

**Detailed Notes: Youth Policy Forum Closing Address and
Plenary Dialogue “Realising Singapore’s New Social Compact – The Road Ahead”**

Date/Time: 24 August 2024, 2.30pm - 4pm

Venue: Sands Expo and Convention Centre, Cassia Ballroom

The session commenced with a Closing Address by Mr Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and Second Minister for Law followed by a panel dialogue.

YOUTH POLICY FORUM CLOSING ADDRESS

1. Minister Tong expressed his appreciation to the Youth Panels and highlighted their efforts in coming up with their recommendations.
2. Minister Tong said that in partnering with the Government, the Youth Panels exemplified the new social compact, where Singaporeans take collective responsibility to work out solutions together. He said that the Government did not have a monopoly on good ideas, and depended on different stakeholders to provide their feedback, understand the trade-offs, and chart a path forward together.
3. Minister Tong reiterated the Government’s commitment to partner youths and said that their involvement would impact the way policymaking was conducted in Singapore.
4. Minister Tong said that beyond the Youth Panels, attendees could also join other platforms including the Youth Corps Singapore, Youth Action Challenge or MentoringSG. He encouraged attendees to all play a role in building Singapore for a better tomorrow.

Minister Tong’s full speech can be referenced [here](#).

PLENARY DIALOGUE: “REALISING SINGAPORE’S NEW SOCIAL COMPACT – THE ROAD AHEAD”

5. The moderator and host, Ms Ilyna Tan (#GreenHacks Youth Panel member, Outgoing Curator and Chief Impact Officer, Global Shapers Community Singapore Hub) introduced the panellists:
 - (i) Minister Edwin Tong;
 - (ii) Ms Garrendir Shanna, Head of Governance and Strategy and Policy Explainer, MAJU;
 - (iii) Mr Mohammed Aizam Bin Abdul Rahman, #JobHacks Youth Panel member; and
 - (iv) Ms Skanthakumar Thakshayeni, Head of Youth Engagement, SINDA Youth Club (SYC).
6. Ms Tan asked Minister Tong to share the Government’s broader vision in partnering and engaging with the youth in Singapore.

7. Minister Tong said youths held different perspectives, ideas, and aspirations, and the Government wanted to open spaces for youths to contribute to Singapore's future. He said that the process of the Government working together with citizens was not just about the outcome, but also about building mutual understanding of each other's perspectives and trade-offs.

EXPERIENCES OF YOUTHS AND THE GOVERNMENT IN WORKING TOGETHER

8. Ms Tan said that with any form of partnership and working with different stakeholders, there would always be a mix of successes and stumbles and asked panellists to share their experience.
9. Mr Mohd Aizam said that as part of the #JobHacks Youth Panel, he worked with Workforce Singapore (WSG), Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY) and National Youth Council (NYC) to explore different ideas and share ground sentiments with them.
10. Ms Garrendir shared that MAJU was an initiative focused on policy research and co-creation, where members are involved in writing and submitting policy papers to different Government agencies. She said that when MAJU was founded, they had contacted NYC without expecting a reply. But they were surprised to hear back, and NYC had been a strong supporter of MAJU since.
11. Ms Garrendir said that policymaking in Singapore was decentralised across different Government agencies and that their members had the opportunity to interact with civil servants across multiple domains. Through the interactions, members realised that many ideas they had come up with had already been considered, but they also came to understand the implementation constraints and the importance of timing.
12. Ms Garrendir said one limitation members faced was access to Government data but acknowledged the privacy concerns. She said that MAJU overcame this by collaborating closely with the Government. She acknowledged that civil servants were very busy and appreciated that they were still willing to partner youths.
13. Ms Skanthakumar said that SINDA Youth Club (SYC), which offers leadership programmes and initiatives to mould the next generation of youth leaders in the Indian community, valued cross-sector collaborations as this brought together different resources and reduced duplication of efforts. She shared that SYC's "Youth Giving 24" initiative and had partnered National Parks Board (NParks) on a tree planting exercise. Despite initial apprehensions of working with a big Government organisation, both SYC and NParks managed to support each other's objectives.

WORKING TOGETHER TO ACHIEVE COLLECTIVE ASPIRATIONS

14. Minister Tong said that MCCY had set up the Singapore Partnership Office because the Government recognised that Government-citizen partnership needed to be two-way. He cited the

example of #GreenHacks Youth Panel's recommendation of "Involvement" which focused on improving public education and awareness of recycling, to help the community understand the situation and downstream impacts.

Participants asked (via Slido) how the Government addressed the issue of "self-selection" where participation across different initiatives might become dominated by the same pool of vocal citizens.

