Be a thought leader and catalyst for positive social change in Singapore and beyond.

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Catalyse innovative responses to social needs through applied research and capacity building in collaboration with the public, private and social sectors.

SCOPE
The Lien Centre for Social Innovation, a partnership between the Lien Foundation and Singapore Management University, was established in 2006 to advance the thinking and capability of the social sector. The Lien Centre contributes to a more equitable, inclusive and vibrant society by addressing social needs through innovative approaches. We drive socially innovative solutions by strengthening social sector organisations so that they become influential and effective partners with business and government. We also work at the intersection of the public, private and social sectors to catalyse social innovation.

OUR VISION
Be a thought leader and catalyst for positive social change in Singapore and beyond.
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EDITORIAL

At the National Day Rally on 18 August 2013, the Prime Minister of Singapore radically redesigned the compact between the people and the government. In a speech that was widely lauded as breathtaking and game-changing, PM Lee Hsien Loong articulated sweeping changes to policies on many aspects of life in Singapore, notably in the areas of education, health care and housing. Everything within the government’s capability will be done to mitigate the effects of the widening income gap, level up and ensure the social mobility of all groups. In a country famous for hard-headed economic and social policies over its 48 years of nationhood, with its emphasis on meritocracy, self and community help rather than dependence on the state, the left-leaning and redistributive flavour of the government’s new policies surprised many, but clearly warmed the hearts of those whose passion is for social equity.

PM Lee said: “We must now make a strategic shift in our approach to nation-building. … Today, the situation has changed. If we rely too heavily on the individual, their efforts alone will not be enough, especially among the vulnerable like the low-income families, like the elderly. And there are some things which individuals cannot do on their own and there are other things which we can do much better together. So we must shift the balance. The community and the Government will have to do more to support individuals. The community can and must take more initiative, organising and mobilising ourselves, solving problems, getting things done.”

Traditionally, despite keeping state welfare provisions low, targeted and stringently applied, the government has not really encouraged the non-government sector to assume as large a role as it could. Where the government has worked through non-governmental organisations, these have been largely relegated to the role of “sub-contractor” in the harnessing of civic resources and delivering services. Indeed, the government has steadfastly refused to acknowledge the validity of “civic society,” preferring the construction of “civic society” which is much more docile. But in recent years, the government has admitted that it does not have all the answers and the people sector must help more. With the government’s new approach, we hope that the substrate on which we can foster collaborations and create solutions for social needs will be immensely fertilised. LCS1 sees greater optimism in a new, more equitable, inclusive and vibrant society, in which addressing the needs of vulnerable communities is regarded as the responsibility of all. We believe engaged citizens, a strong civil society, a sensitised government and socially responsible corporations can together drive positive social change.

LCSI intends to ride this new wave in our work to encourage all parties to proactively and holistically identify, respond to and address needs by leveraging one another’s strengths. We believe in the power of a sincere, apolitical collaborative spirit to make social innovation not something arcane and esoteric, but something natural and part of the fabric of society.

The Lien Centre for Social Innovation (LCSI) is heartened by PM Lee’s breadth of vision. The government, in pursuing hard-headed economic policies, previously believed (as did President John F. Kennedy, to whom this quote is most commonly attributed) that “a rising tide lifts all boats.” However, a rising tide cannot lift the boats that have already sunk! The effort required to raise a sunken boat is clearly much greater than that to keep a leaky, but still viable boat above the water line. The government has a new emphasis on helping the categories of people who are pretty much scuttled in the old order, to lend a hand to prevent submergence. Social innovators and social service providers will in the new order have a less steep and arduous path towards successfully helping their constituents.

Amongst our busy slate of programmes and projects, one key initiative in the coming years is the “Social Collaboratory” which is a process designed as a powerful facilitative pathway that will harness the insight, imagination and initiative of social sector collaborators with the active participation of government and business. By together asking the right questions in addressing social needs and conducting research that can inform potential solutions, we can craft prototypes that can be tested and determine the best solutions to be rolled out across society. The Collaboratory thus fits well into PM Lee’s vision of harnessing community initiatives to solve problems and getting things done.

This edition of Social Space has much in it to help LCS1 and its partners everywhere to better understand the needs of society as well as to achieve collective impact through knowledge of methodologies at the cutting edge of social innovation. The contributions are incisive and insightful, with perspectives spanning veteran workers at the coalface to academics and practitioners in the myriad fields of social innovation.

Dr Tan Chi Chiu is a gastroenterologist and Managing Director of Gastroenterology & Medicine International. Besides his chairmanship of the Lien Centre for Social Innovation, he is also vice-chairman of SATA CommHealth, and board member of the National Youth Achievement Awards. He is an elected council member and chairman of the Medical Ethics Committee of the Singapore Medical Council. He has won numerous Singaporean and international military and civilian awards for his global humanitarian, community, and youth development work.

“We BELIEVE IN THE POWER OF A SINCERE, APOLITICAL COLLABORATIVE SPIRIT TO MAKE SOCIAL INNOVATION … SOMETHING NATURAL AND PART OF THE FABRIC OF THE SOCIETY.”
As the Tsao Foundation celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2013, Social Space catches up with the indomitable Dr Mary Ann Tsao who explains what it means to be a catalyst for change and how the Foundation will continue in transforming the experience of longevity in the community.

Dr Mary Ann Tsao is the Chairman and Founding Director of the Tsao Foundation, a Singapore-based but regionally oriented non-profit operational foundation dedicated to aged care and ageing issues. Previously, she was also its CEO and President. Tsao Foundation aims to address issues of the ageing population, promote successful ageing and enhance the well-being of older people at policy and practice levels by catalysing constructive change. For her work on ageing, she received the Public Service Medal in 2000 and Public Service Star in 2004 from the government of Singapore. She has also worked with numerous multilateral agencies, such as the World Health Organization Geneva office’s Ageing and Life Course unit, and has been a resource person and technical adviser to other United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for the Asia Pacific.

“By focusing on the ‘person-centric’ care philosophy and demonstrating its practice, we hope to inculcate the importance of respect for the elderly as well as dedication to the person’s need for self-determination … which significantly impacts their quality of life.”

Reflecting on the last 20 years of the Tsao Foundation, what are the achievements that you would highlight as your most impactful?

It’s hard to know how much credit you can claim for any of this work. But I think one key thing is this idea of ageing in place. Dr Amy Khor, the Minister of State in the Ministry of Health, actually acknowledged that she heard that from us way back in 1993 or 1994, which was really heartening. So, it’s the notion of ageing in the community that we’ve been trying to get across. I’ve already demonstrated some of the key services like care management, home care or comprehensive and integrated day centre care; from the beginning, we had the blueprint of what we thought were the key services required in the community to support that.

Likewise with women and ageing, the Foundation tried to push for the notion that men and women don’t experience ageing the same way, and you’ll have to look at policy and practice in different ways. It took quite a bit of effort in research and advocacy for us to squarely get that onto the policy agenda. And some of the past practice has changed because of that. One example is something seemingly small, like segregating data by gender. You couldn’t study and plan appropriately unless you have gender-segregated data, like when looking at CPF savings. So because they started to do that, we now have much better data. Policy-makers are now much more aware that women are in a different situation, so they’ve started to change the CPF policy concerning topping up, and pushing for more women to have health insurance and various things, and opening up more possibilities for women to have small businesses for income generation. I’d like to think we’d played a role.

When I was on the Inter-Ministerial Committee on Ageing, I kept saying there’s this feminisation of ageing they needed to look at from gender lens, but it was repeatedly ignored. Then, in collaboration with AWARE, we commissioned a study on women and ageing, and presented the results to the relevant Ministries and agencies, and on the subsequent Inter-Ministerial Committee on the Ageing Population, women and ageing appeared on the agenda and they referenced that paper. So I know we definitely contributed towards getting this in.

I think the third area is that we’re the only dedicated training provider for community aged care. We train both professionals in the area of community aged care as well as individuals for self care in successful ageing as well as caregiving. We are the first Workforce Development Agency Continuing Education and Training centre for the elderly services sector, which provides training that ranges from frontline workers to centre managers. We also continue to roll out our “signature courses” on professional training in community geriatrics for nurses, social workers and counsellors, which reflect competencies that are very different from hospital and other institutional practices and specific to the community. Recently, we signed a Memorandum Of Understanding with NTUC Eldercare to support them in fleshing out new service models as well as to train the staff. We’re looking at how we can help map out the competencies for each of the staff types for these new services.

We would like to think that we can influence standards of practice by providing training not only in the technical aspects of care, but also in the philosophy and attitudes towards older people that underpin our approach to care. Even within the aged-care sector, there is a tendency to treat older people as passive recipients with no say over their day-to-day life, and no need for personal development because they are “old”. By focusing on the “person-centric” care philosophy and demonstrating its practice, we hope to inculcate the importance of respect for the elderly as well as dedication to the person’s need for self-determination— including their preferences, the decisions they make and the reasons behind their decisions—which significantly impacts their quality of life.

I hope those who train with us will develop this elder-centric mindset because I think health and social providers can—with all good intentions—really be hell to the older people. If providers and caregivers don’t have that person-centred mindset, the predominant attitude tends to be “I know what’s good for you so you have to do what I think you should do!” If the elders push back, then...
they are “uncooperative”, “difficult”, “non-compliant”, “stubborn” and “child-like”. A professional who thinks that takes away that dignity of self-control from the older person entirely, which can be very damaging.

On the policy side, we established the International Longevity Centre–Singapore as well as the Tsao–NUS Ageing Research Initiative three years ago, specifically to do better in policy advocacy. The idea is about connecting the dots and policy support through science and evidence. Typically, academia, policy-makers and the community function in silos. Through our services and involvement with the community, we can identify issues and see emerging trends early, and by organising engagement platforms that bring together all the stakeholders, a needs-driven and policy-relevant research agenda can be established and research results can be circled back to policy and practice, addressing what they should and need to know. After that, we will continue to work with them to see through as much as possible the recommendations to be implemented. Effective policy and practice advocacy take years, so we don't know how far we can go with this strategy yet, except for the women and ageing initiative started some years ago that seems to be effective. We will see how well we can build that platform.

In addition to women and ageing, we are currently concentrating on the caregiving issue. Caregiving is central to the debate on ageing because if families and communities for whatever reason no longer provide the informal care that has been traditionally in place, that will have huge implications for the state in terms of real cost of care, as well as intangible costs to society with the rupture of the inter-generational social contract.

Already, we are placing older people in nursing homes with increasing ease to the point where it is the solution of choice—not so much for the older person, but the family. Academia, policy-makers and the community need to clearly understand what constitutes good care for the elders, what it takes for families and communities to continue to give care, as well as the kind of support they need.

Recently, a caregiving study under the Tsao–NUS Research Ageing Initiative showed that one out of four caregivers is a single woman, and that many of them quit their jobs to take care of their patients. That makes sense from a policy-maker’s ideological perspective, but they’re not always aware of what the unintended adverse impact will be. By bringing together a broad range of stakeholder perspectives, we hope to influence things in the right direction.

With the Foundation’s experience in a variety of areas—helping to catalyse change and change thinking, what are some of the lessons in those 20 years? What do you know now about pushing for social change that you wish you knew back then?

One has to be tactical. For me, not being from Singapore has always been a handicap. It took me quite a while to figure out how people really think, what people want, and what will motivate them. This is particularly so with policy-makers and the social change makers. They have their own ideology. It took me some time to figure out what that was, and how one can work around those ideologies in order to communicate in a way that they can actually hear you, and not in a way that puts people on the defence.

Next, talk to people. I talk to a lot of people who were very generous in sharing their knowledge of what works and what may not work, who were the go-to persons for various matters. A lot of things we do have never been done before and generally speaking, people tend not to be terribly encouraging.

On the other hand, there are always a handful of people who’ll say, “We believe in you and will support you.” That gives me enough confidence to go ahead in situations when I really don’t know whether things are going to work or not. I do my due diligence and all that, but it’s always good to talk to people. They’ll always give me some insight that would be useful for planning and delivery.

Another thing is always to reach out and be connected to other interested parties—people who can help in various ways. I didn’t go to school here, so I don’t have any natural network to fall back on, but my colleagues do. Generally, if you can find a few good people, one introduces to three and three to nine, one can build a network reasonably quickly over time. So, I think that’s another point. One should really just tap into their generosity and people will share information with you. That’s one very important lesson.

The other thing is just never give up! We try to practise joyful perseverance, enthusiastic perseverance. Change-making can be very disheartening sometimes, because there can be a lot of obstructions in introducing new ideas or programmes, and there can be many challenges with people not understanding what you’re trying to do. Even my own staff struggle to understand what we’re doing sometimes, especially in the early days.

Another struggle is that we are frequently not acknowledged for our effort and sometimes that’s hard, especially for our staff. Our dedication, therefore, must be focused on the commitment to serve, and not acknowledgment or getting credit for our work. We must always remember that our reward is in the purpose of service, and we should not spend energy on worrying about what people say or not say about us.

So, we have to persevere through clarity of purpose, always keeping our eyes focused on the light at the end of the tunnel, so to speak. That’s my job, I’m the cheerleader! I always remember that our reward is in the purpose of service, and we should not spend energy on worrying about what people say or not say about us.

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In each group. With a trained facilitator, these OPAs aim or “old people’s associations” with about 20 or 30 people to mobilise the right people for one-on-one interviews, here speak many dialects, and because of that, we’re able to have a hard time accessing the subjects, which of course researchers find our partnership valuable because they much everything we do.

But we’re not the only ones who benefit from this collaboration. The SACs who help us organise these OPA groupings love it as well because they sometimes have a hard time getting older people to be involved or have sustained interest in their activities. With this programme, because it involves purpose, self-efficacy, empowerment with and growth, the older people are happy to come down. So for 28 weeks, which is the duration of the programme, they come down to the SACs to meet, and sometimes, they start using the exercise equipment in the SACs consistently because they’re being taught to do that. Some of them stop smoking and some start getting very vibrant because they are more socially engaged. Suddenly, these folks are starting to see their friends down. Now, the SACs are asking, when the SCOPE pilot is finished, if they can carry on, and if we can teach them how to run the programme and keep it going. So now, we can move on to the next phase, which is to teach our colleagues at the SACs the methodology of building and sustaining self-help groups.

So that’s what I mean, we always look for win-win situations in partnerships that work for everyone.

So what’s the “next big thing” for the Tsao Foundation?

Well, the next thing is to take a look at how we can take a whole community approach to create systems that enable successful ageing and ageing in place. In the past, we were looking at introducing concepts of community service models, capacity building, and research to gather evidence for policy advocacy. But these are still isolated events.

What we need is actually to integrate all the above to effectively create systems across communities and community ownership to sustain ongoing development. Right now, we have a project with the Ministry of Health and the Whampoa constituency. Whampoa is a very old, underserved and isolated community with significantly insufficient community health and social services as well as transportation connectivity. The idea here is to develop a “city of all ages” where physical infrastructure and services are well planned and integrated to enable its citizens to age well throughout the life course. That is why we talked to Hua Mei Centre for Successful Ageing, the service arm of the clients we serve, even though increasingly, we are considering the possibility of serving more paying clients to create revenue for cross-subsidy.

In the work of the Tsao Foundation, how important is collaboration been? What are some of the lessons behind successful collaborations?

I don’t think we would have been able to really work without collaborations. At the community level, we work with all the partners in the community to mobilise resources and identify those who need help. At the policy level, for a long stretch, we did a lot of work with the Institute of Policy Studies. We would co-organise forums, for example.

I think collaboration is a hallmark of our work, because I don’t think we can do anything as well without our partners. That’s the philosophy that underpins pretty much everything we do.

Good collaborations can help all parties. For example, the researchers find our partnership valuable because they have a hard time accessing the subjects, which of course is no problem for us. Sometimes, it’s not easy for the researchers because of the language barrier, but our staff here speak English, Chinese and dialect, and because of that, we’re able to mobilise the right people for one-on-one interviews, for example. We can also inform specific research questions because of our understanding of the needs and situations around particular research issues. So while we may not be strong in research methodology, we can assist and bring added value to research teams.

Another example is our current collaboration with several Senior Activity Centres or SACs on a programme called Self-Care on Health of Older Persons (SCOPE), which is about helping older people develop their own little OPAs or “old people’s associations” with about 20 or 30 people in each group. With a trained facilitator, these OPAs aim to teach and empower participants on health and self-care.

For us, the easiest way to reach out and organise these groups is to go to SACs. They are very entrenched in their neighbourhoods and also relationships with the older people in the community, and they can get the older people organised very quickly. In this regard, we can set up many such groups in 12 or 15 neighbourhoods quite quickly in collaboration with SACs, whereas if we were to do this all by ourselves, it would take a long time and with much more difficulty.

The first component involves developing a grassroots-based system of identifying older people with different risk and needs profiles in a proactive, accurate and consistent way. The approach to care right now is largely reactive. We wait until someone gets sick, go to hospital, and we try to follow up afterwards. But we need to be proactive and think of a public health and preventive approach to healthy ageing, we need to identify people with risks and get them to services early—whether it is wellness programmes or support at home.

Singapore is uniquely well-organised by neighbourhoods, and by working with grassroots and community groups, we can have the manpower and social capital to reach and identify older people with risks through the use of international tools that we have validated locally. Once the risk profile can be accurately identified, we can then work on getting the older people into appropriate programmes.

The second is the establishment of a care management service system to deliver packages of services to targeted groups of older people based on different risk and needs levels. The care management services have to be integrated into a care system. Currently, different levels of care-management services function in silos. However, people change—they get better, they get worse, families move, caregivers die, and so on. So those who provide services need to communicate with each other systematically and in an efficient and effective manner so they can stay on top of the elderly clients’ needs change. We don’t have to provide all the services, but we can act as a catalyst to bring the players together and facilitate the development of such a system.

The final component looks at rallying the community. We aim to develop stakeholder networks in the community to foster community ownership and mobilise resources in order to grow the full range of health and social services that can enable successful ageing across the spectrum—from the healthy and well, to the frail and the dying.

The idea here is to engage in community development that aims to identify all the stakeholders who are involved with older people in some capacity and can value-add to an age-friendly neighbourhood. They can be the police, town council, local business owners—anybody who’s interested in being part of an effort towards an age-friendly community. By building this stakeholder network, we foster understanding and actually build a community that takes ownership of their own older people and their own future.

The community stakeholders don’t often know enough about what’s going on with the older members; they need to be informed and to better understand the situation. We need to facilitate that connection, help the community understand and encourage them to take ownership of the well-being of the elders.

Once committed, much more resources are then available, and most importantly, they too, will find satisfaction in being part of that “kampung spirit.” In fact, that’s how people get their passion. It’s not always easy to do but we’ve got to give it a shot. Our experience has been that, when people collaborate and get the benefits of seeing what they can do together, they will be motivated to do more, because they derive fulfilment from that purpose. So here, we want to facilitate the building of that social capital and social structure, and with time, the community will be able to take ownership of their own development. Thereafter, we can participate as a member and just play the supportive role.

So that’s our next big thing—to get a whole-community approach to creating a community for all ages, something that would help us all age well throughout the life course.
UNPACKING RADICAL PHILANTHROPHY

PURPOSE-DRIVEN PHILANTHROPY IN ACTION

Being a proponent of radical philanthropy, the Lien Foundation's approach is to tackle the problem at its roots and offer long-term solutions. Lee Poh Wah tells Social Space how he equates radical philanthropy with practical remedy, and demystifies the term with a lucid explanation of his work at the Foundation.

As the Lien Foundation's first professional staff, Lee Poh Wah transformed the Singapore family foundation into one noted for its radical approach and style. The Foundation achieved several firsts under his leadership. Its innovative IT initiatives set new standards for eldercare and pre-school education. His entrepreneurial practices steered the Foundation into the global arena.

