jeffrey Oon
 Mr Thomas Pek
 Ms Denise Phua
 Mrs Jessie Phua
 Ms Sim Ann
 Mr Tan Chuan-Jin
 Mr Kenneth Paul Tan
 Ms Teng Zi Ying
 Mr Patrick Teo Han Cheng
 Mr Benett Theseira
 Mr Lawrence Wong

Venue Providers

National Library Building, National Library Board
 Bukit Merah Public Library, National Library Board
 Civil Service College

Reflections

Published by
Our Singapore Conversation Secretariat
 Email: voices@oursgconversation.sg
 Web: www.oursgconversation.sg/reflections

Designed by
Tuber Productions Pte Ltd
 Email: info@tuberproductions.com
 Web: www.tuberproductions.com

Copyright of the materials contained in this publication belongs to the Our Singapore Conversation Secretariat. Nothing in here shall be reproduced in whole or in part without prior written consent of the Secretariat. Views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Secretariat or Tuber Productions Pte Ltd and no liabilities shall be attached there to. All rights reserved. All information correct at time of printing.

BEYOND OSC

Keep talking and engaging citizens, it builds trust

In the spirit of how OSC brought strangers to the table to discuss diverse issues, we invited four citizens – who met for the first time – to share their OSC experiences and their thoughts on how such conversations can continue into the future

Edited by Chen Jingting

Reflections: Could you share your OSC experience with us?

Rosemary Lim (RL): This was a good exercise, because not many people are exposed to it, especially those from the lower income group. I facilitated various sessions, and some were for the lower income group. At the beginning, they were all very quiet – they just looked at you and wondered whether they were going to be recorded and if someone was going to “come after” them. But after probing and telling them that it’s good for them to say what they felt and what they wanted, they actually managed to move on.

Rosemary Khoo (RK): I think it’s a wonderful experience to have people coming together to share their aspirations and ideals because it breeds a sense of common identity. It is valuing our contributions, valuing us as individuals with minds and spirit.

Prakash Nair (PN): I decided to volunteer my time as a facilitator because I think Singaporeans, in general, don’t know how to have good conversations with each other.

Kwan Jin Yao (KJY): Already in cyberspace you have people talking about different social-political issues, but coming together to talk about issues [face to face] was quite new in Singapore. One part that I really liked about my first session was the 15-20 minute introductory activity asking us to share significant moments in our lives.

R: What left an impression – something that made you go: “Wow, that’s an interesting perspective” during the dialogues?

PN: During the very first session on October 13 at the National Library Pod, I was a small-group facilitator and in my group we had a mixture of people. One thing that almost all of them said was: “Oh I didn’t know that the elderly had this problem; I didn’t know that the young had felt so strongly about Singapore.” And consistently in all the sessions that I did, at least one person comes to me and says similar things.

RL: [But] during sessions with secondary school students and their parents, we thought that it would be an opportunity to hear what the youths have to say



and how the parents will respond or react, but the outcome was that most of them stayed quiet or didn’t want to say much...

If you mix two different groups together, some of them may be very conscious. Some seniors may say: “The youngsters don’t like to know the problems we are facing.” The youngsters would say: “Whatever we say the elders would think that we youngsters don’t know what has happened.”

RK: But some people did say that there is more benefit in mixing people from different age groups together, at least in the beginning.

PN: (Nods in agreement) Because people who normally would not be in the same social context are at least talking to each other, listening, and having a conversation.



I’ve read about issues through newspapers and online sites but you really only get to understand them when you talk to someone on a first-hand basis.

KJY: I’ve read about issues through newspapers and online sites but you really only get to understand them when you talk to someone on a first-hand basis.

Prior to the sessions, you always hear policymakers talking about trade-offs. It’s a buzzword that should be banned because it’s been overused (group laughs) and people get frustrated. But when you go to a session without using that word [trade-offs], you realise that it’s hard to come to a consensus and it’s almost impossible to please everyone. For example, there’ll be parents saying that the abolishment of the PSLE will disadvantage their children who might be talented academically. But then someone else will say PSLE gives too much stress. Then you realise that probably, the point of policymaking is not to please everyone but to have a policy that is effective and efficient.

R: Could the dialogues have been more useful or productive?