15. Minister Tong said it was natural for people who were interested in certain causes to advocate for them and offered two suggestions: (i) for participants to amplify their causes and raise mindshare for others to join, and (ii) on a systemic level, for more formal partnerships to open spaces for the community to decide for themselves where and how they wanted to participate.
16. Ms Skanthakumar agreed that deliberate creation of partnerships and opportunities at an organisational level would encourage the exploration of new causes. She said that the second iteration of tree planting activity between SYC and NParks also involved the MINDS Me Too! Club, a befriender initiative for persons with intellectual disabilities, and this expanded partnership resulted in new interests within SYC youths.
17. Mr Mohd Aizam said his biggest takeaway from being on the #JobHacks Youth Panel was being able to intentionally hear from citizens, organisations, and Government agencies. He said that while the Youth Panels were very diverse, it was a safe space for underrepresented voices to be heard to discover common threads where different stakeholders could work together.

Participants asked (via Slido) how the Government managed divides, such as local/foreigner or intergenerational, in society.

18. Minister Tong said that Singapore being a small country had to manage divides carefully lest they be weaponised. He said that the Government was intentional in creating space and being inclusive through, for example, HDBs and common sporting locations to facilitate organic interaction between people.

Participants asked (via Slido) if the Government had appetite to address more contentious and sensitive topics.

19. Minister Tong said that while it is important not to shy away from such issues, how these conversations are handled is important and not all dialogues can be organised in a completely free form or open setting. He said that sensitive conversations must be raised in a respectful manner and could take place behind closed doors first, so that different interest groups were not caught unaware. Involving a diversity of views to understand differing viewpoints and trade-offs is also important.

An on-site participant said that he had experienced bullying before and asked what support could be provided to outliers to ensure that they also are given space within the social compact.

20. Minister Tong acknowledged the complexity of outliers and said that while policies generally catered to the majority, it did not mean that those who take different paths or had different personal circumstances were ignored. He said that there were often exceptions to policies, and that policies could also change over time as society evolves.

An on-site participant said he recently attended a Global Health Partnership Dialogue and observed that there were not many youths in the field of public health. He asked how more youths might be encouraged to enter this space.

21. Minister Tong said there are no systemic barriers to prevent youths from articulating their voices, and Singapore had representation at the highest levels of public health through the United Nations and World Health Organisation. He said that youths could also work with professional medical associations to lend their views.
22. Ms Skanthakumar said that she worked in public health and had received a grant from the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) to conduct a planetary health workshop as there were few people were looking at the intersection of clinical health and climate change. She said that as new topics of interest emerge, youths could push the agenda forward by advocating for these causes and leveraging funding, mentorship, and resource networks.

An on-site participant asked how youths could move from being idea generators to idea synthesisers.

23. Minister Tong said that when ideating policies, the Government ensures that it addresses citizens needs by going to the ground to engage the target groups. He cited the #LifeHacks Youth Panel's recommendation for a Starter Savings Plan as an example and said that it was important to speak to the lower income groups to understand if the idea was feasible. He encouraged youths to consider how their ideas could be implemented to achieve their intended effect.

An on-site participant asked how discriminatory mindsets against youth in the workplace might be addressed.

24. Minister Tong said that while some level of qualification or experience could be required depending on the nature of the job, youths bring different considerations and qualities, and that having less experience was not a disadvantage. He said that he had been able to tap on the perspectives of youths at home, workplace, and grassroots, and if employers were open minded enough, the overall workplace could benefit from different viewpoints.

An on-site participant asked how policies satisfied citizens who hold different opinions.

25. Minister Tong said policymaking was intended to improve and uplift people's lives while balancing implementation constraints such as infrastructure or resources. He said that the Government hopes that most citizens would be satisfied and if that was not the case, the Government would make the necessary adjustments, taking the resource requirements into consideration.

An on-site participant said that many youths perceived a power difference between them and the Government and thus did not think that their voices were being heard. She asked what the Government could do to address this.

26. Ms Garrendir encouraged youths to be more vocal about issues they care about. She said that organisations championing climate, labour, and LGBT causes were started from the ground up by citizens who wanted to move the needle. She said that joining a community of other like-minded youths would reduce their sense of isolation and the feeling of a power differential.
27. Mr Mohd Aizam said there were spaces for youths to take the first step to lend their voices, such as in school, through youth conversations organised by NYC or REACH listening points.
28. Minister Tong invited youths to understand how the Government worked with citizens, such as by joining agencies for short stints. He also affirmed the Government's commitment to be more accessible to youths.

PANELLISTS' TAKEAWAYS

29. Ms Garrendir said youths should not discount the value of their own voices despite having less experience. She encouraged them to be proactive and connect with more youths about the issues they were passionate about.
30. Mr Mohd Aizam said it was important to be intentional to listen to different perspectives to enrich oneself, and to support others.
31. Ms Skanthakumar encouraged youths to leverage volunteering opportunities to understand how policies and initiatives were impacting the ground, and to provide feedback to the Government on causes they were interested in.
32. Minister Tong closed the session by expressing his optimism for youths, and the possibilities ahead in whatever path they chose as part of the refreshed Singapore Dream.
33. Ms Tan thanked the participants for their time.

Notes recorded by the National Youth Council Youth Leadership and Engagement Team.