The similarities also lie in the distribution of resources. We both have an agenda and we decide on who gets what and why. The difference is in the resources we have. At the foundation, we have some ‘ignorant money’ while the civil service has a big team and deep war chest. For example, the government’s social spending this year is set to be more than $520 billion. It has ample access to privileged information and a range of policy levers to use.

The Foundation was started by Dr Lien Ying Chow in 1980 for which he set aside close to half his wealth. The focus of the foundation since its inception had been on education. Things started to change when Laurence Lien was co-opted to the Board in 2002 and the areas of focus expanded to include eldercare, environment and families-at-risk. But these are catch-all categories that could mean everything or nothing. A critical challenge in philanthropy is to identify the primary purpose and priorities.

In 2006, we crystallised our mission statement into three areas of focus. We decided on water and sanitation. Singapore is positioned as a water hub, yet neighbours to the country. In truth, I was more interested in helping the poor in Asia, for water is fundamental to human health and the foundation for human development.

Within eldercare, our main agenda is to improve care for the dying. In 2012, we tweaked our mission statement to narrow it down to three core “businesses” that included water and sanitation, care for the dying and fostering exemplary early childhood education. There is no ambiguity, and ours is purpose-driven philanthropy in action.

What did Lien Foundation identify the three areas of focus— education, eldercare and the environment? The Foundation was started by Dr Lien Ying Chow in 1980 for which he set aside close to half his wealth. The focus of the foundation since its inception had been on education. Things started to change when Laurence Lien was co-opted to the Board in 2002 and the areas of focus expanded to include eldercare, environment and families-at-risk. But these are catch-all categories that could mean everything or nothing. A critical challenge in philanthropy is to identify the primary purpose and priorities.

In 2006, we crystallised our mission statement into three areas of focus. We decided on water and sanitation. Singapore is positioned as a water hub, yet neighbours with titanic water and sanitation challenges surround us. Personally, I found it very easy for two reasons. Firstly, I don't have a messiah complex and secondly, you've got to be fiercely focused because you have finite bandwidth and limited resources. I'd like to quote one of my heroes, Bruce Lee, who said that concentration is the root of all higher abilities in man. How true! You need to pay attention and learn because learning begets learning, and success breeds success. The more you do, the better you get in that space. Sometimes, you just need to dive deeper and you'll find that a lot of compelling opportunities will surface.

Can you talk about the theory of change in relation to the Foundation’s work, particularly in early childhood education and end-of-life issues? I don't like jargon like theory of change. It is a simplistic narrative of a possible course of action to a complex problem. Philanthropy has a lot of theory and talk, but is short on inspired action. Sometimes, theories have the power to waste a huge amount of time. Instead, I strive to understand and respond to the reality and certainty of change.

Why did you choose early childhood education? That's because 90 per cent of our brains are formed by the age
of five. A lot of our social competencies are hardwired by then. The debate is no longer about nature versus nurture; neuroscience has already shown that different environments can switch on or off different genes. Besides, the issues surrounding preschool is also linked with the ongoing debate on social inequality.

The reality is many countries have a widening social divide. You find this inter-generation transmission of power and privileges at the top, poverty and problems at the bottom. We know, of course, there's no equality in any society, not even in nature. But while you can't stop parents from giving the best to their children, you can actually help the children who are less privileged and right at the bottom. Put the children in an enriched environment, focus resources on the vulnerable and give each of them a fighting chance. Some children spend as many as ten or twelve hours each day in the preschool, each of them a fighting chance. Some children spend as many as ten or twelve hours each day in the preschool, which becomes their sanctuary and safe haven. There's still a working chance that more can be done for them and right at the bottom. Put the children in an enriched environment, focus resources on the vulnerable and give each of them a fighting chance.

We live in a death-denying society, estranged from this topic. Unfamiliarity breeds anxiety. This is why we are driving advocacy efforts through our Life Before Death initiative.

Our latest is a tie-up with the ACM Foundation, which is started by the funeral house, Ang Chin Moh Casket. I look at funeral directors as experts in their own right. Like death, they too are stigmatised, but they should also be involved in our dialogues on end-of-life issues, just as we have done for palliative care professionals.

ACM Foundation and the Lien Foundation are collaborating on three initiatives. The first is the Design for Death competition, an international design competition to re-imagine death care. Although we are two small outfits from Singapore, we are working with the National Funeral Directors Association, the global organisation representing funeral directors all over the world. We are also working with designboom, the world's biggest online magazine on design and architecture which administered the competition and curated the winning entries. We received more than 700 entries from over 40 countries with many fascinating ideas. You have people thinking about how fungi and algae can be used for decomposition. There were also entries that looked at solar power, sending the ashes to the stratosphere, and then the conversion of ashes into rain!

Unfortunately, our modern healthcare system is fixated on diseases and medical technology. They have forgotten their mandate, which is to alleviate suffering. The solution can be simple because pain can be managed. If you think about it, the way to remove fear and anxiety, or deal with the issue of euthanasia, is to aggressively alleviate suffering by making high quality palliative care accessible to all.

We simply wanted vehicles for implementation. Impact is a function of vision, courage and an understanding of how to use money to leverage change. I view money as a facilitator. The real currency is ideas and imagination. To have an impact, your need solid implementation. Take the example of water and sanitation. I spoke to people from the UN and Stockholm Water Week, and those involved in the field to understand the landscape. But when I wanted to do the work in Asia, no NGO had the capability to deliver our aspirations. So what did we do? We decided to take on some risk and build the machinery from scratch. That's when we started Lien Aid for learning and implementation. It has helped improve water and sanitation access for about half a million people since its formation in 2006.

We have embarked on seven IT initiatives over the years. A salient example is the IngoT II project that we rolled out in March this year. IngoT means using IT to stretch the capability, imagination and the potential of the NGO. With IngoT II, we put seven nursing homes on cloud computing and empowered them with mobility solutions. Peacehaven Nursing Home was the first to roll this out. As part of its IT transformation, it now uses 30 iPads and 15 BMWs (Bedside Mobile Workstations, which are similar to IT kiosks) in its care and workflow processes.

Collectively, these seven homes account for about 20 per cent of all the nursing beds in Singapore. It is a hallmark project for us. Through IngoT II, labour productivity improved by at least 10 per cent and over 100 paper forms were eliminated from Peacehaven. We wanted to change all that because I saw it crucial not only to recruit good people but to also give them the best tools to enhance their productivity. That's especially pertinent in health care, and for us, in eldercare. Health care is very much an information-based industry and you need a strong IT backbone to orchestrate the care.

When you talk to the Peacehaven staff, you realise that IT has changed their outlook. They now have the right clinical or admin information at their fingertips, at the right time. They no longer have to hunt for onerous paper files. In a way, their imagination has been fired up and
now they look for new ways of how IT can further enhance their work. So IT is not just IT, it is total reorganisation and a culture change.

Could you tell us more about NPal?

NPal was very successful in introducing the use of IT in nursing education and starting a positive mindset change towards technology. We rolled it out with Ngee Ann Polytechnic in 2007 for 200 of its final-year students. They trained nurses for a three-year diploma but effectively, the students spent one year out on clinical attachments in the hospitals and nursing homes. The students’ learning was not very self-directed. In the frantic working environment, they were too shy to ask the staff nurses and doctors anything they didn’t know. So, what we did was to move the entire curriculum into a PDA. This was before the iPhone.

We created a database of drugs used locally, nursing procedures, and also a nursing logbook inside the PDA. Suddenly, these student nurses could be smarter than the staff nurses. They could validate procedures and the dispensation of drugs instantaneously. Two years later, Ngee Ann’s entire nursing school of 1,500 students and staff were using the system. They then migrated to the iPhone and now they even have their own App store.

Policy has also become a key plank of Lien Foundation’s work. How has the response been to the Quality of Death Index and the Starting Well Index?

Sometimes, if you want to seek reformation, people must be able to see reality. Leadership is about having the courage to face reality and mobilising people to tackle the challenges. We commissioned the global Quality of Death Index and the Starting Well Index to generate some awareness. We live in an “ADHD world” with hedonistic tendencies where one is bombarded with 3,000-5,000 marketing messages daily. Causes compete for mindshare, so it is a huge challenge to rise above the cacophony and shine the light on an issue. I do think that in an age where there is nothing really novel or new that people are saying, style and design becomes paramount. How you say something is more important than what you have to say.

We have made seven films to date, and I just want to share about the Life Before Death feature film which rolled out last year on World Cancer Day. It was filmed in 11 countries, including Singapore, and over 40 nationalities were represented. The film looked at the crisis of untreated pain and profit in palliative care professional, and the amazing work at the frontline. Credit goes to the film producer and director. The film has been shown in 40 countries at more than 300 physical screenings. In Australia, the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing attended a special screening of the film in Parliament House. I think close to 35,000 people have seen the film.

Because we had so much footage, 50 short films were produced from the original film and these were provided free online. These have been downloaded 4,000 times and many of these clips are being used for training and advocacy purposes. A thousand and three hundred DVDs have been sold with 70 per cent of these purchased by educational and healthcare institutions. We even had the film sold on iTunes and it received 800 paid downloads.

The TV version of the film was also screened in countries like the Czech Republic, Jamaica, India and Australia. It has impacted decision makers to amend policies related to pain-relief drugs and catalysed the provision of palliative care in developing countries. Our modest investment has paid off with maximal impact.

How do you see these approaches—setting up centres, technology, influencing policy, and media—working together?

Typically, when I look at a project, I look for six possible attributes or characteristics. They are new models, capacity building, charity, research, advocacy and networks. Each project subsumes a few of these characteristics.

When I say new models, I’m referring to new service delivery models. We are building a better mousetrap, experimenting and developing new models. Capacity building is about training and equipping people with better tools, whether it’s IT or something else, to be more efficient in their work. Charity is quite straightforward—to help those who are needy and marginalised. Research is informing policy, practice or the public, and advocacy is about harnessing the media to foster awareness and shaping people’s opinions. Finally, it’s establishing networks and looking at how we can parachute ourselves into the circles of thought leaders and influencers in the domains of our interest.

Sometimes it’s counter-intuitive. Take research for example, we commission research not just because we want to learn about a certain issue; we also hope to make friends in the process and many experts are more than happy to come forward to share their thoughts. By working on a campaign, we are not just promulgating messages and engaging our target audiences. We get to better understand the issues and meet a lot of stakeholders out there.

So these are some of the ways I view a typical project. I can’t tell you the weighting of the portfolio. We are really just trying—punching left, right and centre; eventually, the wall will crumble.

Would you say this is the radical philanthropy Lien Foundation practices?

We’re just here to solve problems. Although the term “radical philanthropy” sounds sexy, another phrase for it is really “practical remedy.” Don’t over conceptualise or intellectualise philanthropy. Like life, you’ve got to live it. Bruce Lee said, “Knowing is not enough, you must apply. Willing is not enough, you must do.” I can share all my kung fu with you but if you don’t go out there and practise, you will not achieve anything either.

At the Foundation, we try to build a very different sort of organisation with a different attitude and style. Now, let me explain why you need to be unconventional. If you look at a business or any endeavour, strategy is about doing different things from the competition or doing the same thing in different ways. So, excellence, by its very definition, is deviation from the norm. If you want to have excellence, don’t imitate others because that’s just a recipe for mediocrity. I habitually do things that others won’t do. Think the unthinkable, mix the unmixable and entertain the inconceivable. At the board level, they have given me the space to do that.

Do you practise martial arts?

I don’t, but I see philanthropy as a form of kung fu; its part-art, part-science and part-spirituality. The Chinese word “kung fu” often connotes a special power or success, and is frequently associated with medical prowess, culinary talents or skills par excellence.

Bruce Lee is an international icon and I admire his strength, brilliance and iconoclasm. Despite his brief period on the world stage, he was a formidable and positive force who made a tremendous impact in his lifetime. His influence as a martial arts innovator, actor and philosopher has moved Hollywood, broken boundaries, and inspired many. His philosophies reflect some of my personal beliefs and philanthropic ideas. I strive to apply myself to “fight” imaginatively, constructively, and systematically to solve social challenges.

Endnotes

1 The Life Before Death campaign in 2010 not only challenged death’s conventions but also took the taboo topic out of the box
2 The Life Before Death campaign at the Foundation international design competition to catalyse the international creative and design community to re-think and re-imagine death care for the future. See www.designboom.com/competition/design-for-death/
TRANSFORMATIVE SCENARIO PLANNING
A TOOL FOR SYSTEMIC CHANGE

Adam Kahane is the author of *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future*. He is a partner in the Cambridge, Massachusetts office of Reos Partners and an Associate Fellow at the Said Business School of the University of Oxford. He has worked in more than 50 countries, with executives and politicians, generals and guerrillas, civil servants and trade unionists, community activists and United Nations officials, clergy and artists. About his book, *Solving Tough Problems: An Open Way of Talking, Listening, and Creating New Realities*, Nelson Mandela said: “This breakthrough book addresses in a leading organiser, designer and facilitator of processes involving tri-sector collaboration, Adam Kahane shares with *Social Space* on how transformative scenario planning takes scenario planning to a new level and works as a powerful tool for systemic change.

A POINT THAT IS NOT OBVIOUS AND THAT PERLAS MADE TO ME WAS THAT WHEN THE THREE SECTORS SIT TOGETHER, THEY ARE SITTING AS CIVIL SOCIETY. ...THEY ARE NOT SITTING AS GOVERNMENT TO LEGISLATE, NOR SITTING AS CORPORATIONS TO BUY AND SELL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES, WHEN THEY SIT TOGETHER, THEY ARE DEALING WITH THE REALM OF CULTURE.”

How is transformative scenario planning different from the more popular adaptive scenario planning mentioned in your writing?

Although transformative scenario planning grew out of what I’ve called “adaptive scenario planning,” the two methodologies are fundamentally different. Adaptive scenario planning, the subject of 99 per cent of the literature in this field, starts from the assumption that we can neither predict the future nor influence it. This is the fundamental and axiomatic assumption. I always thought the reason that Singapore was the first adopter of scenario planning in government is that Singaporeans see themselves as being at the mercy of external forces— they can neither predict nor influence.

The assumption that we cannot predict and influence the future is partly true and partly untrue. It’s a simplification. Shell is an extraordinarily powerful company. And although Singapore is a small country, it would be an exaggeration to say Singapore has no influence over what happens around her.

So, transformative scenario planning says, to some extent and in some ways, we cannot influence what goes on around us and therefore we have to adapt. But in other respects, we can and want to influence what goes on around us, and therefore we have to soften this basic assumption. In that sense, transformative scenario planning includes and goes beyond adaptive scenario planning—it involves both adapting to and transforming the future.

What is the scope and potential of transformative scenario planning for the non-profit sector?

Non-profit organisations such as hospitals, voluntary organisations, citizens’ groups, and so on, are characterised not by the fact that they don’t make profits (this is an incidental matter), but that in general, they have a transformative mission. They are trying to influence some aspect or area of society. In this sense, transformative scenario planning is well suited to such organisations.

At the same time, the most basic error that an organisation with a transformative mission can have is to overestimate their own influence, and to focus only on the way they want the world to be. Therefore, in non-profit organisations, adaptive work is also important. I would therefore say the scope for scenario planning for the non-profit sector or for non-profit organisations is both to adapt to and to transform the future. In contrast, for-profit organisations often see themselves as having no transformative purpose.

Could you walk us through some examples where transformative scenario planning was used in your work?

The examples of which I will give you involve tri-sector work, which in a not obvious way is civil society work. By tri-sector, I’m using Nicanor Perlas’s definition—the government whose job it is to make rules, the corporate sector whose job it is to produce things to buy and sell, and the civil society sector which in Perlas’s formulation is concerned with culture, “culture” in the general sense of the word—the making of meaning. A point that is not obvious and that Perlas made to me was that when the three sectors sit together, they are sitting as civil society. In other words, they are not sitting as government to legislate, nor sitting as corporations to buy and sell products and services. When they sit together, they are dealing with the realm of culture. All of Reos’s work is with the civil society sector in the sense of the sector whose job it is to create meaning about what’s going on and what’s important, and what we need to work on as a society.

The first example is well-known—the Mont Fleur project in South Africa.

**Figure 1**


Theme: Possible futures for South Africa with the impending end of the apartheid regime.

Participants: A team comprising politicians, businesspeople, trade unionists, academics, and community activists; black and white; from left and right; from the establishment and opposition.

Four scenarios:

- **Flight of the Flamingoes**
  - Are the government’s policies sustainable? **Y**
  - Is the transition rapid and decisive? **Y**
  - Is a settlement negotiated? **Y**
  - The Mont Fleur Scenarios, South Africa, 1992

Impact: The essence of the Mont Fleur process was employed in the hundreds of negotiating forums (most of them not using the scenario methodology) as such on every transitional issue from educational reform to urban planning to the new constitution.

Text and illustration adapted from *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future*.
The second example is that of Destino Colombia, which is an interesting example because it shows how a set of scenario stories can create a narrative for a population as a whole, and how a government can use the scenarios to understand, work with, and act on the future.

2. Destino Colombia (1996-97)
Theme
To discover the way out of the long-running and violent conflicts in Colombia.

Participants
Guerillas and paramilitaries, as well as academics, activists, businesspeople, journalists, military officers, peasants, politicians, trade unionists, and young people, including FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the ELN (National Liberation Army). The guerillas participated in the workshops by telephone.

Four scenarios

- When the Sun Rises We'll See
- A Bird in the Hand Is Worth Two in the Bush
- Forward March!
- In Unity Lies Strength

Impact
Transformative change appeared to have occurred in some participants but no systemic change was apparent for more than a decade after the meetings. Since 2007, however, some actors (including President Juan Manuel Santos) have stated that Colombia has worked through the four scenarios to draw conclusions about what was needed to be done. One of the conclusions was that in order to be able to achieve the plan and move forward, Colombia needs to develop the capacity for coordination and alignment, not just involving the government, but also involving the business sector and civil society.

On 15 April, 2012, there was a meeting of the heads of state of all countries of the Americas. They meet every three years in what’s called the Summit of the Americas. And the host of that meeting was Juan Manuel Santos, the Colombian President who was also the initiator of Destino Colombia 17 years ago. He proposed to his fellow heads of state that they would use transformative scenario planning methodology to see if there would be better ways to address the problem of drugs in the hemisphere. He gave a compelling analogy, “I feel as though we’re on a stationary bicycle. We’re working as hard as we can, we’re spending tens of billions of dollars, and tens of thousands of people are dying. But while the scenery is changing, we’re not making any progress.” So this is a current example and it’s the largest scale example of the use of transformative scenario planning. (See Figure 3)

The third example is one my colleagues and I have been working on for the past year, producing a set of scenarios to deal with one of the most difficult, serious and polarised issues in the hemisphere of the Americas (that is, North, Central and South America, and the Caribbean). This is the problem of illegal drugs.

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The last is an Asian example that I’ve been peripherally involved in. It is the work of the Indian Planning Commission, a very important body since India’s independence. These are full-time commissioners and a cabinet level appointment, and in the most recent Indian five-year plan, they used scenario planning to supplement the plan. It was done by one of the commissioners, Arun Maira, somebody I worked with many times. The Indian Planning Commission for the first time, used scenarios to draw conclusions about what was needed to be done. One of the conclusions was that in order to be able to achieve the plan and move forward, India needs to develop the capacity for coordination and alignment, not just involving the government, but also involving the business sector and civil society.

There was a famous book by V.S. Naipaul published just after Indian independence called India: A Million Mutinies Now, and Arun made the comment that you could write a book called India: A Million Bottlenecks Now! That incapacity of the Indian stakeholders from the three sectors, to think, talk and to act together, was a serious impediment to the development of the country. An effort to build the capacity with the three sectors to work together was required. When I was in New Delhi in April of this year (2013), they launched something called the India Backbone Implementation Network or IBIN, which is all about building the capacity on a large scale for this kind of tri-sector collaborative work.

