

Detailed Notes

National Youth Dialogue Session 5 on Budget 2023

Date/Time: Wednesday, 18 January 2023, 6.00 to 9.00 pm.

Organisers: National Youth Council (NYC), Global Shapers Community (Singapore Hub).

Venue: Asian Civilisations Museum, River Room

Attendance: 117 youth participants

The dialogue started with a breakout session comprising thirteen groups to discuss the three Budget 2023 themes: (i) Navigating a Volatile and Complex World, (ii) Strengthening our Social Compact, and (iii) Building a Resilient Nation. Participants used traditional voting to share which issues were most important to them. Each group then used quadratic voting, a method of collective decision-making, to allocate resources to these issues and discussed how to address the trade-offs that arose. The groups then reconvened for a large group share back and panel dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

1. The moderator and host, Mr Tan Kuan Hian, Vice Curator of Global Shapers Community (Singapore Hub), welcomed participants to the fifth session of the National Youth Dialogue. He introduced the panellists:
 - i. Mr Chee Hong Tat, Senior Minister of State (SMS), Ministry of Finance and Transport; and
 - ii. Mr Alvin Tan, Minister of State (MOS), Ministry of Culture, Community and Youth & Trade and Industry.

LARGE GROUP SHARE BACK AND PANEL DISCUSSION

2. Mr Tan invited facilitators and youth to share insights from their breakout groups across the three Budget themes.

THEME: NAVIGATING A VOLATILE AND COMPLEX WORLD

Issue: Increasing Cost of Living

Discussion points from the breakout session:

3. Participants said the increasing cost of living was an urgent issue, resulting in greater stress that negatively impacted one's physical and mental well-being.
4. Participants acknowledged the Government's efforts to provide support packages to help Singaporean households with their expenses but noted that these were short-term solutions. Participants suggested that the Government could invest in long-term solutions such as education, upskilling workers and transforming businesses to create new jobs to drive the economy.

Question and answer:

"What sort of investments does Singapore make to support the vulnerable, especially in the backdrop of retrenchment and increasing cost of living?"

5. MOS Tan said that the nation's investments consisted of fixed assets and the generation of jobs for Singaporeans. He said that with the tourism sector recovering, the Government had launched different initiatives, such as with the Singapore Hotel and Tourism Education Centre, where hotels leveraged technology to increase efficiency in human and resource management.
6. MOS Tan said that manufacturing made up approximately a quarter of Singapore's Gross Domestic Product, and the advanced manufacturing sector (including robots, semiconductors, and precision engineering) was an area that the Government was moving into to create new jobs for Singaporeans. He said

that at the same time, the Government also focused on growing and reforming traditional industries to attract investments into Singapore.

7. SMS Chee said that Singapore was susceptible to external global pressures as the nation depended on the import of essential supplies. He said that appreciating the Singapore dollar could only help to a certain extent, as it would affect the price of exports.
8. SMS Chee said that the Government focused on helping lower-income families cushion the impact of rising daily expenses through redistribution of revenue collected from taxation and investment, which funded household support packages, utilities rebates, Cost-of-Living Special Payments, and CDC vouchers.

Issue: Jobs security and transforming businesses to be more productive

Discussion points from the breakout session:

9. Participants said that it was essential for individuals to have a stable job and income to tide over economic difficulties amidst a slowing economy and increasing inflation. They called for more measures to transform businesses to become more innovative, productive, and sustainable.

Question and answer:

"Will there be job support schemes to support vulnerable sectors, given the increasing retrenchment rates?"

10. MOS Tan said that the Government would ensure that Singapore remained attractive for foreign companies to invest in, which in turn helped create job opportunities for locals. He said that the Government was constantly looking to bring in new products and services, such as SailGP (an international sailing competition), to keep the economy vibrant.
11. MOS Tan said that SkillsFuture helped workers re-skill and upskill to stay relevant and adaptable. He said that the Government was committed to equipping Singaporeans with the skills required for new jobs in upcoming sectors

and providing companies with training incentives to encourage workers to refresh their skills.

12. SMS Chee agreed and said that a culture of lifelong learning amongst citizens would effectively prepare workers to be employed in jobs created in various sectors and, in turn, encourage businesses and investments.

"On the topic of job security, would the Government consider implementing unemployment insurance with time limitations for Singaporean workers since more people are getting retrenched?"

13. SMS Chee said that there were limitations to unemployment insurance as it could lead to over-reliance and less motivation to look for jobs if the payouts were attractive, which in turn might result in higher unemployment rates. He said that instead, the Government introduced various funding schemes which were more sustainable in the long term to provide transitory help to the unemployed.

THEME: STRENGTHENING OUR SOCIAL COMPACT

Issue: Supporting Vulnerable Groups and Ensuring Social Mobility

Discussion points from the breakout session:

14. Participants shared that in view of the increasing cost of living, they were most concerned with ensuring that vulnerable groups were not left behind.