KJY: Because of the scale of the discussion, a lot of

issues were repeated, a lot of ideas were rehashed and there wasn’t a lot of in-depth discussion. Everyone has his or her own view on the PSLE issue. But no one really has an idea of where we want to go. I thought recommendations could have been addressed as well.

RL: We probably need to be more finite in our subject matter and be clearer about what we want to find out.

PN: I’m quite happy with the fact that we didn’t go too much into depth. My perspective is that as a movement, it’s a great start. We shouldn’t end here. In what format it will be, or should continue as, I’m not sure.

But one major drawback is that we didn’t reach out enough. I know we tried but I think there are a lot more people who actually need the most help but have not been represented. I’m worried that the final findings may not be truly representative of Singaporeans. What we really need are more advocates, those who work with them on a regular basis, to come.

RK: (Nods) For the educated like us, we can talk. But there are lots of marginalised groups in Singapore – the poor, the disabled, the prisoners and the very old. How do they dialogue? Who speaks for them? It worries me sometimes.

I think Rosemary (Lim) put up an important point (in response to the first question) about empowering the marginalised communities, to teach and slowly accustom them to this practice of speaking up. Because they may not have been used to the idea of “I can express myself”, or may question “Is it safe to say this?”, it is almost like they are learning to engage and converse.

And it would be good if next time, they can speak even when their ideas are ascribed to them. I think this would really be the sign of a very mature society, a mature government.

R: How would you describe the “spirit of OSC”?

RL: I think that the spirit of OSC lies with the facilitators. It’s how the facilitators move around and get the people to speak. When you have an active facilitator, somehow there’s a more productive outcome. The facilitators actually build up the mood and get it going.

PN: I agree (laughs), if you say anything good about facilitators, I will agree.

KJY: (Nods) The sessions that I enjoyed the most were the ones with the more proficient facilitators. They were all well trained, and were more sensitive to nu-

Prakash Nair

The English teacher, in his 40s, was a volunteer facilitator for more than 10 OSC sessions, including one at the Singapore Anti-Narcotics Association (SANA) where he used to volunteer.

**Rosemary Lim**

An active grassroots leader, Ms Lim, 56, wore many hats in the OSC. She was an organiser, presenter, facilitator and participant in several dialogue sessions conducted by the People's Association HQ and MacPherson constituency where she volunteers.

**Kwan Jin Yao**

Better known as the owner of blog guanyinmiao.wordpress.com, the university student, in his 20s, joined several OSC sessions organised by the OSC Secretariat and Ministry of Education (MOE).

**Dr Rosemary Khoo**

As President of the National University of Singapore's (NUS) Senior Alumni, Dr Khoo, 70, is passionate about speaking up for the aged so she organised a dialogue for senior alumni and attended another for senior volunteers.



ances – how they rode onto an idea and got someone else to come on it as well.

RK: It can be very difficult to facilitate a session. The facilitator will have to use his or her judgment whether this person deserves more than two minutes, maybe even five, to flesh out his ideas. I feel that for some who had worthwhile contributions, the two minutes could be exceeded. For those who kept repeating and talking irrelevant stuff, the two minutes was just right (group laughs).

PN: Or it may be too long.

RL: Yes too long! (laughs)

R: Apart from talking to people face to face and having 4,000 people polled in the national survey, could there have been greater online engagement?

KJY: An online platform will definitely be quite constructive. The only concern I have is whether the OSC Committee would be comfortable with anonymous individuals speaking up. People may not be comfortable airing their views and having their names tagged to them.

PN: I think we missed the opportunity to create a platform. For example, *Cyber Pioneer* [the official news website of MINDEF and SAF] is very good because it compiles stuff that appears on *Today* and other websites and blogs. It also puts up questions for discussion and people just use it. Engaging people on any platform, whether it's face-to-face conversations or online, is a big opportunity because now everybody is connected, even the 70-year-old.

RK: (Shakes head) Not so – there's a great digital divide at present. I attended one dialogue with senior volunteers and organised another for the NUS senior alumni. A lot of seniors are not IT savvy so although there's a lot of discussion on the Internet, many don't read it.

PN: I'm just wondering if these notes from the dialogue sessions – since they are non-attributable – can be put on the OSC website. Some people, like me, may prefer to read the raw data to see what has been discussed at the other sessions, rather than have the information summarised and filtered down. Perhaps, having an e-hansard, like a parliamentary hansard, put up on a website, might be something useful to consider.