In this instance, scenario planning was used as part of the Planning Commission’s work involving actors not just from the government of India, but from all three sectors. And these scenarios (stories about what was possible in India) shaped what the government thought it needed to do—that is, the plan, an important government document. Furthermore, in working on what it would take to implement the plan, they realised a very specific capacity was missing in the country, which is this capacity for tri-sector collaboration and this led to the launching of the IBIN initiative. So, this is an example of a specific and important initiative that arose directly out of a transformative scenario planning exercise in an Asian country.

Let’s stay in the context of Asia. You spoke of Singapore as a user of adaptive scenario planning. How do you see scenario planning developing further here?

The government of Singapore is the most sophisticated governmental user of adaptive scenario planning. It has been a tool, at least historically, for making government decisions, and for giving direction to programmes. But my understanding is more generally giving direction on the way forward to the country as a whole.

What I understand as being attempted now is the use of scenarios not only as a tool for making government decisions and giving direction, but also as one for engaging societal actors, that is, actors from all three sectors, in discovering the way forward.

There are many aspects of this work that are challenging—
to do the work in a way that is systemic and participative. The way that it is most challenging is that this work is emergent. You're finding the way as you walk, and this is difficult for everyone. When I made this comment in a meeting in Singapore, one of the participants responded that a specific reason why this is difficult in the Singaporean context is that finding the way together is in contradiction to a Confucian idea of being told the way forward.

There is a fundamental difference between a system where people are told what to do from the top (a command and control system), and a system where the actors in the system negotiate, discover and create a way forward. Of course, it's always a mixture of the two—it's not black and white, or right and wrong—but they are not the same. So inasmuch as historically, Singapore has thought of herself as the former, she is trying to shift in some measure towards the latter, and this is a big change.

There have been two participative scenario processes in Singapore. The first was a citizen engagement process—Our Singapore Conversation, an attempt to have a participatory process, and there was the IPS Prisma, an attempt at a multi-state scenario process. So that sounded to me like first-generation attempts at transformative scenario planning processes.

Are you saying that while Singapore has led the way in adaptive scenario planning, when it comes to transformative scenario planning, other countries have actually gone further? Well, yes, it's certainly true that the government of Singapore has led the way in using adaptive scenario planning as a tool to provide direction in how the country can adapt, but in terms of tri-sector work to shape the future together, I would say there are examples of other countries where this is more developed, including Colombia and India.

In your words, transformative scenario planning is "a way for actors to work cooperatively and creatively to get unstuck and to move forward." Do you think transformative scenario planning actually works better for those in dire need of change? In countries like Singapore, where the situation is not desperate, it is more difficult to apply transformative scenario planning. Well, these are fundamental points. So yes, and I will broaden the point in the following way. Any process of change, especially voluntary change, requires as a condition that I have some substantial dissatisfaction with the way things are now, or at least some aspects of the way things are now.

Why would I change and in particular, compromise and be willing to work with opponents, if basically, I thought everything was okay? Either somebody has to force the change from the top or we will have to wait until things are much worse, or perhaps, someone has to decide that the scenario process can help us see the danger of the situation before it happens. People sometimes say to me, "Oh, it must be so difficult to work in Colombia, South Africa or Thailand," but I say no. In certain respects, it's easier because in such situations, all actors have already seen that the situation they're in is not sustainable, and they are therefore willing to do the genuine hard work of thinking and acting out of the box, not just with friends and colleagues, but with strangers and opponents. So a complacent society, like Canada in my example and Singapore in yours, finds it difficult to do this work. Changing voluntarily requires real energy, will, commitment and patience.

That's why the drug situation was a good example for transformative scenario planning because everybody knows that this situation is really not good, and whatever we're doing is not working. So although they disagreed over the solution or even on the characterisation of the problem, they agreed they had to do better than what they had been doing, and that was enough.

We understand that Rees's work involves tri-sector collaboration in some form. But hypothetically, we see transformative scenario planning possible within the non-profit sector itself. Does it have to involve all three sectors? Transformative scenario planning is where we’re trying to adapt to and also to transform or influence our context. So yes, most non-profit organisations need to adapt to remain in existence, and they almost always need to have a transformative objective—they’re trying to change something in society.

The question of whether the organisation can do this alone or needs to work with others, including those from the government and corporate sector, is a practical question. Let's take services to the disabled as an example. On the one hand, somebody working for the non-profit organisation providing services for the disabled has an adaptive problem. They need to think about what might happen to the population and to the economic opportunities of the population, as well as to government policy and technological developments, and adapt, so as to be able to survive and fulfill the mission, given different possible futures.

But at the same time, such an organisation has a transformative objective. It is trying to create a society where disabled people have opportunities and good lives. In achieving the transformative objective, at what point does somebody working for a non-profit organisation for the disabled say we are doing everything we can by ourselves? There's a larger context here about government policy, or cultural and social norms, or about political will that requires us not just to work with people from within our organisation, but to also make alliances with people from other non-profits, corporations and government.

How do businesses come into this? Would their contribution to the process be simply financing the initiatives? The contribution goes beyond financing. Most of these problems cannot be addressed at scale without the participation of business. If we think about Perla's definition of the sectors, that the business sector is in the job of providing products and services, most of the solutions to these social or societal problems cannot be successfully there without the participation of the business sector.

If I take a more dramatic example of climate change,
it would be impossible to make progress on climate change without the active participation of the companies that produce energy and produce technology. The idea that government alone, or government and civil society alone, can effect the kind of change that’s required to address climate change without the participation of the business sector, is absurd! Perlas’s point is that all three sectors are required to deal with any of these difficult societal changes.

So, how do we get people to act and change the future?

Here, I just want to add one non-obvious point, which I think is important. In most of these situations, and it’s dramatically true in the drug situation, it’s not as though nobody’s doing anything. On the contrary, probably tens of thousands of people are employed to work on the drug problem across the hemisphere and tens of billions of dollars are expended every year in treatment, security and control programmes.

The more important question is, “From what story are we acting? With what understanding of the situation are we making decisions about what to do?”

People often say, ‘Well, how do we get people to act?’ This is usually not the problem! Actors are acting all day every day. The question is from what stories, from what narratives, from what understanding, from what mental morals are they acting?

Transformative scenario planning operates at the level of how we understand the situation and what we need to do about it. The four drug scenarios arise from four understandings of the problem and therefore show different ways of dealing with the problem.

How can transformative scenario planning become more widely accepted?

What I’ve tried to do in my book is to explain the methodology in straightforward terms and to spread it, so that it’s not a mysterious thing. It took me three years to write a 100-page book and I hope this “essentialisation” of the methodology will allow it to be more widely used, and for people to try it and do it themselves.

Endnotes
3 Ibid., 79-90.
5 Our Singapore Conversation, www.oursconversation.sg/.
8 Ibid., 63-65.
Earl Tupper was an inventor. From fish-propelled boats to multi-use hair combs, he spent his days with a sketchbook and applying for patents for his ideas. In 1948, Tupper unveiled a watertight food storage container to an unreceptive public. This product languished on store shelves until a young mother called Brownie Wise saw its potential and took the initiative to meet Tupper to present a novel marketing vision. Within the next 10 years, Tupperware had become a household name in the United States and would soon scale worldwide, operating in 100 countries.

Brownie Wise was a self-taught saleswoman who never got past eighth grade but we have much to learn from her about scaling a good idea. Long before Facebook, Wise instinctively knew about the power of personal social networks and relationship building. The first insight she took to Tupper was that his products should be sold not in stores, but at home parties, where hosts would demonstrate the revolutionary, unbreakable bowls to their friends and neighbours.

Ashoka Fellow and Co-Founder of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, Al Etman ski believes many innovations designed to meet our social and environmental challenges could be regarded in the same way: lying dormant on the shelf. These orphaned innovations lack the vision and energy of a Brownie Wise, and their designers often don’t take into account the importance of relationship building to achieve scale.

Secondly, Wise knew that creating the right space for the sale was important. She chose homes for the parties, finding them to be the best container for successful outcomes. Similarly, the right container for designing solutions to systemic social and environmental challenges is key. How we create and design space, who participates in the process, how many people and what skills are important considerations when creating a setting and atmosphere that will help foster ideation and the conditions to see solutions take flight.

For some time, Social Innovation Generation (SiG) has been exploring the answers to these questions—how to find, adapt, re-deploy and scale existing innovations or how to creatively develop and prototype, and scale new innovations.

SiG is a unique partnership of four organisations in Canada committed to fostering a culture of continuous social innovation. We work from a definition of social innovation developed by our colleague, Dr Frances Westley, that assumes “the capacity of any society to create a steady flow of social innovations, particularly those which re-engage vulnerable populations, is an important contributor to the overall social and ecological resilience.” The definition doesn’t consider the quality of the innovation alone, but that the innovation—a new initiative, product, programme or process—profoundly changes beliefs, basic routines, resources and authority flows of the social system into which it is introduced. Successful social innovations have durability, impact and scale.1

The issue of scale is fundamental. While it is important to acknowledge that many small scale innovations can and do enhance community resilience, the complexity of our greatest challenges require attention to complex solutions that intervene at more than one scale.

Complex challenges demand complex solutions. By their very nature, these problems are difficult to define and are often the result of rigid social structures that effectively act as ‘traps’... Therefore when a social innovation crosses scales, the innovation is crossing a boundary that separates organisations, groups, hierarchical levels or social sub-systems, whether they are economic, cultural, legal, political, or otherwise. The more boundaries that the innovation crosses, the wider and possibly deeper the impact, and the more likely the result is more transformative change.1
Along with many others around the world, SiG has been researching lab practices for the last 18 months and has generated a new lab methodology that more fully incorporates system thinking, has a cross-scale focus, and is meant to specifically address complex systemic problems. This research is fuelled by a desire to design the most useful container for problem-solving and/or scaling those innovations capable of having a dramatic and positive impact on a particular stuck-system challenge.

As the research team refines the process, the broader SiG partnership has entered a phase of field building with practitioners, funders, intermediaries and those working within government, community and private sector organisations. The idea of field building involves deepening understanding of various lab-related processes, learning from international examples, fostering confidence in new ways of collaborating and building legitimacy for the new methodologies.

This field-building work being recognised by those grantmakers (philanthropists or governments) who identify themselves as collaborators and funders in the process of generating solutions—especially those leading towards system innovation.

Before digging into the structure of labs and field-building activity in more detail, it is interesting to ask ourselves why we need a new process at all. While no one would disagree that our global challenges—poverty, climate change and water scarcity for example—are immensely complex, there may well be skepticism over claims that a new process will be more effective. Here we can look to Tupperware again for some insight.

In the early days of Tupperware’s growth, no one at the company knew the standard business models, so the company invented itself by the proverbial seal of its pants. Staff meetings with Brownie Wise were brainstorming sessions that included the groundskeeper and the head of the model kitchen, as well as the heads of conventional departments like sales promotion and public relations. “Everybody attended and everybody put in their two cents. There was no idea that was too absurd and nothing was impossible.”

What works about this? It suggests that no one person ever has all the answers. This approach flattens hierarchy and creates an environment where it is believed that anyone can contribute to the problem-solving process.

So, we know we don’t have all the answers, we know we must focus on cross-scale systems solutions, we know that building relationships is key and that the right container for collaboration and ideation may help generate transformative results. So let’s consider what that space might look like in more detail.

**LABS: A PROMISING CONTAINER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE**

At SiG, we describe labs as “intense meetings of diverse groups of people who are searching for breakthrough solutions to serious problems.” The labs we are seeing globally are innovatively creating new shapes and sizes. Some operate via a series of pop-up style multi-day workshops while others have dedicated studio space running over years. Being exploratory in nature, almost all labs aim to create a safe, creative and collaborative space to examine a problem, generate and prototype solutions and navigate solutions through implementation. We see Labs as an optimal and versatile container for tackling some of our toughest whole system challenges.

**LABS ACT AS A CONTAINER FOR ACCELERATION**

Lab activities generally move between three different “spaces”: research, solution development and implementation. Labs enable teams to fast-track the understanding of a problem space through deep desk research, ethnographic and interviews. By blending top-down expertise (gained through education and training) and bottom-up expertise (gained through lived experience) the lab teams are able to quickly map out and get a sense of the key influencers, opportunities and challenges at play in the system being studied. The lab team also brings a representative sample of stakeholders related to the challenge into the same room to develop solutions together. The high concentration of knowledge with varied experiences of a system significantly reduces the time required to check for feasibility, relevance and effectiveness of solutions as they are taking shape. Labs accelerate systemic change by providing a “safe” space to gain a deep and shared understanding of a systemic problem, blend expertise from across the problem domain and follow a facilitated process to prototype and test high potential solutions.

**LABS ACT AS A CONTAINER FOR DEEP COLLABORATION**

Throughout the lab, significant effort goes into creating a comfortable and safe space for expression of ideas, questions and critiques. Participant contributions are seen to be valued equally and much planning and effort goes into neutralising hierarchies and power differences. As participants get a broader sense of their role in the larger system, they are better able to suspend their judgment and put away their differences in order to surface the facts and imagine a mutually beneficial future. The process builds champions for the long haul and potentially uncovers those “passionate amateurs” or system disruptors who are crucial in the implementation of solutions coming out of labs. Labs create a space that enables diverse groups to form bonds and effectively work together.

**LABS ACT AS A CONTAINER TO TAME “WICKED PROBLEMS”**

Labs thrive in environments that have traditionally low risk tolerance and with challenges that are seen as resistant to resolution. Challenges that make good candidates for a lab approach include those where conditions are rapidly changing, where there is conflicting information, and where there are many unknown unknowns. Labs can offer a safe space for trial-and-error testing, since early failures inform later success. In the paper, “Change Lab/Design Lab for Social Innovation”, Westley, Goebery and Robinson identify not just the benefits of prototyping interventions through design and visualisation techniques, but that the unique role computer simulation can play in testing multiple scenarios with those that would be most directly affected by those interventions. Walking the line between form and messiness, labs provide a structured, repeatable process for tackling the tough and seemingly intractable social and environmental challenges we face.

**WHILE THESE DESIGNED SPACES PROMISE MUCH, THEY ARE NOT A PANACEA**

Without a receptive network and field, there is nowhere for innovations to go. As many of us have found in working with governments, for example, it’s not enough to protest decisions or deposit a solution on their doorstep. We must develop solutions while enhancing the receptive capacity of governments to act with us. To facilitate this shift, SiG has been working to intentionally build the field of social innovation and labs across and with all sectors.
FIELD BUILDING: Creating the conditions for social innovations to flourish

SiG has entered into a phase of Canadian field building to help develop structure and build legitimacy for lab approaches and encourage collaboration among social innovators and lab practitioners. In deference to the cultural context of individual Canadian cities, we are approaching field building in different ways.

TORONTO Intentionally curating and weaving networks

In mid-2012, SiG’s national office staff interviewed lab practitioners in Toronto to get a sense of the activity underway. Two common pain points emerged: the marketplace was fragmented and there were few opportunities to build and practise skills for this type of work. Our approach has since been to act as an honest broker to encourage collaboration. We have been weaving and strengthening ties among a network of 40 lab practitioners and creating (and pointing to) capacity building opportunities in the social innovation space.

Other lab-related communities of practice are sprouting up across the country, notably Calgary’s Leading Boldly Network, Montreal’s lab practitioners group and The Natural Step’s cross-institution partnerships. The SiG partnership is promoting the lab approach to influencers and the general public through public talks, meetings, and communication resources. The partnership is also leading by example through the creation of the MaRS Solutions Lab and the funding of multi-stakeholder lab initiatives by the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation. In the course of SiG’s field-building work around Labs, we maintain that a systems focus on outcomes must remain part of the process in order to ensure that the techniques are not applied to improve efficiency of the status quo.

VANCOUVER Throwing a wider net to enable self-selection

Vancouver’s social innovation community has approached field building from a different angle. With the support of Al Etmanski, a self-identified group of lab practitioners, calling themselves Co-Lab or the Lab cooperative, came together to create a community of practice. By the third meeting, the Co-Lab group had swelled to more than 80 participants comprised of a mixture of practitioners and passionate citizens all wanting to make social change a reality. The network has since settled to about 20 dedicated members, who continue to meet semi-regularly and has changed its name to the “whole systems change group.”

WHY IS COLLABORATION IMPORTANT FOR FIELD BUILDING? Strengthening relationships and trust among a network enables the rapid exchange of information. Practitioners quickly learn what works and what doesn’t from one another, they tease out best practices and quash inefficiencies in their own practice. Moreover, these agents of change are empowered to engage the network by unlocking access to the network’s hidden assets (such as meeting space, technology or lived experience).

Working together creates legitimacy that benefits all lab practitioners. Collaborating enables practitioners to deepen their knowledge, develop a shared language around the practice, and strengthen the value proposition for the role of labs. Greater legitimacy for the lab field overall amplifies practitioners’ voices, increasing their influence and the social capital of the emerging sector.

Labs have emerged in response to our growing need to find new processes to support people in government, civil society and the private sector as they search for breakthrough solutions to serious social, economic and environmental problems. They take many different forms, but must strive to offer a place for creative, cross sector and cross-disciplinary decision-making and innovation. As their numbers grow, lessons from success and failure will help inform future iterations.

In all its work, SiG is mindful that while we write of bridging silos between government, business and community sectors, much of the groundwork for change is laid by passionate amateurs: people who have a personal interest in and the energy to see a solution scale. These agents must be identified through collaboration among practitioners, and are the key to taking an initiative forward into the system. They greatly enhance the capacity to move from thought to action. Would we know Tupperware without Brownie Wise or would the unbreakable plastic container have gathered dust alongside Tupper’s fish-propelled boat?

Most importantly, regardless of containers or innovations, the intention of the work must be to heal our fractured landscape. We can only do that by working together, building new relationships and deepening old ones. To revive our democratic institutions, we must continue to build the capacity of innovators to propose ideas, and strengthen the receptive capacity of others to receive and scale them out and up through the systems we live in. As depicted in the work of artist Bill Reid, and consistent with the Haida tradition in British Columbia, we must all get in the canoe together, and be ready to read the rapids and react to the certain turbulence along the way.

Haída Gwaii spirit canoe

SiG is a collaborative partnership composed of The J. W. McConnell Family Foundation, the University of Waterloo, the MaRS Discovery District, and SiG West, formerly the PLAN Institute. Our ultimate goal is to support whole system change through changing the broader economic, cultural, social and policy context in Canada to allow social innovations to flourish.

“Practitioners quickly learn what works and what doesn’t from one another, they tease out best practices and quash inefficiencies in their own practice. Moreover, collaboration among practitioners empowers the network by unlocking access to the network’s hidden assets (such as meeting space, technology or lived experience).”

References

1 For SiG’s definition of social innovation in full, see www.signgeneration.ca/social-innovation/.
2 Ecology and Society, www.ecologyandsociety.org/vol16/iss1/art5/.
8 The Waterloo team has been testing the use of computer simulations during ideation and has been publishing their reflections and journey on the Social Innovation Simulation blog here: http://socialinnovationsimulation.com/.
10 For more on the research work being conducted by the team at the Waterloo Institute of Social Innovation and Resilience (WISIR) see their lab resources here: http://siw.uwaterloo.ca/feature/social-innovation-labs.
Social innovation labs are emergent spaces for naming social challenges, testing hypotheses, developing and spreading interventions. Despite the common denominator of experimentation, they vary in methodology.

Dr Sarah Schulman makes explicit her observation of the hunches and assumptions embedded in the current social change methodologies. Dr Sarah Schulman spearheads InWithForward, a social start-up that’s developing and testing methodologies according to how they bring about change: through learning, through un-learning, through problem-solving, through envisioning.

Social innovation labs are emergent spaces for naming social challenges, testing hypotheses, developing and spreading interventions. But just because social innovation labs share a belief in experimentation, doesn’t mean we are all experimenting for the same purposes. Nor should we be. Plurality can be a strength—‘problems and solutions are based on the objective conditions of the real world.’

