

NATIONAL YOUTH DIALOGUE 6: TOGETHER, WE MAKE SINGAPORE

24 MAY 2023 | National Gallery Singapore Supreme Court Terrace

The National Youth Council (NYC) and the Global Shapers Community (Singapore Hub) co-organised the sixth in the series of seven National Youth Dialogues, “Together, We Make Singapore”, on 24 May 2023, involving 146 participants (on-site and Zoom) and the following panellists:



- Min Edwin Tong, Minister for Culture, Community and Youth (MCCY), and Second Minister for Law
- Dr Carol Soon, Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies
- Ms Woo Qiyun, Environmental Advocate, The Weird and Wild
- (Moderator) Mr Tan Kuan Hian, Vice-Curator, Global Shapers Community (Singapore Hub) and Editor, The Birthday Book

Here are the key insights of the conversation covered by the panellists:

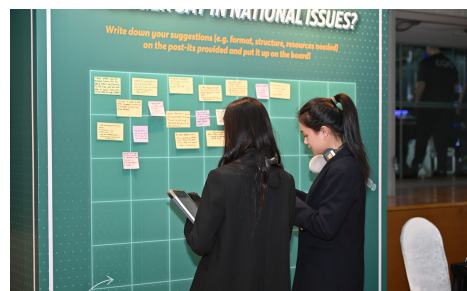
1) Issues that youths are concerned about

Key insights from the panel dialogue:

- Dr Soon said that youths were interested in a wide range of issues including cost of living and mental health. She said that the issues brought up by participants supported the findings from a study conducted by the [Institute of Policy Studies](#) and youths’ diverse concerns were motivated by their differing aspirations, values and what they deemed as important in society.
- Ms Woo said that while she advocated for issues such as the environment, equality and jobs, she was also concerned about areas that were not usually top of mind. She said the issues that youths were interested in were often interrelated, and youths would invest more time and effort into issues they were personally concerned about.
- Minister Tong said that the Government would conduct dialogues with youths to obtain ground sensing on the issues they were interested in, to determine the topics of the first few youth panels.



What issues are youths concerned about?



How can youths have a bigger say in national issues?

2) Involving youths in policy-making

Sub-topic: How the Government plans to involve youth in policy co-creation through the youth panels

Key insights from the panel dialogue:

- Minister Tong said that the set up of the youth panels had received support across the Government and intended to increase youths' understanding of existing challenges, provide youths with the freedom to come up with a policy statement and understand the impact of policies on both the target and unintended audience.
- Minister Tong encouraged participants to share on the issues that they were concerned about. He said that the Government would provide information and data points, such as the possible impact of a certain policy, to help youths share their feedback.
- Minister Tong said that the Government and youths, through exchanging information and ideas, might eventually decide to keep certain policies as is. He said that this was still a good process to facilitate discourse, and being able to exchange ideas on a level playing field through a constructive platform would be considered a success.

Sub-topic: How youths can contribute to the youth panels

Key insights from the breakout discussions:

- Minister Tong said that the Government did not have all the solutions to address Singapore's challenges and youths' inputs, through their lived experiences, helped to shape policies and initiatives. He cited the SG Mental Well-Being Network as an example where youths suggested additional help-seeking avenues (e.g. by sending messages should there be difficulty in seeking help face to face). He said that the implementation of such alternative options resulted in increased help-seeking and he appreciated the insights from youths.
- Dr Soon said that the process of engaging youths to suggest solutions would provide them with a deeper understanding of the policy-making process, and a greater sense of confidence in their ability to address issues affecting Singapore. She said that providing youths with a platform to decide what issues they wished to engage in was a good way to start involving youths in policy-making.
- Ms Woo said that policies reflected values, and may not necessarily reflect the values shared by youths. She said that this provided an opportunity for youths to advocate for an issue that they wished to change people's minds on, which could eventually lead to a policy change.

Key insights from the breakout discussions:

- Participants said that it was important to have youths as role models to look up to as a form of "affirmative action". They said that recognising the contributions of youths would assure fellow youths that they could also achieve similar accomplishments, and suggested having youth representation in Parliament.
- Participants said that with more support (e.g. more learning opportunities and exposure to policies), youths would be able to provide better inputs to policy-making. They said that youths were committed to taking ownership of national issues as part of their responsibility as future leaders, and encouraged each other to effect positive change.

Sub-topic: How to encourage youths to take part in civic engagement or action

Key insights from the panel dialogue:

- Ms Woo said that she leveraged social media to create awareness and educate youths on environmental issues. She said that it was the responsibility of different stakeholders such as the Government and civil society to provide accessibility to information (e.g. workshops on how to write letters) which would result in greater citizen participation.
- Dr Soon said that there were no one-size-fits-all methods to engage youths as the type of modality depended on the engagement objectives and target audience. She said that regardless of modality, it was important for the Government to close the loop with citizens to inform them of the suggestions being considered, and if these recommendations were deemed unfeasible. She said that closing the loop would help to maintain citizens' interest in future engagements and trust in the Government.
- Minister Tong encouraged participants to explore different avenues to share their views, such as by writing to their Member of Parliament. He said that citizens should feel empowered to speak up while the Government must be open to criticism.

Key insights from the breakout discussions:

- Participants suggested having more smaller-group sharing sessions to exchange views with policymakers and other relevant stakeholders. They said that informal settings would create a more comfortable environment for youths to provide honest feedback.

3) How to ensure diversity and inclusivity within the youth panels

Key insights from the panel dialogue:

- Dr Soon said that it was important to include diverse voices to co-create solutions and suggested two ways: (i) levelling the playing field so that everyone in the room had an equal chance to contribute to the process, and (ii) creating safe spaces to ensure that participants did not feel "cancelled" by sharing their insights. She said that certain segments, such as lower income families, were typically underrepresented because of their situation in life rather than due to not caring. She encouraged participants to design additional support to help underrepresented groups step forward.
- Minister Tong said that humans were tribal by nature, and ensuring diversity was a constant work in progress. He said that the Government could not dictate citizens to befriend each other, but could make spaces for diversity to develop organically, such as by having different schools conduct their co-curricular activities together for students to interact and socialise.

Key insights from the breakout discussions:

- Participants said that they observed that communication channels were skewed towards English-speakers, and Singaporeans who did not speak English or of lower education status might face decreased accessibility of channels to raise their concerns. They called for the language used in dialogues by speakers to be simplified and less jargonistic (use fewer technical terms) so that the conversations were more inclusive for all participants.
- Participants said that dialogues could be held in venues that took into consideration Singaporeans who were time-poor or financially less well-off. They suggested reaching out to where youths naturally congregated such as neighbourhood multi-purpose courts, or a "catch-all" approach to gather a randomised group of youths to examine an issue.