KJY: I think what would have been constructive would be to detail the different conversations that were going

on. For example, I know of different PA [People's Association] sessions going on but I don't know what was being reported other than the main mass sessions. So if there was an online platform, people could read about these issues and be informed about the different conversations that were going on. I think it will make for richer discourse.

R: I would love to see the online community get together face-to-face, the ones who are pro-government and anti-government...

KJY: Yah yah, that will be interesting!

R: And sit down and have a conversation.

PN: We put them in a room, lock the door...(laughs)

Maybe in the conversations themselves the “kampong spirit” is already being nurtured.

R: Should everything then become a conversation? If so, would people expect policy making to take a very long time?

PN: I don't expect the government or every ministry to have a conversation before they implement every policy.

RL: I think conversations are good but not with every issue. We are a democratic society, but collectively as a nation we still need somebody to set the direction. I'm sure the government has a vision and wants to take the nation to the next lap. I think there could be some forms of conversation before some of the main plans are implemented.

PN: Any leader of an organisation, school, family, or a country needs to have a vision that is not only compelling, but is something that everybody can buy into. I think that's perhaps lacking at this point.

R: So do you think it is the onus of the government to carry on all these conversations, or should the conversations be citizen-led?

KJY: The ministries should continue to have focus group discussions if they can. MOE does it quite regu-

larly. But I think the ideal is to have discussions run by citizens. We come together, and once we produce a report we can just submit it to a government agency. So discussions don't have to be government-initiated but both [government- and citizen-led conversations] can be complementary.

PN: There must be willingness for the government to allow that. I think in the past there have been many community-driven initiatives. But sometimes things are made very difficult [by government rules].

If we want to have a conversation about the gay issue, will it be “oh no no, we cannot do that – we must have a permit”? The government must allow, I think, a certain level of messiness.

RK: It's very important to have inter-generational dialogues because this will close the digital divide. There may also be a language divide. Also, what do we make of differing views? That's where I think it takes a person, or the authorities that have the welfare of everybody in mind, to formulate a workable policy that is for the good of society as a whole.

R: There must be trust then, that this person (or the authorities) has the interest of the entire nation?

PN: I think that certain level of trust has dissipated over the years and the government may not have realised it. I think over time, the gap between the citizenry and the government has widened. So this engagement between citizenry and government should continue. The government understands who they are governing and needs to trust that the citizens will be able to tell you “This is what we really feel.” Don't make assumptions about how we feel.

RL: It is also about the government's ability to communicate whether they even talked to people. For example, the truth is they did do some engagement for the White Paper but it is all very quiet and not very well publicised. And there was poor online engagement.

PN: The reason is because the focus has always been on the final product. The OSC, on the other hand, is a process. At the end I am really less concerned with the final product. The process of this engagement, is getting people to learn that “I can talk!”, and people are listening and realising that “he is saying something different although we are Singaporeans.”

RK: Maybe in the conversations themselves the “kampong spirit” is already being nurtured. We cannot be so dependent all the time on the government. We have to look after our neighbours and ourselves. Especially with seniors living isolated in homes. Long ago, I think people had the idea that we were being treated like digits. No more! Now, there is a humanising of Singapore. I think this is the way to go. This is part of a maturing society.

KJY: It is. And it takes time. It won't happen overnight.

HIGHLIGHTS

THE MARK OF
OSC'S SUCCESS

OSC committee member Kenneth Paul Tan reflects on the process of OSC and shares his ideas of what would make the national conversation a success.

Page 14

GIVE EX-OFFENDERS A
SECOND CHANCE

When Nelson Ong left prison, he had difficulty finding a full-time job. Today, he helps ex-offenders integrate back to society at SCORE. He urges the government to take the lead in hiring ex-offenders.

Page 16

JOINING THE DOTS TO
MAKE VOICES HEARD

The OSC reached out to more than 47,000 people. This would not have been possible without the many Singaporeans who volunteered to organise and facilitate the dialogues.

Page 42

WHAT HAPPENED TO
YOUR IDEAS?