‘Plurality can be a strength—provided we’re explicit about our divergent hunches and assumptions. T.J. Cartwright … reminds us that, ‘problems and solutions are based on the perceptions of individuals. They are not objective conditions of the real world.’’

Mo was 18 when I met him. He sometimes showed up to school, but still struggled to read and write. He and his mates dabbled with drink and drugs, but rigorously followed Ramadan. He had no real idea what he wanted to do with his life, but busing tables at his parents’ Indian restaurant was the obvious option.

Mo wasn’t yet a dropout. He wasn’t yet a welfare recipient. He wasn’t yet a criminal. He wasn’t yet a government label. But Mo was one of about 13 per cent of young people for whom school just wasn’t working. He was fast disengaging.

School disengagement is one of those wicked social challenges. There is no single root cause, and therefore no one solution. Yes, formal institutions are breaking down and leaving groups of people out. But so too are informal community systems. And like chronic disease, unemployment, homelessness, criminality, and so much of the interconnected wickedness, there’s a window. To intervene. To change life outcomes. Before the cycle of marginalisation entraps and hardens.

The big question is: when and how do we best intervene? And where do the ideas for interventions come from?

Answers to these questions lead to some very different social change methodologies, and reflect some very different values about what constitutes a “good” social outcome for whom. I would argue that too often we lump these methodologies and values together under the trendy title of social innovation. We confuse the vehicle for social innovation—lately, the social innovation lab—for the theory about how change unfolds and for the ethics about what is good.

Social innovation labs are emergent spaces for naming social challenges, testing hypotheses, developing and spreading interventions. Despite the common denominator of experimentation, they vary in methodology.

In the pages that follow, I hope to embrace the subjective and make explicit (some) of the hunches and assumptions embodied in social change methodologies. So that we can start a conversation about what these hunches and assumptions mean for our formal institutions, for our informal systems, and ultimately for the Mos of the world. Which methodologies might actually shift behaviours and life trajectories?

SELECTING METHODOLOGIES

A methodology is a set of principles, practices, and procedures for answering a question or solving a problem. There are many ways to break down and categorise methodologies. By who is involved; by what disciplines and what techniques are drawn upon; by when and where interventions take place. Doug Reeler, in his article “Three-fold theory of social change,” differentiates methodologies according to how they bring about change: through learning, through un-learning, through problem-solving, through envisioning.

I follow a similar path, though far less tidily, grouping social change methodologies by the source of the underlying ideas for change. Do ideas come from the elites—from the statehouse or the ivory tower? Do ideas come from the meritocracy—from professionals, representative community leaders, anointed stakeholders? Do ideas come from inspired individuals—from entrepreneurs, designers, local problem-solvers? Do ideas come from the people left out, disengaged, and unaffiliated?

Drawing on first-hand experiences and a review of the grey literature, I have selected one methodology emblematic of each of the above assumptions. The intent was not to conduct a rigorous analysis of all social change methodologies, but to gain a feel for what these assumptions look like in practice and how they might be mixed and matched. The goal is therefore generative, rather than analytic.

My interest in mixing and matching methodologies comes from the limits of my own methodology. From 2009 to 2012, I co-ran InWithFor, a social innovation lab with a methodology called Working Backwards. Working in, with, and for The Australian Centre for Social Innovation, we co-designed and prototype new social services. Whilst two of these services are now spreading, our single-minded focus on bottom-up solutions meant we had little to say about how to transition systems from where they were to where we wanted them to be.

Luckily a second generation of social innovation laboratories is springing forth and learning from past failures and oversights—the MaRS Solution Lab in Toronto, the 27th Region in Paris, the Human Centered Design Innovation Lab in Phnom Penh. How might these new labs develop their own blended methodologies?

Chart 1 offers an overview of the selected methodologies, and short descriptions follow.

Chart 1: Social change methodologies: an overview

THINKERS IN RESIDENCE
Adelaide, Australia

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Social challenges are best addressed by importing external expertise, exposing local stakeholders to fresh thinking, and creating a political window for action.

State government, in combination with universities and third sector organisations, identify Flashpoint issues—like the future of the manufacturing industry, the quality of early childhood programmes, an ever-growing ageing population—and sponsor an international expert to fly in from the states and united kingdom to take on a new role as a broker to his teachers take family meets other immigrant experiences for himself; his mo gets homework tips from a peer a lot like him. mo has access to a new kind of after-school. mo is enrolled in a dropout prevention programme at the school. mo has access to after-school and weekend programmes. mo has access to a new kind of charter school. mo's school principal sets up a joint initiative.

The product is a written report with high-level recommendations—often for new committees or institutional structures, for new funding streams, for new policies, and for new kinds of academic research. The report is launched at a high-profile public event, with both ministerial attendance and media coverage.

All of this activity is predicated on a belief that expert knowledge can and should drive local change. And that a change must start at the top—with strategies and structures—and trickle down to practice, and from practice to improved outcomes. Without the interest and support of the top, sustainable change gets stuck.

EVIDENCE2SUCCESS
United States and United Kingdom

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Social challenges are best addressed by forming place-based partnerships, and using robust data to drive decisions about spending, programmatic design, implementation, and monitoring.

Place-based partnerships start by convening anchor partners: social researchers, philanthropic funders, and the leaders of a city experiencing poor social and health outcomes. Data collection is the focal point of activity. Validated survey instruments—like the Kids Count Survey—are used to dig deeper than existing indicator sets. The aim is to measure the risk and protective factors within the community. So, if there is a high rate of drug use, the researchers will attempt to measure what’s influencing that number (social perceptions, family support, school structure, etc.).

This local data is then used to make decisions about the distribution of health and social care dollars, and the best mix of programmes and services. Two groups are convened to analyse the data and make decisions about spending, programmatic design, implementation, and monitoring.

The Community Partnership includes system leaders, voluntary sector representatives, parents and children living and working in a particular neighbourhood. Both
partnerships make use of a range of tools that synthesise results from evidence-based social programmes. For example, the Blueprints for Success database contains hundreds of peer-reviewed social programmes searchable by social problem (education, justice, health, etc.); target audience (children, teenagers, young adults, parents, teachers); and outcome measures.

The big idea is that comprehensive local governance and robust data will lead to better investments in social programmes and services, and better investments will ensure better practice, and better practice will result in better outcomes. Better outcomes are codified as a reduction in risk behaviours and an increase in protective factors.

The Evidence2Success methodology is predicated on the existence of evidence-based programmes. Rather than develop bespoke responses to social challenges, there is a belief that enough evidence-based programmes exist to meet local needs. Programmes fail because they are implemented without fidelity, not because they are a-contextual. Expert knowledge, provided there is also local buy-in, prompts change.

**PROMISE NEIGHBORHOODS**

**United States**

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Social challenges are best addressed by bringing together local community initiatives, joining up services for vulnerable population groups, and improving social indicators (e.g., school graduation rates, drug use, etc.).

The focus, then, is on implementing multiple programmes at once. The goal is for communities to reach a “tipping point” where there is a critical mass of coordinated, supportive activity. This theory was developed and popularised by Geoffrey Canada and the Harlem Children’s Zone.

Whilst the Harlem Children’s Zone has concentrated their activities on children and adolescents, the core concepts—coordinated service delivery, high dosage, high intensity targeted to a particular population over a period of time—could be applied to other groups like disabled adults or older people living alone.

In an attempt to replicate the Harlem Children's Zone model in more communities, the United States federal government established the Promise Neighborhood Institute. The Institute offers resources and guidance to build and sustain burgeoning Promise Neighborhoods— including linking federal, private, and public investors; providing coaching in leadership and communication; and spreading stories of emergent practice.

Like Evidence2Success, local coalitions are at the crux of decision-making and planning. These are coalitions comprised of community leaders, professionals, and service managers. But unlike Evidence2Success, Promise Neighborhoods generate their own bottom-up initiatives. They may draw on the know-how of other neighbourhoods, or on academic literature, but they are not confined to implementing evidence-based programmes. Interventions might include removing barriers to accessing services, streamlining rules and procedures, holding community events, and offering new programmes and services. There isn’t an articulated point of view about how best to develop these new programmes and services.

The big idea is that if local professionals, managers, and community leaders come together and execute a comprehensive and collaborative plan of action, there will be enough good stuff going on to protect residents from risk and enable them to do well.

**REOS CHANGE LABS**

**International**

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Solutions to social challenges come from convening a group of selected stakeholders and engaging in interpersonal learning and reflection.

An organisation with a stake in the social challenge typically invites key stakeholders to the table—such as policy-makers, managers, practitioners, community leaders and opinion makers. Social challenges tend to be framed at a broad societal level, rather than at a specific behavioural level (e.g., food insecurity versus obesity rates). Over the course of multiple days or weeks, trained Reos facilitators walk stakeholders through a group process of observation, introspection, listening, conversing, and narrating possible futures. This process draws heavily from Otto Scharmer’s Theory U.

What comes from the process includes personal insights, re-articulated values, revised mental models, and often a commitment to work together on follow-up projects—be it new initiatives or policy reforms. Unlike some other methodologies, the focus isn’t on tightly defined or packaged solutions. Nor is there a codified structure, timeline, or approach for this follow-up work.

The big idea is that common values will drive problem-solving and future-setting. If stakeholders share a common understanding, then they will change their own organisational practices, and this will, in turn, change the broader social ecosystem. How a change in the broader social ecosystem translates to improved outcomes for people like Mo is not readily articulated. Nor is there a pre-existing point of view about what constitutes an improved outcome.

**ASHOKA FELLOWSHIPS**

**International**

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Solutions to social challenges come from individuals with good ideas. Good ideas are those that are sufficiently new, potentially transformative, and imminently practical. By identifying and supporting these individuals, we can hasten and deepen the impact of their ideas.

Selectiveness is the crux of this methodology. Individuals must be nominated, and are then shepherded through a rigorous selection process. This process involves site visits, in-depth interviews, a judging panel, and the vote of Ashoka’s executive board. Selected individuals join a community of 3000 fellows from 70 countries, and receive financial assistance, international connections, coaching and technical assistance, along with the use of a trusted brand.

The big idea is that entrepreneurial individuals, given effective resources and connections, can develop and implement new products, programmes, services, and campaigns that will shift outcomes in their communities and their countries. What makes for a good outcome does not seem to be standardised or defined.

**POSITIVE DEVIANC**

**International**

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Solutions to social challenges already exist—we just need to find the everyday people who are putting them into practice, understand why, and enable more people to do the same. These everyday people are the positive deviants—individuals who face the same challenges and barriers as the rest of the population, but who have somehow adopted a different set of behaviours and experience good outcomes.

Core to this methodology, then, is identifying and learning from the positive deviants. The methodology...
starts with community members identifying both a specific social problem (e.g., childhood obesity) and a desired social outcome (e.g., active children with a healthy body mass index). Community members seek out individuals experiencing the desired social outcome, but who share the same risk factors as those living the social problem. Using interviews and observational techniques, community members look for the positive deviant’s uncommon behaviours and specific practices. These uncommon practices are home-grown solutions. Home-grown solutions are then spread through campaigns, trainings, events, and peer-to-peer exchanges.

What comes from the process, then, is a range of locally evidenced behavioural interventions. The big idea is that lived experience, rather than expert knowledge, unlocks social challenges. If people experiencing a challenge can learn a new way of doing something from their peers, they will experience better outcomes.

WORKING BACKWARDS15 Australia

The underlying assumption of this methodology? Solutions to social challenges come from a creative partnership between the people directly experiencing the challenges, and an interdisciplinary team of designers, social scientists, and community organisers.

Like all of the other featured methodologies, this one begins by naming a wicked social problem and pooling project funding from organisations with a stake in the issue. Problems are framed in terms of a group of people who share the same risk factors as those living the social problem. Using interviews and observational techniques, community members look for the positive deviant’s uncommon behaviours and specific practices. These uncommon practices are home-grown solutions. Home-grown solutions are then spread through campaigns, trainings, events, and peer-to-peer exchanges.

No magic bullet

No one solution, or one methodology, can do it all. Inventor Temple Grandin chastises us, “People are always looking for the single magic bullet that will totally change everything. There is no single magic bullet.” Indeed to budge a stubborn social challenge like educational disengagement, we would probably need to shift Mo’s motivations and behaviours; his interactions with family, peers, teachers, and future employers; how his teachers are trained and supported; how his school is funded and held to account; and broader political mandates and cultural norms surrounding adolescence and schooling.

The question, then, is not which social change methodology to use, but in what order and for what ends? The social change methodologies highlighted here offer different, and at times, conflicting starting and ending points. Are we to start at the top, by re-setting the political mandate? Or at the bottom, with Mo’s behaviours? Are we to end with improved interpersonal relationships in one particular context? Or with a solution that can scale across contexts?

Were we to start at the top, we might reform standards, only to find they entrench a “schooling as accreditation” worldview and further alienate young people like Mo. Were we to start at the bottom, we might develop an alternative to school with young people like Mo, only to find our solution conflicts with existing standards and resource flows. Could some sort of hybrid methodology allow us to work bottom-up and top-down at the same time—to shift the values and behaviours of end users whilst simultaneously shifting the values and behaviours of policy-makers and professionals? And could we actually shift values and behaviours in complementary directions—towards a shared vision of what could be?

As we mash up methodologies, and play with permutations, it’s our values, behaviours and vision as social innovators that deserve scrutiny. We are not neutral facilitators of social change. The language of laboratories and evidence creates the illusion we are objective scientists, rather than curators of a craft. Craftsmanship focuses far less on codifying methods and tools, and far more on redefining and pursuing “quality” work. And good, quality work the author Richard Sennett tells us is not a “finished end” but an ongoing exploration. So let’s keep going.

Endnotes

3 As defined by the online Psychology Dictionary, http://psychologydictionary.org/methodology/.
10 Promise Neighborhoods Institute, www.promiseneighborhoodsinstitute.org/.
Citizen engagement is widely regarded as critical to the development and implementation of social innovation. What is citizen engagement? What does it mean in the context of social innovation? Julie Simon and Anna Davies discuss the importance as well as the implications of engaging the ground.

Over the last decade, there has been an explosion of methods and approaches to citizen engagement. Competitions, idea banks, crowdsourcing, co-design, online petitions, citizen panels, citizen juries, participatory workshops and participatory budgeting are just some of the hundreds of methods which are becoming increasingly common. Across government and civil society, the value of participation and the important role it plays in social innovation, we first need to define our terms. What is citizen engagement? What is social innovation? And what does citizen engagement mean in the context of social innovation?

In the field of social innovation, there is a similar assumption: engaging people in developing new ways of tackling social challenges will lead to more effective and more legitimate solutions. In fact, the idea that citizen engagement is critical to the development and implementation of social innovation is regarded by many as a self-evident truth. Certainly it seems inconceivable that we could develop a long term solution to any of the mounting economic, environmental or social challenges—such as youth unemployment, ageing societies, chronic disease or climate change—without the collaboration and engagement of citizens. Take the case of climate change, for example. This will require profound changes not simply in terms of new technologies but also in terms of human behaviour. We will need to cut our energy use, conserve what is used through recycling and reuse and avoid production where possible rather than expanding it. We will need new models of collaborative consumption. And every part of the economy will need to be transformed—from development to manufacturing to distribution and consumption. This will require innovation on a huge scale. But it will also require solutions that are created “with” and “by” people rather than “for” or “at” them. So, engagement in its various guises seems integral to the development of social innovations.

However, before we can discuss the value of citizen engagement and the important role it plays in social innovation, we first need to define our terms. What is citizen engagement? What is social innovation? And what does citizen engagement mean in the context of social innovation?

DEFINITIONS
We define social innovations as new solutions (products, services, processes etc.) that simultaneously meet a social need (more effectively than existing solutions) and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships and/or a better use of assets and resources. Examples include microfinance, fair trade, new models of eldercare, preventative interventions in health and criminal justice, co-production and online platforms that enable sharing and mass collaboration.

“Citizen engagement” is a very broad concept and along with “participation”, the inherent appeal of the term means it often lacks critical examination. As we understand it, citizen engagement refers to a broad range of activities which involve people in the structures and institutions of democracy or in activities which are related to civil society—such as community groups, non-profits and informal associations. Citizens take part in these activities voluntarily and these activities require some form of action on the part of citizens—although this can include things as diverse as signing a petition, making a donation, volunteering, or taking part in a demonstration. But “engagement” can take many forms beyond civil society—for example, when businesses crowdsource ideas from their customers or when businesses carry out market research to better understand customer needs. Citizens can be incentivised to participate—but their involvement cannot be coerced. And lastly, public participation and citizen engagement activities are usually directed towards a common goal (such as reducing isolation among the elderly, or improving the local community) so they’re often strongly connected to a social mission.

So when we talk about citizen engagement in social innovation, we’re talking about the ways in which more diverse voices and actors can be brought into the process of developing and then sustaining new solutions to social challenges—essentially how citizens can be involved in developing social innovations and in social projects which are innovative. But why is engagement important in social innovation? And what does it look like?
WHY IS ENGAGEMENT IMPORTANT?

Engagement as a concept tends to be universally thought of as a “good thing.” Sherry Arnstein described citizen participation as “a little like eating spinach: no one is against it in principle because it is good for you.” However, it’s important to think through the specific functions of engagement, and why exactly it is useful. We argue that there are at least four reasons why involving citizens is particularly important for social innovation:

1. Engagement enables a better understanding of social needs. Effective innovations must respond to actual needs as people are experiencing them. Citizens are the best judge of their own needs and are often best placed to articulate these needs. This is because they have unique knowledge of their own desires and experiences. Of course in some cases, citizens themselves develop an innovation, and so needs and challenges are already well understood. But where those driving the development of an innovation do not experience the issue or problem first hand (as is often the case with policy-makers, civil servants and non-profit leaders), it will be extremely valuable to bring citizens into the innovation process.

2. Engagement enables diversity and provides a channel for new ideas. Involving a wide range of citizens can increase diversity which is particularly important for problem-solving. Although this idea is often expressed as a truism, recent research helps unpack why different perspectives are valuable in developing responses to complex problems. Scott Page’s work highlights that people with different skills. In the last five years, there has been an explosion of different kinds of citizen engagement in developing social innovations.

3. Engagement can increase the legitimacy of projects and decisions. If the development and implementation of a particular social innovation (or decisions relating to it) include some mechanism for involving citizens, that innovation is likely to be seen as more legitimate than if it had been developed without this engagement.

4. Responses to complex challenges will be ineffective without some form of engagement. Many of the challenges that social innovations aim to tackle, such as obesity or climate change, are extremely complex problems where responses require significant behaviour change. For this reason, solutions cannot be “delivered” to people. Rather, they will require citizens’ participation and “buy in.”

ENGAGING CITIZENS IN DEVELOPING SOCIAL INNOVATIONS

But what does citizen engagement in social innovation look like? Citizens can be involved in social innovation in numerous ways—through research and consultations, through more formal activities such as co-design workshops and idea camps to informal activities online. During the development stages, citizens tend to be involved either to get a better understanding of the needs they are currently experiencing—“informing about present states” or to gather their ideas for new and better solutions—“developing future solutions.”

• “Informing about present states” refers to all the ways that citizens can provide information about their current experiences. This information is critical to the development of social innovations.

• “Developing future solutions” refers to all the ways in which citizens contribute and shape new ideas. These might be ideas for entirely new innovations or simply improvements to existing services. In some cases, citizens will provide fully formed ideas and in others they will collaborate with organisations to develop ideas in partnership.

Figure 1 on the next page illustrates these two distinct forms of engagement, along with a dimension of scale — whether the type of activity involves few or many citizens. This gives us four quadrants that help us organise different kinds of citizen engagement in developing social innovations.

