

KOPI SESSION ON SOCIAL INEQUALITY AND MOBILITY

17 May 2022 | The Red Box

While Government policies help in addressing problems in the area of social inequality and mobility, legislation alone is insufficient in plugging all the gaps. Some issues may even require a marked shift in how society defines success and ascribe values to certain jobs. What kind of society do youths want to see in the future? What more needs to be done by various segments of society to get there?

On 17 May 2022, about 30 youths and a panel comprising youth leaders vested in the issue discussed youth concerns and questions about social mobility and inequality in Singapore society. The session involved the following panellists:

- Mr David Hoe, Former educator; Director of I Am Talented, (a programme that provides skills-based workshops and sharing sessions to inspire youths and develop skills)
- Ms Siti Nurbiah Daud, Philanthropist; Service Operations Analyst
- Ms Adriana Rasip, Social Worker; Creator of the Micro-Jobs initiative, (an initiative that aims to provide jobs for low-income families whose employment has been impacted by Covid-19)



Here are the key insights from the session:

Key points raised by youths

Increasing opportunities for social mixing/awareness

- Youths should engage in conversations on social inequality outside of their social circles – Participants shared that engaging in conversations was crucial to increasing awareness of inequality in society. They said that self-reflection led to increased awareness of instances of inequality and the ability to identify gaps in society.
- An inclusive society should include marginalised individuals, such as migrant workers – Participants said that individuals should hold space for structurally and systemically marginalised individuals in society. They said that being inclusive meant that migrant workers should also be considered part of the community and be presented with opportunities to interact with Singaporeans.

Varying definitions of success

- Society should accept that every individual's version of success is not the same – Participants said there should be a diverse definition of success as everyone is unique, and individuals should have the freedom to realise their aspirations with minimal biases.
- Society should confront and address biases – Participants said that in addition to viewing all races as equal, society should also strive to remove biases associated with professions. They said that society should be less dismissive of alternative pathways, e.g. the arts.

Technological Development

- Technological advancements would level the playing field for all – Participants said that with the development of technology and availability of better resources, individuals would be able to ensure a basic standard of living and have increased access to opportunities, which would level the playing field.

Government Policies

- Hearing the voices of vulnerable communities could enable policymakers to help them better – Participants acknowledged the efforts put into uplifting vulnerable communities (such as through the White Paper on Women’s Development) but said that more should be done to include every group in the society. Participants shared an example of engaging in comprehensive ground sensing, such as surveys for low-income households, to develop relevant policies and ensure that the specific target audiences were aware of such policies.
- Less-privileged individuals would need to upskill and would require more opportunities to reach their aspirations – Participants acknowledged the availability of education policies to assist less academically-inclined individuals to move forward but said that more should be done to equip individuals with the necessary skills and opportunities for success.
- Youths could participate in volunteer programmes and initiatives to increase social mixing – Participants shared that engaging individuals through various volunteer programmes and funding initiatives would encourage social mixing. They also said that this would enable individuals who are interested to do more for the community to better execute their ideas.
- Existing employment policies and practices should be reinforced to ensure equality – Participants said that employment policies and practices like the Fair Consideration Framework (FCF) and those recommended by the Tripartite Alliance for Fair and Progressive Employment Practices (TAFEP) should be reinforced to ensure equal opportunities for employees.

Key points raised by panellists

Technology’s impact on education and careers

- Exposure of the tech industry to students from less privileged backgrounds could allow it to be a viable career path in the future – Ms Siti shared that exposing students from schools with fewer opportunities to different sectors of the tech industry, such as coding and analytics, could give them an opportunity to explore tech as a career.
- Technology could be used to gather data on improving policy – Ms Siti shared that technology is a tool that could be used to gather data on how the lifestyles of different communities could be improved.
- Smartphones and popular online platforms could be used to educate communities – Mr Hoe shared that as people from all walks of life have access to smartphones, most people have access to certain platforms like social media. Social media could be used to educate people from lower-income communities on certain topics, like current affairs.

Creation of public policies and grants to help lower-income community

- Grants could allow access to opportunities for lower-income families to achieve self-sufficiency – Ms Adriana shared that an issue many families face is the inability to commit to full-time employment due to caregiving duties. Grants that allow individuals to leverage their skills to generate income would allow them to start up and achieve success on their terms.
- Policies are helping to create more pathways to success – Mr Hoe shared that in recent times, there were more policies to enable individuals, which created more pathways to explore success and aspirations, such as allowing students to have more than one path to fulfil their aspirations.
- Co-creating policies with lower-income communities could help to better fulfil their needs – Ms Adriana shared that allowing policies to be created with the lower-income communities’ needs and resources available in mind could help to better support them.

Social mixing could create more awareness

- Youth leaders could work with the lower-income community for mutual benefits – Ms Adriana shared that youth leaders could volunteer with the lower-income community, by creating an ecosystem of tuition help. The youth volunteers would gain experience and learn more about the lower-income community due to exposure, while the youths from the lower-income community would receive support and aid in realising their potential and aspirations.
- Sharing personal stories of people from varying backgrounds could help decrease social stratification – Mr Hoe shared that social inequality was not as well understood as it is currently, and the gap should be closed so that Singapore could become a place where youths are able to achieve their different aspirations. There is a need to share stories of people with different backgrounds to showcase their strengths.
- Interaction between different social classes could increase awareness about social inequality – Ms Siti shared the need to educate families about mixing with other social classes. As social inequality is being talked about more now, the traction would lead to more awareness about such issues.
- The gaps between social classes could be bridged through more interactions with others – Ms Adriana shared that by going out of our comfort zones and interacting with people from different social classes that we meet in our everyday lives (eg. taxi drivers), we would understand social inequality better. Putting on the shoes of others could help to build informal relationships to provide informal help, which helps to bridge the gap.

Opportunities to pursue aspirations are necessary

- Access to opportunities would allow for exploration of aspirations – Mr Hoe shared that the current education landscape should include sharings from educators about their passions instead of only focusing on the curriculum so that students could understand passion and excitement about a certain topic. This would give them a reason to study and work towards.
- Meeting basic needs and having access to basic infrastructure could ensure equal advantages – Ms Adriana shared that those from disadvantaged communities lack access to their basic needs, thus the needs of required infrastructure must be identified. This would ensure that they are not materially disadvantaged when it comes to facets like education.
- Increasing exposure to various subjects through subject-based banding could spark interests – Mr Hoe shared that subject-based banding is a good way to provide exposure to certain subjects in school so that students could be exposed to certain subjects they may be interested in pursuing in the future.

Creating a change in society

- Individuals could create change by collaborating with different government agencies – Ms Siti shared that individuals could reach out to the government (including ministries like MCCY and agencies like NYC) to help create change.
- Even small actions could help in the grand scheme of things – Mr Hoe shared that one could try to help within their means. He added that it is not always necessary to start projects as it may end up capitalising on resources, and that volunteering is an option to consider.
- Everyone should respect different definitions of success – Ms Siti shared that everyone should respect that success does not come in one way, and that it has different definitions.