They didn't get sucked into a black hole. Turn to this infographic to see how feedback and ideas from the public shaped the national conversation and even contributed to policy reviews.

Page 44

Back to the future

OSC committee member Stanley Chia imagines looking back on today from 2030



By Stanley Chia, 43 (Year 2030)

It is the year 2030. There I am, looking right back at me. I am with my family at an exhibition on Singapore's history. In the midst of the posters and news clippings, I spot my face, back when I was just a 20-something. It is a newspaper article about the first meeting of the OSC committee...

It was 2012. We were asking ourselves what our hopes for Singapore were, come 2030. I was sitting in a room with no fewer than four government ministers and other leaders from diverse fields. At 26, I had just graduated from university and started my own education business. I was the second youngest in the room, and I was thinking to myself, "What is a former poly boy like me doing in this group?"

But that question was soon displaced by other questions.

Weren't we all just too different?

I wasn't the only "unusual suspect" in our OSC committee. Members came from a wide array of demographic and professional backgrounds, including a teenager who always spoke her mind, and a taxi driver who shared refreshing insights using a colourful mix of dialects. I was intrigued to learn that even the ministers would debate with each other on how to move towards a common future.

In fact, we were not too different. Our diversity was the reflection of an increasingly varied Singapore society, and that was an eye-opener for me. Our deep investment in the future of Singapore bound us, as was true for the thousands of Singaporeans who joined in the OSC.

Of course we had our differences, and some of us felt more strongly about certain groups, like the youths, the disadvantaged or the elderly; but our common hope was for a thriving, vibrant Singapore where everyone had a chance to succeed and everyone played a part in society.

What's the point of talking?

Frankly, the OSC was one big, bold experiment. We moved away from conventional "town hall" sessions, where one minister faces hundreds and only a few ever get to speak. Instead, we broke the mould by having lateral dialogues – between citizens and citizens, letting them hear each other out, while ministers moved from group to group, listening to everyone.



I have not forgotten to this day the youths reacting with surprise, asking, "You want to know what we think? You care about what we think?"

This was less intimidating, got everyone involved and brought out more honest feedback. People asked if this was the right thing to do, but I saw the real connections being made, often between individuals who, until then, had not met someone who thought so differently from them.

As an entrepreneur, I wasn't interested in judging the process. Entrepreneurs know that there is no such thing as failure; there is only one learning experience after another, until you get to success.

What could I do?

I soon started to ask myself what more someone like me could do. Together with some youth leaders, we organised OSC dialogues targeted at youths, especially those from less privileged backgrounds.

I have not forgotten to this day the youths reacting with surprise, asking, "You want to know what we think? You care about what we think?" I understood that they felt excluded from national matters because they were not academic stars, but I told them that every Singaporean's view is of value.

After all, I didn't score top grades either, but I have always felt a strong personal mission to be a changemaker. I was determined to be heard on matters to do with Singapore's future, and I trusted that what I brought to the table was absolutely valid.

So is the Singapore of 2030 a result of the OSC? It definitely set the tone – for me and, I believe, for many others too. That we must talk to, and hear, one another, and work towards a common tomorrow. One of the best things I've ever done in my life is to play a part in convincing other young people that the same is true for them.

Stanley Chia is the managing director of Envisage Education Pte Ltd, an educational enterprise committed to youths' holistic development.



"Kampong spirit" in action

OSC dialogue spurs citizen to launch Blockpooling.sg

Soh Chong Kian is the Executive Director at Estatebuzz Pte Ltd, a start-up Internet company and social enterprise that develops online platforms to connect people living nearby. The ShareTransport.sg website was their first initiative, which connects people nearby to buspool, taxipool or carpool for their daily travel. From the avid discussions at an OSC dialogue on 4 December 2012, Mr Soh felt the participants' desire for a stronger "kampong spirit" in the future and became more determined to develop his team's second initiative, the Blockpooling.sg website.

Using the concept of an "asset map", Blockpooling.sg consolidates information on what people can lend or sell to each other in their neighbourhood. Mr Soh feels people are more likely to connect like the old kampong days if there are stronger economic benefits from the pooling of resources and saving. This starts from opening homes virtually to display selected things to neighbours on Blockpooling.sg, even if our physical house gates remain locked. People will then find reasons to meet up more often, just like in the kampong days that we reminisce about.