INFORMING ABOUT PRESENT STATES

UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL NEEDS & PROBLEMS

Ethnographic techniques
User led research
Citizen mapping needs

UNDERSTANDING LARGER PATTERNS & TRENDS

Crowdsourced data
Rating platforms
Polling & panels
Open data initiatives

CO-DEVELOPING SOLUTIONS

User feedback
Citizen led initiatives
Co-design
Positive feedback exercises

CROWDSOURCING SOLUTIONS

Rating platforms
Competition
Large scale innovation exercises

FEW

MANY

DEVELOPING FUTURE SOLUTIONS

Crowdsourcing case study: I Paid a Bribe

I Paid a Bribe is a platform set up by non-profit organisation jamag- raha in 2010 that aims to understand and tackle the issue of corruption in Indian public services.10 It is an example of a project where citizen involvement is not an added “extra” but absolutely integral—I Paid a Bribe is completely dependent on the collective energy of citizens to be effective.

Citizens are invited to use the platform to upload reports about bribes they paid, bribes they resisted and instances where they received a service without paying a bribe. By gathering this information, the project is able to map the scale of corruption, uncover patterns and trends and lobby for changes in governance and accountability processes. Jamagr- raha uses the data that they collect to produce citizen reports that help citizens avoid bribery, as well as reports for government agencies that highlight particularly corrupt teams or departments. The organisation also makes recommendations for reforms to rules and procedures.

As well as painting a picture of the nature and scale of bribery in India, I Paid a Bribe can be used to put pressure on corrupt officials and on government departments. There have been many instances where government rules and procedures have been changed in response to information gathered through the site. For example, twenty senior officials at the Department of Transport in the Government of Karnataka in Bangalore were issued with warnings based on information gathered through the site. Changes were also made to registrations of land transfers at the Department of Stamps and Registration in Bangalore.

I Paid a Bribe has now been replicated in Pakistan, Kenya, Greece and Zimbabwe. By March 2013, the site had received 1.9 million visitors to 833,033,890 rupees worth of bribes from 493 cities across India.10

To better understand the relationship of citizen engagement to social innovation, it is helpful to make this concept more tangible through specific examples. In what follows, we highlight two methods of involving citizens in the process of developing new solutions: crowdsourcing and co-design.

UNDERSTANDING LARGER PATTERNS AND TRENDS: CROWDSOURCING

The term crowdsourcing was first coined by Jeff Howe who defined it as “the act of a company or institution taking a function once performed by employees and outsourcing it to an undefined (and generally large) network of people in the form of an open call. This can take the form of peer production (when the job is performed collaboratively), but is also often undertaken by sole individuals.”11 The defining feature of crowdsourcing is that it asks the public (rather than experts) to input their knowledge and skills. During the last five years, there has been an explosion of these types of platforms that provide a cost effective way for citizens to contribute information about their experiences.

From the perspective of social innovation, crowdsourcing is important as a process that enables large groups of people to contribute information and feedback that helps to uncover needs and problems. It is particularly useful in the innovation process for understanding the scale of a problem, and for identifying larger patterns of need.
When faced with a complex problem, a group of experts with similar perspectives will tend to get stuck in the same places as one another, whereas a diverse group of solvers will not.

Co-design describes an approach to social problems that sees designers working in partnership with service users, practitioners and employees to develop solutions that address social challenges. Its central underlying assumption is that individuals experiencing or responding to a social problem must be involved in developing solutions if they are to be effective.

Co-design processes often emphasise the importance of ethnographic research methods in order to understand what needs look like, employing methods also used in design work such as focused observations, mapping user journeys and other forms of visualisation. Participants then come together with service providers and others to develop solutions, often in a workshop setting. Prototyping is another aspect of design methodology that forms an important part of co-design since it enables low cost testing of ideas early on, so that they can be quickly refined and developed. Since co-design requires specialisation, facilitation and design techniques, it is often led by intermediary agencies who work with citizens and public sector groups.

Co-design case study: Family by Family

Family by Family is a new model of family support co-designed by The Australian Centre for Social Innovation (TACSI) and families in South Australia. The programme was established to support families and help them thrive, while reducing their need for crisis services. The core idea of the programme is to find, train and resource families who have overcome tough times (known as “sharing families”) and connect them with families who want things to change (known as “seeking families”). Matched families then take part in “link up” activities together for between 10 and 30 weeks. In this model, professionals act as brokers to these family interactions rather than delivering services directly.

The programme was developed in partnership with local families from the area (Marion in Adelaide). There was an initial phase of ethnographic research in order to better understand the nature of family stress and coping mechanisms. The team then worked with a smaller group of 20 families – prototype “sharing families” who wanted to use their experiences to help others, along with “seeking families” who were looking to make some changes to their own family life. Over weekly “sharing family dinners”, the team worked with both sets of families and their children for a period of three months to discuss, test out and refine ideas. The project team wanted to co-design all elements of the programme, both at the conceptual level (what the outcomes should be, what the process should look like) and also the interaction level (all the materials, communications, training resources etc.).

This input from local families was essential in conveying the message of the programme effectively. It was the experience of families putting up posters in their local neighbourhoods who were frequently needing to explain what the project was (and wasn’t) that eventually led to the description of the programme: “We’re a group of families who are about more good stuff for families. We link up families with stuff in common to change the things they want to change – like kids’ behaviour or going out more as a family. We’re not government. We’re not religious. We’re not political.” This description still features on the programme brochures.

An early evaluation of Family by Family suggests that the programme is contributing to positive outcomes and enabling families to meet some of their immediate goals. In February 2012, an adapted version of the programme was established in a second location, Playford. The team’s long term goal is to grow the model in locations throughout Australia.

Risks of engagement?

Despite the benefits we’ve outlined above, it’s also important to be aware of the risks associated with engagement practices. There is considerable research from the fields of international development and participatory democracy which suggests that engagement can often lead to negative or poor outcomes. So, for example, some engagement activities can lead to a greater sense of empowerment and agency, while others lead to a feeling of disempowerment and a lack of agency among participants. Similarly, while some participatory activities do promote social inclusion, enabling the inclusion of new actors and issues in public spaces, others can reinforce social hierarchies and the exclusion of particular groups or individuals.

Engagement practices will have to be carefully designed to avoid the risks of co-option by vested interests and elite groups and over-representation of the most affluent, articulate and educated members of the community. Where processes are not seen to be representative, decisions which are taken may be seen as illegitimate and lead to further disengagement.

Conclusion

Engagement plays an essential role in social innovation. It can improve the quality of information that is used in the innovation process and therefore help create innovations which are more effective. It also enables contributions from varied and unexpected sources, introducing diverse and new perspectives which add particular value when confronted with complex social issues. There are clear challenges for practitioners to ensure that engagement practices are representative, inclusive and sensitive to the dynamics of the communities in which they take place. However, these challenges that must be overcome, since engaging citizens is absolutely critical to the development of much needed social innovations.

To find out more about citizen engagement in social innovation, see www.tepsie.eu

Endnotes

1 This article is based on the work of TEPSIE, a research project funded under the European Commission’s 7th Framework Programme and is an acronym for “The Theoretical, Empirical and Policy Foundations for Building Social Innovation in Europe”. The project is a research collaboration between six European institutions led by the Danish Technological Institute and the Young Foundation and runs from 2012-2015. For more information see www.tepsie.eu.
10 ibid.
Social Innovation Labs

A Tool for Social Integration

The Organisation for Awareness of Integrated Social Security (OASIS) has designed a different approach to innovation in India by creating social innovation labs to work across the social sector. Pradeep Ghosh describes the approach and the work of OASIS, and shows how social innovation labs can play an increasingly important role in creating solutions for the Indian society.

Social development programmes all over the world have existed for almost as long as the problems and issues they address. Yet, despite billions of funds being pumped into development every year, developing countries are still far from attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the set of eight international developmental goals set by the United Nations for 2015. In fact, some countries have veered off the parameters and are now worse off due to both internal and external disturbances.

A key reason behind this failure is the mindset that the “educated” know better than the “illiterate”, and that development can only be measured in terms of modernity and an increase in income. The word “traditional” conjures up images of the primitive, meant only for the illiterate or those with little education.

Increasingly though, practices once considered primitive and backward are now receiving some attention. For the innovative mind, a new approach to traditional practices could lead to new solutions to problems. A very good example of this is the biometric identification system. In the past, illiterate people who did not even know how to write their names had to use their thumb impressions as signatures. A thumb impression became the symbol of illiteracy. After extensive research using modern technology, it was found that it is the most unique signature of an individual. Using the best technology available today, the traditional practice of using the thumb impression is now the key element in the biometric identification system.

The Need for Social Innovation Labs

The social sector is dotted with issues and problems, yet, there is no platform where new ideas and approaches to solving these problems can be experimented, tested and developed into models for the sector. While both the private and commercial sector heavily fund finance research and innovation within, the social sector funds only research and shies away from the risks of financing innovative solutions.

Many youth and young professionals in both rural and urban India possess new ideas for development, but what they lack is a platform where there is guidance, motivation and support for experimentation. If youth are led to explore their forgotten traditions and systems, and taught to apply modern approaches, they can create a synergy between the old and modern, and innovate new practices and systems to overcome their problems.

Most countries have many ethnic communities with rich cultures. If we look deep into the ethnic practices, we may find many solutions to our modern-day problems. By dressing up ethnic practices with modern approaches, we may not only find solutions to our problems, but even revive our fast disappearing traditions and cultures. Such entrepreneurial initiatives can help us find solutions for problems such as malnutrition, unemployment, economic insecurity, illiteracy and disease. This may even spark a different trend: one towards self-reliance and less dependence on the government and external agencies.

In our current society, young people are not taught to understand self-reliance. Youth from privileged backgrounds are brought up in a culture where they learn to guard their wealth and maintain the status quo. They see the importance in supporting those in power, and in return, expect the latter to solve their problems. In a similar but different way, youth from underprivileged backgrounds grow up in a culture where they and their families fear insecurity, but they too expect the government and those in power to solve their problems.

These young people from different backgrounds have great ideas and are capable of developing solutions for the problems they see. However, there is first, the need to draw them out of their comfort zones and insecurities. These youth need a platform to develop their creativity, and a space to test their ideas and innovate solutions to help the underprivileged in their community grow. Once the seed of social innovation is sown among the youth, they will start viewing problems in their community not merely as challenges, but as opportunities for innovative solutions. The impact of such solutions can spark off similar initiatives among other youth within or outside their communities, who can then learn the social innovation approach and follow suit. This will create a ripple effect, growing the number of beneficiary communities exponentially.
THE OASIS APPROACH

In India, the Organisation for Awareness of Integrated Social Security (OASiS) has designed a different approach to innovation. It created the first Social Innovation Lab (SIL) in the country to work across the sector. In OASiS, they constantly look out for gaps and issues in the sector. With experience, the members have come to believe that the solution to every problem lies deeply-rooted within the problem itself, like the cause. If the root cause and its path to the problem can be traced, the solution can be designed to follow the same track, and its effect could be longer lasting.

OASiS has produced innovative models across the social sector, addressing problems in the areas of disability, social security, urban education, rural education, and volunteering, and some of these models have been implemented and are being used across India. OASiS is now setting up SILs across the country, both at the university and grassroots levels, so that issues at the macro and micro-level can be addressed.

Course of action in the OASIS approach:

1. Trace the Solution
   The team studies the problem from the perspectives of all stakeholders. They pin down the issue and identify the root cause(s). They trace the path to the problem and try to understand the factors and events that have been responsible in bringing the problem to the present stage.

2. Conduct “Negative Brainstorming”
   The solution is presented to the stakeholders separately and criticisms are elicited. The team looks at the criticisms and converts them into lessons for design revisions and workarounds. They do not stop at this point, but examine the changes from the perspectives of the stakeholders with yet another round of critiquing. This process of brainstorming, critiquing and revision (or modification) continues until the proposed solution is well accepted.

3. Encourage a sense of independence
   While designing solutions, team members try to think that the government or administration does not exist. This helps them in designing solutions based on the existing strengths of the beneficiary community, rather than from external support. This results in better coordination and monitoring of the pilot schemes, and also teaches beneficiaries how to develop community systems enabling basic citizen rights, without demanding from the government.

4. Engage the target community in implementation
   Engaging the local community in the implementation of solutions helps reduce the likelihood of any resistance to change. This is because the ideas for change come from the people themselves, and they will try their best to make it work. If the target community is engaged from the start, there will also be less political interference from the locals in power. In addition, the right persons in the community can be identified to take the task forward after the pilot is over, and grooming and training can take place while they are on the job.

5. Establish partnerships
   It is important that there is collaboration between SIL groups and organisations that provide fellowships or paid guidance. As the SIL entrepreneurs move from pilot to replication or scale-up, they join the group of mentors of the SIL. This helps in creating a growing group of mentors within the SILs, who will in turn mentor other budding entrepreneurs. This ensures that the SIL work goes viral. In this way, the SILs will attract youth, both urban and rural, and provide them an enabling and support system to innovate for the betterment of society.

“IF THE ROOT CAUSE AND ITS PATH TO THE PROBLEM CAN BE TRACED, THE SOLUTION CAN BE DESIGNED TO FOLLOW THE SAME TRACK, AND ITS EFFECT COULD BE LONGER LASTING.”
Social innovations born out of OASiS

1) A Health Insurance Model for the Disabled that was adopted and implemented by National Trust (Government of India) in 2008. In terms of coverage and premium, it is one of the best insurances of the world. Since 2008, the model has benefitted over five lakh (5,00,000) mentally-challenged individuals every year in India. These individuals have received complete medical services supported by the insurance. The model received the “Times Social Impact Award” in January 2015.

2) A Social Security Model that gives complete social security to all in the community, without any social security tax, duties, subsidies or savings. Since most social security systems are based on taxes and savings, they cannot be implemented in countries with a huge population living at the poverty line. OASiS took on a different perspective and helped build a model on expenses rather than savings. The model develops an organised structure for existing essential expenditure by people and from it, builds up a social security potential for them. The model was earlier implemented in two states in India, and is being implemented in two other states now. This expense-based model received the “Changemakers Innovation Award” in 2010.

3) An innovative urban education model for under-privileged children, called The Museum School Model. This is a collaboration between museums and teacher training institutes aimed at bringing quality education to these children without any additional infrastructure. The model has been implemented in two states in India. The model received the “Kubera-Edheleisinn Innovation Award” in 2009.

4) A Social Volunteering Model that brings together people from all walks of life to contribute their knowledge, skills and experience, for the upliftment of the underprivileged. The model is independent of any financial support, and uses a novel way of resource sharing. The model uses a scientific method of assessment, through which it awards social credits, that volunteers carry for life and benefit their organisations, industry, and institutions in many ways. The model is being replicated by other NGOs in India.

5) A rural education model called GRAMODAYA – A Rural Awakening, that grooms rural school children in rural development, making them employable after schooling, to develop their own areas and community. The model received the “Education Innovation Fund for India” award in 2013, and is being piloted in four states.

6) Two models are on the drawing board, waiting for budding social entrepreneurs to take them to the pilot stage. One is a model to make cities environmentally friendly by eliminating polythene use and creating enough livelihoods for urban poor. The other is a Waste-to-Food model, making cities self-sufficient by converting urban organic waste to power and food, through a credit-sharing model.

GROWING A NETWORK OF SOCIAL INNOVATION LABS

SILs should now be established in universities to bring students, academics, industries, corporations, and the community together in collaboration. A SIL can be a common interaction point and problem-solving platform for all. Communities will bring their social issues to the SIL.

Core groups of students and faculties at each SIL can define the issues as projects, and share them with fellow students and academics. Students across all disciplines, having common interests in social issues, can then form project groups. Each project group can have an academic liaison with the university and other SIL collaborators. The SIL groups will then research on the issue identified, interact with stakeholders, identify root causes to problems, develop innovative and simple solutions with the community, prepare proposals, source funding from industries, corporations and government, and set up a structure in the community for implementation. The group will further guide and monitor the pilot programme, document corrections and lessons learnt, analyse the impact, improve on solutions, develop the solutions into models, and add the models to the SIL repository for sharing with everyone.

In the context of India, OASiS has the capability to assist in the setting up of SILs in universities and teach the approach to problem-solving and innovation. OASiS is also helping NGOs working in rural areas start SILs in village clusters to train and empower village youths towards creating their own solutions. Such village SILs will bring youth from different communities and villages, converging at regular intervals, to discuss problems and prospective solutions, using OASiS’s method for problem-solving. The SIL youth groups can then implement their own solutions and be supported by the NGO for funding and other resources. In this way, SIL youths in villages can be self-employed in a purposeful way, while benefitting their own communities at the same time.

CONCLUSION

SILs can play a crucial role in helping industries and the community come together to solve many social and environmental issues through simple solutions. A network of SILs across the country, at both university and grassroot levels, will enable us to find solutions to social issues at the macro and micro-level. SILs do not simply serve as platforms for innovations; more importantly, they bring together the new and the traditional, the young and the old, the urban and the rural, to form a connection for change.

Endnotes

1 The Millennium Developmental Goals (MDGs) were officially established following the adoption of the United Nations Millennium Declaration. The target date is 2015 and the eight goals range from reducing extreme poverty by half to stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS and ensuring universal primary education. For more information, see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/.

Social innovation is gathering momentum in Hong Kong. It is connecting silos and developing partnerships for change. Ada Wong describes how five social innovators are approaching social change to bring about cohesion amidst a fragmented political landscape.

Ada Wong J. P. is the Convenor of The Good Lab and the Make A Difference initiative. She is also the Founder & Honorary Chief Executive of Hong Kong Institute of Contemporary Culture, Supervisor of HKIECC Lee Shau Kee School of Creativity, and board member of Social Innovation Exchange. She is a solicitor, social innovation enthusiast, cultural pluralism advocate, educator, radio host and former elected councillor.

There are three zones at the Good Lab. On 27 July 2013, the eight finalists for the 2013 Young Social Entrepreneurs Award (comprising three grants of HK$100,000 each) were presenting to a panel of judges at the bean bag area. This is Hong Kong’s only award that encourages young people to become social entrepreneurs by providing them with a stipend so that they are able to commit full-time to their fledgling social enterprises.

At the opposite end of The Good Lab, ladies from the nearby Sham Shui Po district gathered for a demonstration of soap-making with used oil. This is a “waste not” campaign organised by MaD (the Make A Difference initiative) for participants to learn how shops and households in poorer communities are mindful of food waste and have creative recipes even for leftovers.

In the Dialogue Experience Square, 30 people joined a “Lunch in the Dark,” one of the experiential activities designed by Hong Kong’s most popular social enterprises, Dialogue in the Dark. The event featured different kinds of dark experiences aimed at building empathy for the visually-impaired. There were probably over 200 people in the different spaces on that exceptionally busy Saturday.

The Good Lab is Hong Kong’s social innovation hub and the brainchild of five people: Francis Ngai (Social Ventures Hong Kong), Patrick Cheung (HK Social Entrepreneurship Forum), Dr Ka Kui Tse (Education for Good), Vincent Wong (Solutions On Wheels), and myself (Make a Difference). It is a convenor with networking and support functions. It serves as a platform with a mission to bring the most innovative ideas, the most passionate people, and individuals with resources and support together to create innovative solutions to address unmet needs.

In this 20,000 square feet of co-working space, trust is in the air. It is also a social innovation hub where knowledge, skills and insights are constantly shared. It is a cozy community where people easily become friends and interesting initiatives can be explored. IT start-ups and social entrepreneurs have sat next to each other and then decided to partner each other in new ventures. Here, people feel inspired to make a difference and believe that they too can help to change society for the better. The Good Lab does not sound real, since the positive energy and cross-sector collaboration that comes out from it is not the norm in Hong Kong.