Question and answer:

"Since funds for financial aid and subsidies are finite and trade-offs need to be made, how will the Government balance the needs of different groups to achieve a sense of equality for everyone in society?"

15. SMS Chee said that while proxy indicators such as income level and type of property were in place to assess the eligibility of households for support schemes, it was still challenging for the Government to ensure a fully accurate

assessment of the amount of aid to provide to each individual. He said that it was important that schemes were designed to be inclusive with extensive criteria to prevent the “cliff effect”, where individuals fail to receive assistance if they cannot meet just one criterion.

16. SMS Chee said that the Government aimed to build a resilient social safety net for all Singaporeans through the “many helping hands” approach, which would promote a greater sense of collective responsibility. He encouraged citizens to also leverage community groups, social service agencies and grassroots to support the vulnerable from ground-up.

"What are the plans to support individuals with special needs for the next 5 to 10 years, in terms of raising awareness about special needs, talent development and educating them?"

17. SMS Chee said that the Government recognised the need for better integration and would work towards having individuals with mild to moderate special needs assimilate into mainstream schools. He said that the Government would also invest more resources to train and send teachers into mainstream and special needs schools to support students who require additional assistance.
18. SMS Chee said that parents of children with special needs were also concerned about future job security and whether the workplace would be inclusive. He acknowledged that this was a challenging issue and required support beyond the Government.
19. SMS Chee said that the Government supported businesses to expand their local hiring through the Job Growth Incentive by providing employers with incentives to hire older workers, ex-offenders, or persons with disabilities. He said that the Government was working through the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) to redesign jobs to meet the needs of individuals with special needs, which would benefit the individual with special needs and other employees.

THEME: BUILDING A RESILIENT NATION

Issue: Ensuring Resource Security (e.g., food and energy)

Discussion points from the breakout session:

20. Participants said that it was important to invest in climate change mitigation measures despite only being able to see their positive effects in the long run.
21. Participants said it was important for the Government to balance spending on current pressing issues, such as the rising cost of living, against long-term issues, such as climate change, that would affect future generations.

Question and answer:

"What principles guide us when deciding whether we should spend or save our resources now?"

22. MOS Tan said that with Singapore being the region's financing hub, the Monetary Authority of Singapore was responsible for regulating the value of the dollar while the Ministry of Finance allocated resources from taxes received through investments. He said that "Grow, Steward, Allocate" were three principles that guided Singapore's decision-making.
23. SMS Chee said that with Singapore's ageing population expected to double, essential spending to support the healthcare needs of the elderly could not be avoided, and national healthcare insurance schemes such as MediShield Life and MediFund would also form safety nets.
24. SMS Chee said that with limited resources and competing needs, sacrifices had to be made in the short term to attain greater long-term benefits. He said that youths had a crucial part to play in building Singapore's future and encouraged participants to continue to work with the Government to create a better future together.

"Does the Government feel that unequal opportunities for working mothers exist, resulting in fewer women getting married and having children, hence a falling birth rate?"

25. MOS Tan said that falling birth rates were a general trend in more advanced economies. He shared some recommendations from the White Paper on Singapore Women's Development that was presented in Parliament, including equal opportunities in the workplace, guidelines on flexible work arrangements, career mentorship, networking opportunities and encouraging greater utilisation of parental leave. He also encouraged participants to make the extra effort to speak up on the issue of hiring women and individuals with special needs.
26. SMS Chee said that the crux was about changing mindsets as employers may hold differing perspectives. He said some employers focused on what an employee could contribute and disregarded race and gender differences, while others were more pro-family. He said there were laws that prevented workplace discrimination and existing labour unions to represent the workers and provide them with a voice.

"What is the Government doing to solve or mitigate the brain drain problem in Singapore?"

27. SMS Chee said that it was a priority for the Government to ensure that Singapore remained attractive to foreign companies and investments for more jobs to be created and local talent to be preserved. He said that it was important that all Singaporeans had a sense of belonging and to build unity and cohesion by developing a stronger social compact, which would tide Singapore through challenging times.

"How can we as individuals help do our part to make a better future for Singapore?"

28. MOS Tan said that the Government did not have all the solutions, and youths could help contribute and generate solutions. He cited initiatives such as the SG

Mental Well-Being Network, Mentoring SG, Singapore Green Plan, and Singapore Women's Development as suggestions from Singaporeans that were supported and co-created by the Government.

29. MOS Tan encouraged youth participants to submit their ideas through NYC to attain funding and the necessary support to implement them.

CLOSING

30. Mr Tan thanked the panellists for their time.
31. Mr Tan shared that participants could partner with the Government through the Young ChangeMakers grant and encouraged them to participate in NYC's Participatory Budgeting Exercise for Youth Action Challenge (YAC) Season 4 and future runs of the YAC.

Notes recorded by the National Youth Council Youth Engagement and Leadership Teams