We have been hard at work creating platforms to launch innovative initiatives and harness the work of those passionate in generating solutions to address unmet needs in society. Social innovation work involves a tri-sector approach: the wisdom, resources and insights of the public, private and people sectors must be shared. Here, trust is an essential ingredient. As social innovators, we encourage social entrepreneurship and advocate cross-sector collaborations by creating intermediary platforms to break silos. We attempt to identify unifying strands to work through the fragments in our society. However, our positive energy is not yet echoed in Hong Kong, which at the moment, is split politically.

In early July 2013, the Hong Kong government rolled out its plan to develop two new towns in the northeastern part of the New Territories (NENT NDA Development). This was in anticipation of further population growth and the need for affordable housing. The plan calls for the resumption of hundreds of hectares of farmland and the demolition of village houses. The Hong Kong Golf Club, with 2,000 of the city’s elite as members, operates three golf courses, occupying 170 hectares of land in the vicinity of the NENT NDAs. After the plan was announced, villagers were angry that they would be displaced while the golf courses would be kept. They threatened to occupy the golf club land if the area where their village houses stood were to be resumed. Activists and villagers went to protest at the front gate of the golf club, calling for re-entry to the golf club land that was under short-term tenancy. Such an action highlighted the people’s mistrust of government initiatives and actually pitched 2,000 “haves” against over 100,000 “have-not” families who could have benefited if the golf courses gave way to public housing. Such is the fragmented state of the society in Hong Kong.
The people of Hong Kong are full of discontent and they have demonstrated (often peacefully) in hundreds of rallies each year. The largest took place on 1 July, on the anniversary of Hong Kong’s reunification with China. The rally has now become an indication of our state of governance. In the momentous year of 2003, the year of the SARS outbreak, and when there was strong opposition to Article 23 legislation, half a million people rallied to say no to the erosion of core values. The event resulted in the resignation of principal government officials. This year, 430,000 people marched on the streets despite the heavy rain and the announcement of typhoon signal No. 3. It was the largest turnout since 2003.

Hong Kong probably has one of the highest Gini co-efficient (0.537 in 2011) in the world. Five per cent Hong Kongers receive 40% of the income. In addition to the worsening rich-poor gap, conflicts in Hong Kong have centred on the increasing number of new immigrants from mainland China as well the annual 30 million mainland Chinese tourists whose buying power has left Hong Kong residents shortchanged. Local noodle shops are closing down amidst skyrocketing rent, and the community landscape is drastically shifting to tourist-led businesses.

In the last financial year, the former Chief Executive decided to distribute HK$6,000 to each Hong Kong resident aged 18 and above. This act of extreme generosity cost the government HK$40 billion—enough to build hospitals, schools and thousands of homes. Unfortunately, this has not reduced negative sentiments towards the government. On the contrary, it raised expectations of more such “candies” for the people each year. Our government still has the financial means to address social concerns but sometimes, money alone is not the cure and it is certainly not a sustainable solution.

Hong Kong went through rapid socio-economic changes in the last decade but players in each sector were slow to recognise these changes and were not adequately concerned about fundamental issues such as deepening income inequality, changing demographics and an ageing population. On the other hand, civil society in Hong Kong is maturing as people are increasingly awakened and becoming more confident that their participation can contribute to the halting of unwelcome measures. The last ten years have witnessed many bottom-up movements in the search of Hong Kong’s identity and the protection of old districts and local community.

The post-80s and 90s generations took the lead to uphold the core values of Hong Kong. This took the form of opposition to the building of Lee Tung Street (Hong Kong’s “wedding card street” with at least 20 shops designing and producing bright red invitations for weddings and celebrations), attempts to save the Star Ferry and Queen’s Pier from demolition, and the rallies against the construction of the express rail linking Hong Kong to mainland China and plans to dismantle Choi Yuen Tsuen, an agricultural village situated along the planned route of the railway line.

In mid-July this year, the government was forced to withdraw a funding request to enlarge three landfill sites after ascertaining that even the pro-establishment camp was divided in this matter (with the “not in my backyard syndrome”) and it could not muster enough votes to push the paper through the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council. The state of Hong Kong is polarised. Political parties and figures have become more radical. Mistrust is growing. There is no room for collaboration, only name calling. The government is fearful of making new moves; big businesses are arrogant and in general, members of the society know how to destroy but they have not learnt to rebuild.

Against such a grim backdrop, the mere idea of bringing a fragmented society to collaborate is daunting and almost impossible. However, social innovators are committed to switching negative mindsets and fostering the creation of a social ecosystem where the three sectors can work together to bring new solutions to fruition for long-lasting social impact. Before achieving systemic change though, what are the possible first steps to consider?

As I write this article, the Good Lab is also preparing a retreat for members to reflect on “what’s next?” at our first anniversary. I did some “stocktaking” and recalled how the five of us shared our vision, the ideas that flowed through, the events that took place, the diversity of the people who worked here, and the network we have built. I believe the Good Lab has been an empowering connector in its first year of existence.

The EngageHK report, spearheaded by two impact investors, Philo Alto and Ming Wong, made the observation that corporations were reluctant to share and people relied on the government to deal with social inequities. Despite that, the five board directors of the Good Lab have continued to push beyond discontent to address the issues through their programmes.

Patrick Cheung, founder of Dialogue in the Dark HK and current Chairman of Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum, kickstarted the Jade Club with fun and creative exercises for the elderly to reduce the risk of dementia. This is a social enterprise calling for a paradigm shift in how we see ageing and the provision of elderly services. Francis Ngai, the founder of Social Ventures Hong Kong, ran in the North Pole marathon to bring home the idea that we meat eaters are also responsible for greenhouse gas emission. His “Green Monday” campaign urges people to take baby steps to go green on Mondays. After a few months of advocacy, major fast food chains and most school lunches now have vegetarian options.

In the Good Lab, we have learned that for social impact to be possible, there needs to be both social and business innovation. We have observed that the three sectors can work together to bring new solutions to fruition. We have been working on bringing up all the stakeholders to work together to bring new solutions to fruition. We have been working on bringing up all the stakeholders to work together.

For the Good Lab to continue to work together to bring new solutions to fruition, we need to move from social innovation labs to “social innovation spaces” where the three sectors can work together to bring new solutions to fruition.
For Ka Kui Tse, besides being a prolific writer, editing and completing a few books on social entrepreneurship each year, he is also passionate about social entrepreneurship education. His startup, Education for Good, is a community interest company that provides inspiring programmes to empower. These programmes include the Gap Year for younger people, and Social Impact Fellows for early retirees.

Vincent Wong, formerly a sharp-tongued radio host and strategic development director at Commercial Radio, started “Solution-on-wheels” (SOW), a social venture that embraces solution journalism and wisdom of the crowd. SOW has designed a state-of-the-art mobile broadcasting van that could be brought to communities to engage district councillors and citizens in lively debates that everyone can watch and share via 4G technology. Rather than simply pointing at the problem, SOW, in functioning as an innovative media platform, has been effective in offering common ground and viable solutions with regard to many local issues.

I founded Make A Difference (MaD), a platform to nurture the next generation of changemakers. Here, we encourage real actions by supporting social projects and innovations with seed money in our MaD School initiative. Such projects originating from young changemakers are multifaceted and include using mobile technology to help Indian, Pakistani and Nepali children living in Hong Kong to speak and write in Chinese; conducting lessons on rooftop farming at schools that cultivate in Big Lunch days for the neighbouring community; co-creating better street furniture involving locals and designers; collecting surplus food from markets and turning them into community meals; and recycling baby prams and products.

When each social innovator takes a small step and inspires others to do likewise, these seemingly small steps add up as bigger and bolder steps that resonate with the people. When this happens, social innovation becomes more visible and easier to understand. And when social innovators are willing to mentor younger enthusiasts, the longer-term impact of this bonding and sharing is invaluable.

These days, I find myself being a busy “connector”, embracing ideas from the crowd and helping fine-tune the ideas. A young man starting a local cultural tourism enterprise was connected to similar ventures in Taiwan, and fair trade products were introduced to corporations. Design houses and IT startups work together with social enterprises, social entrepreneurs seek inspiration from artists and educators, bloggers communicate through face time with their readers, makers of documentaries and their ideas are introduced to changemakers from all fields, and visitors from mainland China are introduced to Hong Kong’s local social entrepreneurship community.

Very soon, I hope to further connect foundations and impact investors with the many fledgling social innovation initiatives being incubated. This kind of synergy has been missing in a fragmented Hong Kong. However, as advocated by Seoul social innovator Mayor Park Won-soon, we should all live in a “sharing” city.

In such a sharing environment, our civil servants should involve social innovators when considering new policies and policy changes in order to gain a deeper understanding of social issues and embrace innovative solutions. Our corporate leaders can share their knowledge and expertise and be directly involved in social projects. The Good Lab is more than a passive intermediary. The five of us are determined to see it as an active connector and catalyst, providing affordable co-working space and also changing mindsets for the incubation and implementation of innovative social solutions.

STEERING HONG KONG TOWARDS SOCIAL INNOVATION

This is only the beginning. Most people in Hong Kong are presently too absorbed in protecting and expanding their turf to think about building a more inclusive society to involve different stakeholders. We prefer not to take risks. As with everyone else, funders also choose safer projects. Even non-profit organisations sometimes guard against intrusion into their turf instead of embracing a more empathetic and fuller perspective of the social issue at hand. Working in isolation has resulted in wasted resources, work duplication and missed opportunities to make a bigger impact.

Nevertheless, when a society is as fragmented as Hong Kong, things can only take a turn for the better. Indeed, we have seen the government’s growing interest in social innovation. The Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Development Fund of HK$500 million was set up under the Commission on Poverty late last year under the leadership of Chief Secretary, Carrie Lam. She is keen to support intermediaries, ventures and initiatives that encourage innovation and entrepreneurship to prevent the further widening of the poverty divide. This is a breakthrough on the part of the government as it had never supported individual entrepreneurs in the past. Details of the fund have not been announced but once it is, it will spark a flurry of applications and ignite more curiosity and interest in this emerging space.

At the same time, pioneers from the financial sector in Hong Kong have come to acknowledge that “the complex problems faced by Hong Kong require solutions that have to balance multidisciplinary factors that cut across fields like finance, the social sciences, design and urban planning, the environment and public policy to name a few.” Annie Chen of the RS Group has been a leader in fostering this mindset change. She has supported many initiatives, including the EngageHK research, encouraging businesses to support social ventures beyond CSR and collaborate across sectors. Civil society, albeit still radical, is now more inclusive, with many embarking on environmental and social projects to do good, rather than simply being resistant to negotiation and cooperation.

The Good Lab is contemplating expansion and the addition of another small venue to the existing physical space. In time to come, I hope there will be a Good Lab for makers, since there is now an expanding global movement encouraging DIY experimentation of innovative products such as 3D printing, electronics and robotics. There should be a meeting place for academia, makers, coders and funders to harness new technology and tools for greater innovation. We look forward to collaborating with institutions to set up social innovation hubs in Hong Kong and mainland China. We will continue to advocate sharing, collaboration, and the blurring of boundaries; we should cut across boundaries to support all entrepreneurial initiatives big and small.

There are champions for social innovation in different corners in Hong Kong: in government departments, businesses and the community. Given time, I am hopeful that these champions will be able to make a difference. Social innovation will be fast-tracked and a social ecosystem will be co-created for systemic change in our society.
Recent events by The Good Lab

May 2013
The Good Lab hosted Hong Kong’s first ever Open Data Hackathon where 60 coders, journalists and data scientists came together to explore opportunities by mashing up data. In 30 hours they built on open government data and created prototype websites and mobile apps for visualising food pollution and noise pollution.

June 2013
Together with MaD, the Good Lab hosted a SIX (Social Innovation Exchange) event with the participation of experts from NESTA (UK’s innovation agency) and social innovation enthusiasts from mainland China, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Korea, Macau and Hong Kong. Interesting cases were shared and participants also attended the opening of Good Kitchen, a social enterprise restaurant situated near the Good Lab.

July 2013
At our “Enhancing Tri-sector competence and dialogue” workshop, civil servants, business executives, NGO workers and social entrepreneurs joined the one-and-a-half-day event to study social innovation cases worldwide and went through an ideation and prototyping process after identifying social problems pertinent to them. Participants were inspired by talks from the directors of Good Lab, in particular the one from Dr KK Tse, who shared his 10 social entrepreneur role models (including Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus of Grameen Bank).

Endnotes
2 The term “land resumption” used in Hong Kong is more commonly understood as the compulsory acquisition of land by the government for public purposes. See www.legislation.gov.hk/eng/glossary/homeglos.htm.
3 In September 2002, the government proposed the Hong Kong Basic Article 23, the basis of a security law. This led to considerable controversy as Hong Kong had operated as a separate legal system established by the Sino-British Joint Declaration on 18 December 1984.
7 Ibid.
Singapore does not have an official poverty line. Should there be one? And what are the frameworks that have been used or could be adopted for the measurement of poverty in this country? The Lien Centre for Social Innovation and SMU School of Social Sciences report on their investigation into the complex issue of domestic poverty.

Team: John Donaldson, Jacqueline Loh, Sanushka Mudaliar, Mumtaz Md Kadir, Wu Biqi and Yeoh Lam Keong.

Over the past ten years, Singapore has registered robust economic growth and consistently ranked amongst countries with the highest GDP per capita in the world. Over the same period, inequality has risen sharply. Singapore does not have an official poverty line. However, the living conditions and incomes of the poorest amongst the Singapore resident population, while not reaching the level of destitution experienced in developing countries, nonetheless suggest that Singapore needs to reassess the way in which poverty is acknowledged, defined and addressed. This concern was reiterated in a dialogue session on poverty in Singapore held in August 2013. Over 20 representatives from non-profit organisations working with poor communities were present, and most concurred that more clearly defining and measuring poverty would be an important step towards more effectively addressing the needs of the poor.

The Lien Centre for Social Innovation (LCSI) at Singapore Management University (SMU) together with John Donaldson (School of Social Sciences, SMU) and Yeoh Lam Keong (Adjunct Senior Research Fellow, Institute of Policy Studies), have embarked on a research project designed to inform strategies to address the complex issues that Singapore faces in this area. Our research collates views on domestic poverty from a range of sources, and analyses various conceptual frameworks used for defining and measuring poverty. This project will provide a basis for further research into the extent and nature of poverty in Singapore.

This article summarises the key findings on the prevalence of poverty in Singapore from our research to date, and discusses the merits and drawbacks of the use of various approaches to measuring poverty that could be particularly relevant for Singapore.
INEQUALITY IN SINGAPORE

Over the last decade, Singapore’s Gini coefficient rose sharply from 0.454 in 2002 to 0.478 in 2012. Singapore now has one of the highest levels of inequality in the developed world.

Rising inequality is a common feature of other developed economies such as the United States and countries of the European Union, as well as advanced Asian economies like Japan and South Korea. However, as noted by the authors of Inequality and the Need for a New Social Compact, Singapore is unique with respect to the speed at which domestic inequality has increased and the level it has increased to. They note that the average increase in the Gini coefficient in these countries over a 20-year period was 0.02, the same increase that Singapore experienced in just 10 years from 2000–2010.7

Inequality in Singapore is compounded in comparison to countries with similar per capita income by the low and falling real wages of the bottom 20 per cent of employed residents relative to that of other wage earners. The period 1998 to 2010 saw the real median incomes of employed residents in this quintile fall by approximately 8 per cent, while incomes of those in the top 20 per cent increased by 27 per cent.8

1. Monetary Measures of Poverty

The most common approach to measuring poverty involves analysis of monetary income or expenditure. The most frequently used monetary measures identify levels of absolute poverty and relative poverty. Table 1 summarises estimates of monetary measures of poverty in Singapore from a variety of sources. (Note: Measures of monthly household income generally use four-person households as their point of reference.)

Table 1 – Estimates of Poverty in Singapore Using Various Monetary Measures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Reference Year</th>
<th>Measurement Method</th>
<th>Absolute Poverty Estimates</th>
<th>Relative Poverty Estimates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Kum Nang, Income (2010)</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>Using household incomes ≤ $1,250 (2010 AHEBN estimate)</td>
<td>10–12 per cent or 110,000–140,000 Singapore resident households</td>
<td>Using 50 per cent of median household income amongst resident households, relative poverty line is ≤ $1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqueline Lim, Social Space “Bullying Fruits in Singapore” (2015)</td>
<td>2008</td>
<td>Using $1,500 as a poverty line (like qualifying level for many ComCare schemes in 2011) and looking at the income distribution across households for households employed. This data is only available every five years from the Household Expenditure Survey (HES).</td>
<td>12–14 per cent or 130,000–150,000 Singapore resident households</td>
<td>Using 50 per cent of median household income amongst resident households, relative poverty line is ≤ $1,500</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Straits Times, “Killing Wage Gap. Does it Matter?” (2016)</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Reports a study by Yeoh that a family of four would need $3,500–$3,600 per month to reach the social inclusion level of income. (Estimated by LCSI from 2007/2008 Household Expenditure Survey.)</td>
<td>23–26 per cent or 210,000–240,000 Singapore resident households with monthly incomes below $3,500</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I. Absolute Poverty

Defining an absolute poverty line involves identifying a minimum level of household income or consumption that is required to meet basic needs, with poverty considered to be income or consumption below this level. Typically represented as a numerical figure in the relevant currency, absolute poverty is conceptually the simplest quantitative approach to measuring poverty on a national level.

While the Singapore government does not define a poverty line, an official measure of deprivation that comes closest to identifying a level of absolute poverty in Singapore is the Average Household Expenditure on Basic Needs (AHEBN), a monetary measure calculated by the Singapore government’s Department of Statistics (DOS). It consists of the average expenditure on food, clothing and shelter in a reference poor household living in a one to two-room Housing and Development Board (HDB) or government rental flat, multiplied by a factor of 1.25 to account for other household needs like transport, education and other necessary expenditures for normal living.9 The AHEBN varies for households of different sizes and is based on data from the five-yearly Household Expenditure Survey (HES) and updated periodically to account for increases in the consumer price index that occur between survey years.

What is somewhat frustrating for those interested in research in this area is that the AHEBN is not easily available in the public domain. The one official reference the study team was able to locate is in the 2012 Singapore Parliament Reports (Hansard). In response to a question posed in parliament, it was noted that the AHEBN in 2011 was $1,250 per month for a four-person household.10

Based on data from the DOS’s Key Household Characteristics and Household Income Trends, 2011 report,11 Yeoh estimates the total number of resident households with incomes less than the AHEBN range of $1,250-1,500 per month to be between 110,000-140,000 households. By this estimate, roughly 10-12 per cent of resident households are unable to meet basic needs in the form of clothing, food, shelter and other essential expenditures. Yeoh’s estimate includes 70,000-90,000 working poor households; 20,000 unemployed poor households; and 20,000-30,000 poor retiree households.12

The AHEBN is in fact a very conservative measure of hardship or absolute poverty. One issue is that the AHEBN does not independently calculate the cost of transport, education and medical costs and instead relies on the estimate that these costs approximately 25 per cent of the cost of food, clothing and shelter combined. Amongst other things, this modest multiple fails to account for the fact that the cost of the former tends to rise faster than that of food, clothing and shelter.

Another critique of absolute measures of poverty such as the AHEBN is that they do not take into account basic expenditures necessary for social mobility such as human capital investments, and information and communications technology. It has been estimated that a family of four in Singapore requires an income of $3,500-3,000 per month in order to invest in human capital and create the possibility of social mobility or a life beyond continued basic subsistence for adults or children of the next generation.13 Such investments include supporting in-school education, improving skills, and the purchase of goods like computers, internet connection or mobile phones that provide vital assistance in training, education and networking. If poverty was defined in this way, then approximately 23-26 per cent of households would fall into this category.
ii. Relative Poverty

Most developed countries measure poverty using a combination of basic needs (food, clothing, shelter, education) and relative measures that take into account domestic standards of living and factors influencing social exclusion. This is based on the notion that an individual’s perception of poverty depends upon their relative position in the surrounding environment. The Nobel prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, in his seminal text on poverty, Development as Freedom, noted that “relative deprivation can mean absolute deprivation, if it means that an individual is unable to participate in society.” From this perspective, relative deprivation is an important indicator of basic needs.

If poverty is narrowly understood in terms of absolute needs, then a relative poverty line would be an indicator of inequality rather than of poverty. However, advocates of relative poverty measures point to the strong linkages between inequality and a number of serious social problems. These include mental and physical health problems, unwanted teenage pregnancy, crime and violence. By this analysis, commonly used indicators of inequality such as the Gini coefficient are also useful measures of deprivation. While it is theoretically possible to have poverty with no inequality, as well as inequality without poverty, both inequality and poverty are linked to serious, though sometimes different, social effects.

A commonly used relative poverty benchmark is 50 per cent of median household income, a definition which is used, amongst many other examples, in the OECD statistical database.

The most recent available source we could find discussing official measures of relative poverty in Singapore is from 1999. It states that the DOS defines relative poverty as 50 per cent of median household income. The HES 2007/08 is the most recent data available that covers all households; however, neither the overall mean or median monthly household income is reported by the HES which provides only the average household income by quintiles. As this figure is $55,480 for the 41st-60th quintile, the overall median income would not be more than this and could be reasonably estimated to be about $55,000, suggesting that households with monthly incomes of less than $52,500 are living in relative poverty. In 2007/08, about 20-22 per cent of households have incomes below this level. As with previous estimates, unfortunately, these rough approximations are the best that can be made due to the lack of granularity provided in publicly available data.

2. NON-MONETARY APPROACHES TO MEASURING POVERTY

While monetary approaches to measuring and defining poverty are more commonly used and understood, these measures do not capture the multidimensional nature of poverty. For this reason, we have explored a great variety of alternative approaches to measuring poverty. In the previous section, we were able, subject to the limitations of publicly available data, to suggest ways in which monetary poverty measures could be applied to Singapore. There is no available data we can use to apply the non-monetary measures discussed in this section. Instead, based on our discussion with non-profits and others working with disadvantaged communities, we have identified a number of approaches that could be particularly relevant for poor communities in Singapore.

The following section also contains a brief discussion of how these non-monetary measures could be useful in better understanding, and ultimately addressing poverty in Singapore.

i. Poverty Measured in Terms of Capabilities

Amartya Sen argues that monetary measures ignore the cultural relativity of poverty and bias solutions towards those oriented around income. He suggests that efforts to alleviate poverty should focus on what the poor person or household lacks in terms of capabilities because this focuses attention on the causes of poverty rather than its symptoms. This approach not only strives to provide people with the ability to escape poverty, it also identifies political, social and economic barriers that reinforce poverty. A number of non-profit representatives who joined our discussion on poverty in Singapore highlighted the potential usefulness of the capabilities approach for their work with low-income households, people with disabilities (PWDs) and people living with mental illnesses. With current patterns of declining social mobility and the emergence of chronically poor groups, the capabilities approach could help focus attention on non-welfare based solutions that could address barriers to greater empowerment.

The capabilities approach is challenging to measure, and Sen himself notes that it is difficult to determine which capabilities are relevant. He argues that the capabilities approach is deliberately left incomplete because “insisting on one predetermined canonical list of capabilities chosen by theorists without any general social discussion or public reasoning is itself problematic.” Extensive qualitative fieldwork is needed to determine the relevant capabilities, and even then, there may be much unsolvable debate about which capabilities are most important. Moreover, unlike monetary-based approaches, measures based on capabilities are difficult to compare across countries and times.

One leading approach to measuring poverty in terms of capabilities is the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) developed by the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI). The MPI consists of ten indicators of poverty divided into three broad dimensions, and can be adapted for different needs. It defines poverty as experiencing 30 per cent or more of the weighted deprivations.

Kerala – The Value of Using a Capabilities Approach to Poverty

The Indian state of Kerala has made significant progress in improving life expectancy, literacy levels and standard of living, in spite of slow or stagnant economic growth over the past few decades. In 2005, Kerala had a poverty rate of 12 per cent against the Indian national average of 26 per cent.

Hallmarked as the “Kerala model” of development, its approach is holistic, rather than solely focused on monetary measures. For instance, the Kudumbashree Initiative launched by the Government of Kerala in 1997 focused on building capabilities by empowering poor, uneducated women; largely housewives from disadvantaged households. By organisng these women into neighbourhood groups that coordinated community self-help efforts and took ownership of local deprivation, the initiative improved gender-related social and political disadvantages.

This approach broke down barriers that limited the mobility and inclusion of members of the lower caste in Kerala. Initiatives focused on providing education and health care as well as employment opportunities that enabled disadvantaged groups to take action to improve their own well-being.

MULTIDIMENSIONAL POVERTY INDEX

Figure 1: See Multidimensional Poverty Index® Dimensions and Indicators of ‘MPI’.
Social exclusion may be more relevant in the developed world. In developing nations, the majority of the population may be struggling with inadequate provision of public services more generally, rather than the exclusion of a minority of people from social institutions and opportunities.

The MPI combines (a) incidence of poverty, or the proportion of people who are poor, and (b) intensity, or the average percentage of dimensions in which the poor are derived.

ii. Poverty as Social Exclusion

Another approach to assessing poverty is to view the issue, as one of exclusion “from the mainstream economic, political, and civic and cultural activities that are embedded in the very notion of human welfare.” This approach views access to labour markets, the education system, the political process and civic or cultural organisations as fundamental to wellbeing. Countries in Europe commonly discuss poverty from a social exclusion perspective. 14

In the Singapore context, our discussion group noted that a social exclusion analysis would be useful in understanding issues faced by particularly vulnerable groups such as PWDs, the elderly as well as the less visible groups such as single-headed households and social orphans. 15

One methodological approach to measuring degrees of social exclusion is the Social Exclusion Index developed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Based on the MPI, this index contains 24 indicators encompassing three dimensions:

a. Economic exclusion: deprivation in income and basic needs.

b. Exclusion from social services: exclusion from education and health services.

c. Exclusion from civic and social life: deprivation in political, cultural and social networks or participation.

The indicators were selected through a combination of academic and practitioner analysis, focus group discussions, national consultations, existing literature, and surveys such as the European Quality of Life survey. According to this index, an individual is socially excluded as single-headed households and social orphans.

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c. Exclusion from civic and social life: deprivation in political, cultural and social networks or participation.

For Singapore, PPAs would be valuable in surfacing the views of poor communities themselves on the unique issues and constraints they face. This approach could be relevant for many poor groups as there is a dearth of rigorous ground-up poverty research and such an approach could assist to uncover new ways of defining and addressing poverty amongst these communities.

There are a variety of methodological approaches that can be used for PPAs. Such subjective poverty measures could be based on surveys of households who stipulate the minimum level of income or consumption they consider to be “just sufficient” to allow them to live a minimally adequate lifestyle. Another form of measurement would involve constructing indicators of well-being and having individuals subjectively rate for themselves as “excellent”, “good”, etc. Individuals in poverty are those whose indicators of well-being are less than a particular level, say “sufficient”, for example. 21

Another variant of PPAs is to ask communities to identify who in their community is poor and to articulate why they regard them as poor. Researchers have often found considerable consensus on who is poor and have used this to further explore avenues out of poverty for this group. 21

One drawback of this approach is that individual perceptions may differ in response to the same real level of welfare. This approach is useful only if those surveyed share a comparable understanding of given levels of welfare. 23 PPAs can thus produce indicators that are comparable across similar communities, but these indicators are difficult to compare across countries.

iii. Participatory Poverty Assessments (PPA)

Both a way of conceptualising poverty and an empowering way to assess it, participatory poverty assessments (PPAs) rely on the community under study to define and measure poverty for itself, as well as examine the causes of poverty and identify possible solutions. 23

PPAs consider poverty to be culturally contextual and a “socially determined state”. 23 While official poverty lines reflect the views of researchers, and ultimately politicians and public administrators, PPAs take the view that it is more appropriate to ask the members of the focus community to define the level of resources needed to support a minimally adequate standard of living in a given community. 23

For Social Inclusion, PPAs are vital in surfacing the views of poor communities themselves on the unique issues and constraints they face. This approach could be relevant for many poor groups as there is a dearth of rigorous ground-up poverty research and such an approach could assist to uncover new ways of defining and addressing poverty amongst these communities.

Our ongoing research in this area suggests that although monetary measures of poverty have their limitations, they are still a simple and effective way to assess the depth of need in the population as a whole as well as to identify specific groups of people who are most unable to meet basic needs.

Combining this with a variety of non-monetary based approaches to measuring poverty would also have great value in providing a more nuanced understanding of poverty within specific communities. These would assist to shed light on the challenges facing such groups, and most importantly provide insight into approaches that could be applied to tackle root causes and drive lasting change.

Active defining and measuring poverty in this myriad of ways will result in greater recognition of existing needs within our community and of the scale of inequality and its impact on Singapore society as a whole. Most importantly, a deeper understanding of poverty can inform interventions to support those most in need, and provide a basis for accurately tracking the impact of these efforts.

“IN LIGHT OF RISING CONCERNS ABOUT INCREASING INEQUALITY, AND DEBATE ABOUT THE EXISTENCE, EXTENT AND NATURE OF POVERTY IN SINGAPORE, IT IS TIME FOR SINGAPORE TO JOIN COMPARABLE DEVELOPED NATIONS IN OFFICIALLY DEFINING AND MEASURING POVERTY.”

Conclusion

In light of rising concerns about increasing inequality, and debate about the existence, extent and nature of poverty in Singapore, it is time for Singapore to join comparable developed nations in officially defining and measuring poverty. We believe that most Singaporeans are not aware of the scale and depth of poverty in Singapore. The process of identifying a poverty line, and discussing how it is measured, will generate greater public support for efforts to address the needs of vulnerable communities. In addition, it will also focus the efforts of the government, the sector and philanthropists according to common indicators arising from locally identified needs.

For enquiries, email the Lien Centre for Social Innovation at liencentre@smu.edu.sg.

Endnotes

1 The Singapore resident population comprises households headed by Singapore citizens or permanent residents.

2 It is important to acknowledge at the outset that a complete picture of poverty and inequality in Singapore must include the experience of foreign workers. The analysis in this draft paper does not do this because we have relied on statistical measures of resident household income that cannot be compared to the little data that exists on foreign worker wages.

3 This dialogue session was convened by the Lien Centre for Social Innovation and involved many groups that have participated in the “Partnership Against Poverty” roundtables convened by Caritas that have taken place in 2012 and 2013.

4 For further information, please contact Sanushka Modalar, sanushka@smu.edu.sg, or Munza Md Kadir, munzamk@nus.edu.sg.

5 The Gini coefficient is an indicator of the level of inequality in an economy. It evaluates the actual distribution of income among individuals or households on a scale from 0 to 1, with 0 representing a situation in which all individuals or households within the economy are perfectly equal. The figures cited for the Gini are for original income from work and includes employers’ CPF contributions but does not take into account government benefits or taxes. See Department of Statistics, “Key Household Income Trends, 2012,” 12 www.singstat.gov.sg/Publications/publications_and_papers/key_income_and_expenditure/pp-19.pdf. Page 12, and also DOS, “Key Household Income Trends,” 2010: 7.


7 Ibid.


10 Mr Lim Hng Kiang, “Minimum Household Expenditure” Singapore Parliament Reports (Parliament No. 12, Session No. 1, Volume No. 12, 1-4-2012), http://opama.parl.gov.sg/search/ topic.jsp?currentTopic=ID=00077477W&currentPub ID=00077461W&AuthKey=00077461W=00077477 W_A,4%25d19%25507%2545x%2545x%2550951%253C%252B


12 Based on the income distribution by decile of employed households (i.e. households with at least one fully employed wage earner member); the bottom 6.8 per cent, or around 70,000 to 90,000 households, was estimated to earn less than $1,230-1,500 per month. (See Table 5, Resident Household Income from Work Including Employer CPF Contributions, 2000-2011, in “Key Household Characteristics and Income Trends, 2011.”) These households could be described as the
"working poor" — where the wages of full time breadwinners are insufficient to meet basic family needs without financial assistance. Making the assumption that half of the non-employed households with working age members are the unemployed poor adds another 20,000 poor households. And finally, assuming roughly half of retiree households whose CPF are poor (76 per cent according to CPF estimates), a further 20,000-30,000 retiree households would be unable to meet basic needs without family or state assistance.


16 Based on the latest available data for all households, the HES 2007/08.


20 The definition for relative poverty used in the OECD database is 50 per cent of median household income after taxes and transfers and adjusted for household size, see www.oecd.org/social/income-distribution-database.htm.


23 Note that in this and other references to approaches that could be relevant for certain poor groups that this listing is not exhaustive and the measure could be relevant for other poor groups as well.


32 Social orphans refer to youth who have no family support. These could include orphans but also youth whose families are not present or relevant in their lives.


36 Ibid.

37 This concept was originally developed in van Praag (1968) and used by Hagemann (1986) to derive a poverty measure.


40 The Singapore series was completed in May 2013, using a figure of S$2.22 (US$1.79) for food per day per person. As Singapore does not have an official poverty line, calculations here were based on the main public assistance (ComCare) monthly income threshold of S$550, and the proportion of household expenditure spent on food for the lowest one-fifth of households (12.12 per cent in 2007/08). For further information on ComCare, see “Measuring Poverty in Singapore,” page 58 to 66.

Read more about: The Poverty Line at www.thepovertyline.net.

The Poverty Line
A Visual Examination on What it Means to be Poor in Singapore

A pictorial essay by Stefan Chow and Lin Hui-Yi

Stefan Chow is grateful to be a witness through his camera. Chow has been awarded at various international photography competitions including the World Press Photo and Photographie de la Paris. His works have been exhibited in cities including New York, Paris, Milan, Beijing and Singapore.

Lin Hui-Yi is an economist by training and currently heads the China research operations of a global market research firm. Formerly with the Ministry of Trade and Industry in Singapore, she has a background in economic policy and seeks solutions that make social, environmental and commercial sense. She holds an MBA from Tsinghua University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

ONE FRAME. ONE PERSON. ONE DAY.

Through photos of daily amounts of food that could be bought if one’s income lies at the poverty line, the project creates a visual impact on the choices faced by a poor person in a country.

Starting off with China in 2010, the project has now covered 20 countries/regions across six continents; these include developed countries like Japan, USA, Germany and France, and developing countries like India, Thailand, Brazil and Madagascar. To mitigate data availability issues, methodologies were set up for developed and developing countries respectively. For developed countries, where there is relatively up-to-date household consumption data, the average daily amount of food that a person living at the poverty line would spend for food is used. For developing countries, the average daily amount that a person at the poverty line earns or spends is used. Food items are bought at the local markets and supermarkets.

The Singapore series was completed in May 2013, using a figure of S$2.22 (US$1.79) for food per day per person. As Singapore does not have an official poverty line, calculations here were based on the main public assistance (ComCare) monthly income threshold of S$550, and the proportion of household expenditure spent on food for the lowest one-fifth of households (12.12 per cent in 2007/08). For further information on ComCare, see “Measuring Poverty in Singapore,” page 58 to 66.
Ang Ku Kueh (Red Tortoise Cake)

Local white bread

Cinnamon and Star Anise

Chicken Rice
Brinjals

Pork Spinach

Rambutans

Spinach
ASSESSMENT-BASED NATIONAL DIALOGUE EXERCISES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOORS IN EAST AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

METHODOLOGY AND FINDINGS

The International Labour Organization conducted landmark studies in four Southeast Asian countries between 2011 and 2013 to come up with concrete recommendations for creating nationally defined social protection floors. Valerie Schmitt and Rachael Chadwick discuss the studies’ methodology and findings in a unique paper that sees its first publication in Social Space.

Valerie Schmitt is the social security specialist of the ILO Decent Work Team, based in Bangkok. She is responsible for the provision of policy and technical advice to over 20 ILO member states across Asia. She has previously worked for ILO’s social protection department in Geneva; a French consultancy firm specialised in the field of social protection and for a NGO on the development of micro health insurance in Africa. Valerie has over 16 years of experience in the field of social security and social protection.

Rachael Chadwick is currently working as a Social Protection Research Officer at the ILO Jakarta Office as part of the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development programme. Past research projects have included Indonesian and Russian democratisation, women, labour and migration in Southeast Asia; and providing country advice for migration and refugee cases for the Australian government.

Between 2011 and 2013, the International Labour Organization (ILO), in collaboration with governments and several United Nations agencies working as part of the Social Protection Floor Initiative (SPF-I), conducted four Social Protection Floor (SPF) assessment-based national dialogue (ABND) exercises1 in Southeast Asia.1 The exercises were undertaken to take stock of existing social protection realities in order to understand what elements of national SPFs were in place, where “holes” in national floors exist, and to propose recommendations for the further design and implementation of social protection provisions that would guarantee at least the SPF to the entire population.

This paper describes the methodology for conducting ABND exercises. The methodology was developed by the ILO in the Asia Pacific region and tested in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam. It is now being applied systematically throughout the region with a second round of assessments underway or planned in Lao PDR, Mongolia, Myanmar, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands.

The paper also provides an overview of the four completed ABND exercises and the resulting recommendations for achieving basic health care and income security for children, the working age population and the elderly, to provide a situational analysis of the SPF in each country. The results of preliminary calculations of the cost of implementing proposed policy options are also outlined.

While socio-political and economic contexts vary between and within Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam, ILO experts observed key parallels in the challenges to— and opportunities for—securing basic health care and income security for children, the working age population and the elderly. These findings not only have relevance for social protection and development agendas globally, but also illustrate how the SPF framework is a useful tool for policy-making, programme planning and analysis of poverty, and as an approach that incorporates the needs of vulnerable groups.

WHAT IS THE SPF AND WHAT IS ITS RELEVANCE TO POVERTY?

1. What are Social Protection Floors?

Social protection floors (SPFs) are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees that aim to prevent or alleviate poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion. By calling for both demand (transfers) and supply side (services) measures, the SPF adopts a holistic approach to social protection. Countries are encouraged to prioritise the implementation of SPFs as both a fundamental element of their national social security systems and as a starting point for provision of higher levels of protection to as many people as possible, and as soon as possible, in line with growing economic and fiscal capacity.

SPFs should comprise (at a minimum) the following nationally defined set of goods and services or basic social security guarantees:

- Access to essential health care, including maternity care, at a nationally defined minimum level that meets the criteria of availability, accessibility, acceptability and quality;
- Basic income security for children at a nationally defined minimum level including access to nutrition, education, care and any other necessary goods and services;
- Basic income security at a nationally defined minimum level for persons of active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in the case of sickness, unemployment, maternity or disability; and
- Basic income security at a nationally defined minimum level for older persons.

Defining the components of SPFs as “guarantees” that are minimum at the national level establishes a flexibility that makes the achievement of the floor compatible with all possible national social protection systems. The four guarantees set minimum performance or outcome standards with respect to the access, scope and level of income security and health care, rather than prescribing a specific architecture of social protection systems, programmes and benefits.

While not all countries will be able to immediately put in place all components for the whole population, the SPF provides a framework for planning progressive implementation of holistic social protection systems that emphasise linkages and symbiotic relationships between the different SPF guarantees.

The SPF also serves as a tool for the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including women and children, the disabled, the elderly, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

2. SPFs and the international context

The utility of the SPF approach in combating poverty has been increasingly recognised at the international level since the global financial crisis of 2007-2008. In 2009, the High Level Committee on Programmes of the UN Chief Executives Board adopted the SPF-I as one of several joint initiatives to combat and accelerate recovery from the global economic crisis. The SPF has also been highlighted by the Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors (G-20),2 and incorporated as a central pillar of the post-2015 UN development agenda for inclusive development.3

Building on this foundation, the International Labour Conference (ILC) adopted Recommendation 202 concerning National Floors of Social Protection (Social Protection Floors Recommendation) at its 101st session in 2012. Recommendation 202 reaffirms the role of social security as a human right and social and economic necessity, and provides guidance to countries in building SPFs within progressively comprehensive social security systems.4

3. SPFs in Southeast Asia

While the Asia Pacific region has made considerable economic progress in the last two decades and lifted millions out of poverty, not all have benefited from these gains. Millions of people are still poor, deprived of basic rights, and vulnerable to increased risks stemming from global economic crises and climate change. The threat that human development gains made in the past decade may be lost and begin to fall back is a key concern. In response, the Asian Development Bank has highlighted social protection high on the policy agenda in the region. At their 67th session in May 2011, member States of the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) passed a resolution on “Strengthening social protection systems in Asia and the Pacific.”5 At the 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting held in Kyoto, Japan, 4-7 December 2011, governments, employers, and workers from the Asia and Pacific Region determined that “building effective social protection floors, in line with national circumstances” was one of the key national policy priorities for the Asia and the Pacific Decent Work Decade.6 The recent adoption by ASEAN member states of the Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection confirms the growing regional importance of social protection.7

1 The SPF also serves as a tool for the empowerment of vulnerable groups, including women and children, the disabled, the elderly, and people living with HIV/AIDS.

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ABND exercises involve three main steps: (1) building the assessment matrix, (2) rapid assessment protocol (RAP), and (3) finalisation and endorsement of an ABND report.

**Step 1: Building the Assessment Matrix**

The assessment matrix lists and describes existing social security schemes for each of the four SPF guarantees, identifies policy gaps and implementation issues, and provides policy recommendations for further design and implementation of social protection provisions, with the aim of guaranteeing (at a minimum) the SPF to the entire population.

The completed assessment matrix answers the following questions:

- What is the social security situation in the country for each of the four SPF guarantees (access to health care and income security for children, the working age and the elderly)?
- For each guarantee, what are the different schemes? What are the planned schemes?
- For each scheme, what segments/percentages of the population are covered? What are the types of transfers (in cash, in kind, access to services)? What are the levels of benefits?
- Do legislative provisions (or lack thereof) exclude some segments of the population from social protection and/or social security schemes (are there policy gaps)?
- Are some parts of the population excluded in practice (implementation issues related to inclusion/exclusion errors, budgetary constraints or mismanagement)?
- What can be recommended to close policy gaps and solve implementation issues?

To build on the results of the assessment matrix, workshops involving all relevant stakeholders are organised, in addition to bilateral consultations.

**Assessment Matrices in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand & Viet Nam**

Assessment of the social protection situations in each country followed the ABND format, listing and describing existing provisions and policy and implementation gaps, and using them to formulate recommendations against each of the four SPF guarantees.

**Health**

The ABND exercise in Cambodia found that high out-of-pocket health expenditure in Cambodia were contributing to impoverishment, indebtedness and forced sale of livelihood assets for the poor and near-poor. Cambodia’s National Social Protection Strategy for the Poor and Vulnerable (NSPS-PV) promotes the extension of health protection for the poor and vulnerable through the expansion of health equity funds (HEFs) and community-based health insurance schemes. In line with this objective, the central policy option proposed for the extension of social health protection under the ILO’s Financial Assessment of the NSPS-PV was the extension of HEFs to all very poor and poor persons. Membership of HEFs ensures access to free medical services at public health facilities and other benefits that aim to remove secondary barriers to care such as transportation, cost of food for patients and family members during in-patient stays.

The Government of Indonesia committed to achieving universal health insurance coverage, commencing in early 2014, under the 2004 National Social Security System Law and 2011 Social Security Providers Law. Nevertheless, the ABND exercise noted that until this system is rolled out, around 41 per cent of the population remain uncovered by health insurance. Accordingly, the recommendations put forward relate to the form and level of benefits proposed under the new system (e.g., inclusion of some diseases currently excluded from existing schemes such as preventive and curative treatments for HIV), and the extension of benefits to progressively greater segments of the population (scenarios for extension to the very poor, poor, near-poor, vulnerable and informal economy workers).

Like Indonesia, Viet Nam also has committed to achieving health insurance by 2014. The ABND exercise did not identify any policy gaps in the Government’s strategy for achieving universal coverage; however the study questioned the feasibility of extending health care coverage to the 40 per cent of the population presently not covered—which mainly comprises informal economy workers—through voluntary insurance. Implementation gaps noted included issues with the quality and availability of healthcare services. Proposals to address implementation gaps included investments on the supply side in terms of staffing, equipment and consumables, and increased insurance subsidies for a large proportion of the uncovered population.

Although Thailand is the only country of the four to have achieved universal health coverage, the ABND exercise identified issues such as unequal distribution of healthcare facilities between rural and urban areas, quality of care issues in rural areas, and lack of coverage for undocumented migrant workers. Furthermore, the laws and institutions governing the health insurance system are fragmented, with some legislative conflicts. While no recommendations were made for additional social protection provisions in relation to health, the Thai ABND report did propose structural reforms and improved operations to make the health insurance system more unified and financially sustainable, including harmonisation of provider payment mechanisms and benefit packages, a legal review to propose solutions to conflicting legislation, and new measures to promote long term financial sustainability such as co-payments for non-essential services.

**Children**

While the range of existing social protection programmes targeting children varied across the four countries, the ABND exercises identified similar policy and implementation gaps, such as limited programme coverage, supply side issues like quality of education,
and problems with data management and beneficiary targeting. In all countries, the introduction of (or expansion of existing) cash transfer programmes were proposed as a means of achieving income security for children, reducing school dropout rates and fighting against child labour. In Cambodia, cash transfers for pregnant women who are poor, poor children and a universal child allowance were suggested. Similarly, in Indonesia the main recommendations for children were expansion of an existing conditional cash transfer scheme to more areas and recipient households, and calculating the cost of a universal child allowance. Design and implementation of a universal child support grant was also recommended in Thailand, and in Viet Nam both universal and targeted child benefit packages were proposed.

Furthermore, as in Indonesia, the almost total absence of social security coverage for informal workers was identified as a significant gap in income security for the working age population. The same problem was highlighted in Viet Nam; unemployment insurance and maternity protection is available only to a minority of workers in formal employment, limited to workers in formal enterprises of ten workers or more. This leaves approximately 90 per cent of the working age population without protection in case of unemployment. There is also no general income support for informal workers in Viet Nam, who comprise almost 70 per cent of workers.

Recommendations for achieving income security for the working age population in each country primarily related to the extension of existing, or introduction of new social security benefits, and improving linkages between employment creation programmes and social security schemes. In Indonesia, the establishment of a public works guarantee linked with vocational training was proposed for the informal sector. In Thailand, a combined benefit package comprising income support measures and mechanisms to increase employability and/or access to markets was suggested—this would involve an improved vocational training system and introduction of links between social protection and employment schemes. The ABND exercise in Viet Nam proposed an employment guarantee scheme for 100 days per household per year, including social assistance for those who are unable to work and access to training and employment services to facilitate return to work and creation of micro-enterprises. In Cambodia, in order to align with the NSPS-PV strategic objective of addressing seasonal employment, a nationwide public works programme targeting poor households, comprising 80 paid workdays per household, was proposed.

Each of the ABND exercises also identified shortcomings in social protection coverage for the disabled under existing schemes targeting the working age population. To address these deficiencies, additional measures were proposed. In Thailand, an increase to the Universal Non-Contributory Allowance for People with Disabilities was recommended; likewise in Indonesia, the extension of the existing non-contributory pension scheme to all people with severe disabilities was suggested. In Cambodia and Viet Nam, where disability is a major issue (affecting 1.4 per cent and 3.7 per cent of the respective populations), recommendations included a means-tested pension for the disabled in Cambodia, and the inclusion of social assistance for those unable to work in Viet Nam’s proposed employment guarantee scheme.

The ABND recommendations in Thailand and Cambodia also included the introduction of maternity benefits in the form of cash transfers to poor women who are pregnant (in Cambodia) and to women working in the informal economy who have just given birth (in Thailand). These proposed maternity benefits aim to compensate for loss of income during pregnancy and after delivery, to improve the health and nutritional status of mothers and newborn children, and to encourage (in the case of Thailand) an increase in fertility rates.

Common to all country ABND matrix results, was the finding that an insufficient proportion of the population was covered by old age benefits, which are limited for the most part to private sector and public service employees. Benefits, where they do exist, were found to be insufficient for achieving income security. In Indonesia for example, close to 90 per cent of all citizens are not covered by an old age benefit; and the lump sum payments received by pensioners in the private sector were found to provide inadequate protection. Lump sum benefits provided to pensioners under Section 40 of Thailand’s Social Security Act (a voluntary contributory scheme for informal sector workers) were likewise found to provide inadequate long-term protection, and old age pension levels will also be very low for some categories of formal sector workers due to low contribution rates. While Thailand also has a Non-Contributory Allowance for Older People not insured under other schemes, challenges to registration were identified, particularly for elderly persons living in remote areas, and protection has been limited by the absence of any automatic indexation of the benefit.

National pension coverage is also very low in Cambodia where only public-sector workers receive old age pensions. While a social security pension for the private sector is legislated for (though as yet not implemented), informal sector workers remain uncovered, resulting in high old age labour participation rates. In Viet Nam, a compulsory pension insurance scheme covers approximately 18 per cent of the workforce; other targeted social assistance programmes provide benefits for elderly persons aged 80 years and above and poor elderly aged 60 years and above and who have no relatives to rely on. The majority of informal sector workers have no protection in old age. Those elderly who are entitled to social pensions receive benefits below both the rural and urban poverty lines.

Recommendations stemming from the four ABND exercises accordingly focused on increasing benefit levels of and access to old age pensions. In Indonesia, the extension of a non-contributory pension to all vulnerable elderly was recommended, as was the establishment of a universal old age pension. Several options ranging from targeted to universal pensions were also proposed in Cambodia and Viet Nam. In Indonesia, it was suggested that the Non-Contributory Allowance for Older People should guarantee a certain level of income security through indexation of benefits against inflation or expression as a percentage of the poverty line.

The ILO RAP model is only suitable for assessing the cost-effectiveness of introducing the first type of recommendations. To facilitate the calculation process, broad policy recommendations were translated into specific policy options or scenarios. For instance, to calculate the cost of establishing a child support grant in Thailand, it was necessary to choose a number of parameters, such as:  
- Is it a universal or targeted child allowance?  
- Will it target poor children, very poor children, or other specific groups?  
- Which age groups are eligible (0-3 years of age, 0-6, or 6-11)?  
- What is the monthly amount of the allowance?  
- Is the allowance limited to a number of children per household?
ILO RAP MODEL STRUCTURE

The cost of implementing this kind of recommendation can be calculated using the ILO RAP model.

LABOUR MARKET MODEL
MACROECONOMIC MODEL
DEMOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK
GENERAL GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS MODEL
BENEFITS COSTING EXERCISE
SUMMARY AND RESULTS

From Step 1 to Step 2 (the Rapid Assessment Protocol)

Recommendations produced by the ABND exercise may be of two types:

i. Recommendations related to the expansion of the SPF:
   - Coverage (number of people/geographic);
   - Levels of benefits of existing non-contributory schemes; or
   - Introduction of new non-contributory programmes.

ii. Recommendations for:
   - New or expanded mandatory or voluntary social insurance (e.g., establish an unemployment insurance system);
   - The operation of and coordination between schemes (e.g., improve targeting mechanisms); or
   - Qualitative recommendations (e.g., improve the education system).

Calculating the cost of implementing this kind of recommendation requires in-depth studies (beyond the ABND exercise).

The ILO RAP model is only suitable for assessing the cost of introducing the first type of recommendations. To facilitate the calculation process, broad policy recommendations were translated into specific policy options or scenarios. For instance, to calculate the cost of establishing a child support grant in Thailand, it was necessary to choose a number of parameters, such as:

- Is it a universal or targeted child allowance?
- Will it target poor children, very poor children, or other specific groups?
- Which age groups are eligible (0-3 years of age, 0-6, or 6-11)?
- What is the monthly amount of the allowance?
- Is the allowance limited to a number of children per household?

Step 2 – Rapid Assessment Protocol (RAP) Model

After transforming broad policy recommendations into policy options or scenarios, the costs of proposed social protection provisions were estimated and forecast over a ten-year period using the ILO RAP model. This costing exercise aimed at providing an evidentiary basis for discussions on available fiscal space and government budget re-allocations, in turn helping with the prioritisation of possible social protection policy options.

ILO RAP model is an Excel tool including three types of sheets (refer to Figure 2).

In the first type of sheets (blue), a range of data was entered, including population data per single age and sex, together with population projections; male and female labour participation rates per age group; the economically active population; various economic indicators such as inflation rate, minimum wage, poverty line, GDP growth (used to calculate the cost of social protection provisions and to express the cost as a percentage of GDP); and information on government budget (used to express the cost estimates of proposed policy options as a percentage of government expenditure).

On the second type of sheets (green) each policy option was elaborated, with a choice of detailed parameters, and data from the first set of sheets was used to calculate the cost of introducing the policy options.

Sheets of the third type (red) present the final results of the RAP model. In all countries, several combined SPF benefit packages were developed and presented, including a choice between ‘low’ and ‘high’ cost packages, thus providing governments with several options. The results of the cost calculations and projections were expressed in national currency, as a percentage of GDP and as a percentage of government expenditure.

Preliminary fiscal space analysis was also conducted by adding the cost of the combined scenarios to the government budget, resulting, in most cases, in an unbalanced budget. Options to create fiscal space and finance the proposed policy options were also discussed.

Applying the RAP tool in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam

For each of the ABND recommendations that were translated into policy options/scenarios in each respective country, the RAP tool was used to calculate the cost of implementing the proposals as stand-alone initiatives, as well as part of consolidated packages to close the SPF. Results of the costing exercise for consolidated packages are presented below (for a full explanation of the policy options and scenarios listed below, refer to the reports in their entirety, as referenced in Endnote 3):

Cambodia

In Cambodia, individual policy proposals were calculated, on the basis of which the following combined low and high benefit packages were proposed⁴ (see report in Endnote 3 for explanation of options):

- Low combined benefit package: a maternity benefit targeting pregnant women (option 3); a cash transfer for poor children aged 0–2 (option 4); a Public Works Programme (PWP) targeting 10 per cent of extremely poor households (option 6); the extension of HEFs to all poor households (option 8); an old age pension for elderly poor aged 65 and above (option 10); and a disability pension for the poor (option 12).
- High combined benefit package: a universal maternity benefit (option 3u); a universal child allowance for children aged 0–2 (option 4u); a PWP targeting 10 per cent of poor households (option 7); the extension of HEFs to all poor households (option 8u); a universal old age pension for elderly aged 65 and above (option 10u); and a universal disability pension (option 12u).

Based on these two combinations, the cost of a complete SPF package for Cambodia was projected at between 0.4 per cent and 2.4 per cent of GDP by 2020.
For the Indonesian costing exercise, two possible combinations of schemes were proposed—a “low” and a “high” scenario comprising consolidated packages of proposed benefits” (see report in Endnote 3 for explanation of scenarios):

- **Low combined benefit package**: extension of health insurance to all poor and vulnerable at third class moderate level (health scenario 1); preventive HIV treatment for the most at-risk population and curative care for all people living with HIV/AIDS, including mother to child transmission protocols (health scenarios 6 and 8); extension of the cash transfer programme to all poor children (children scenario 1); establishment of a PWP linked with vocational training targeting 25 per cent of informal economy workers by 2020 (working age scenario 1); extension of non-contributory disability allowance to all people with severe disabilities (elderly and disabled scenario 1); and extension of a non-contributory pension to all vulnerable elderly aged 60 years and above (elderly and disabled scenario 2).

- **High combined benefit package**: provision of first class health insurance benefits to the entire informal economy population (health scenario 5); preventive HIV treatment for the sexually active population and curative care for all people living with HIV/AIDS, including mother to child transmission protocols (health scenarios 7 and 8); establishment of a universal child allowance (children scenario 3); establishment of a PWP linked with vocational training targeting 25 per cent of informal economy workers by 2020 (working age scenario 1); extension of the non-contributory disability allowance to all people with severe disabilities (elderly and disabled scenario 1); and establishment of a universal pension for all elderly aged 55 years and above (elderly and disabled scenario 3).

Based on these two combinations, completing the SPF in Indonesia was calculated to cost between 0.74 per cent and 2.45 per cent of GDP by 2020.

As in the Indonesian and Cambodian costing exercises, a “high” and a “low” scenario for combining proposed schemes were considered in Thailand (see Endnote 3 for explanation of scenarios):

- **Low combined benefit package**: establishment of a universal child support grant for all children aged 0-3 (children scenario 1); introduction of a maternity allowance for all women working in the informal sector, a sickness benefit for all informal economy workers, a vocational training programme for informal economy workers including an allowance for the poor, and an increased disability allowance benefit (working age scenarios 1, 2, 3 and 4); and indexation of benefits under the government’s universal non-contributory old age allowance (old age scenario 1).

- **High combined benefit package**: establishment of a universal child support grant for all children aged 0-12 (children scenario 5); introduction of a maternity allowance for all women working in the informal sector, a sickness benefit for all informal economy workers, a vocational training programme for informal economy workers including an allowance for the poor, and an increased disability allowance benefit (working age scenarios 1, 2, 3 and 4); and an alternative non-contributory allowance for older people with benefits expressed as a percentage of the nationally defined poverty line (old age scenario 2).

Based on the two package options, completing the SPF in Thailand would cost an estimated 0.50 to 1.21 per cent of GDP by 2020.
In Viet Nam, costing exercises were carried out for four different social protection packages comprising different combinations of proposed benefits. The ‘high’ and ‘low’ scenarios for combining proposed schemes are summarised below (see report in Endnote 3 for explanation of scenarios):

- **Low combined benefit package**: a targeted child benefit for all poor children limited to two children per family (scenario 2b); a targeted old-age pension benefit at the level of the poverty line for all uncovered elderly (scenario 1); and an employment guarantee scheme of 100 days per household per year combined with social assistance for those who are unable to work plus employment and training services including training allowances to facilitate return to employment and creation of micro-enterprises (working age scenario).

- **High combined benefit package**: a universal child benefit (scenario 1); a universal old-age pension, with reduced benefit level if receiving a pension from the contributory social insurance scheme (scenario 2); and an employment guarantee scheme of 100 days per household per year combined with social assistance for those who are unable to work plus employment and training services including training allowances to facilitate return to employment and creation of micro-enterprises (working age scenario).

Based on the two package options, closing the SPF in Viet Nam would cost an estimated 1.98 and 6.06 per cent of GDP by 2020.

### Affordability and Fiscal Space

The ABND exercises additionally included some preliminary analysis of the affordability of the proposed recommendations.

The social protection schemes proposed as a result of the ABND exercises are feasible only if and when the country concerned can afford to fund new social protection benefits. Affordability is assessed by calculating the cost of the new social protection schemes and comparing it with GDP. If the estimated cost of implementing a proposed social protection scenario is 1 per cent of GDP for instance, it may be argued that the country in question can afford to extend the additional social protection benefits.

Depending on policy choices and the social model of the country, additional expenditures may be:

- Fully financed through social contributions (made by workers and employers);
- Fully or partially financed from government budget. In such cases it is important to assess whether the government can afford these additional expenditures, i.e. whether there is sufficient fiscal space.

Fiscal space is defined for the purposes of this exercise as the budgetary capacity of a government to provide resources for a desired purpose without jeopardising the sustainability of its financial position or the stability of the economy. In cases where budgetary capacity is not sufficient, the government may create additional fiscal space by raising corporate income tax, value added tax or personal income tax, borrowing from international institutions or markets, or cutting down on low priority expenses. However, borrowing beyond a certain extent has to be carefully considered, as it may compromise macroeconomic sustainability in the long term.

### Technical validation

Technical validation includes the confirmation of the description of the social security situation (the assessment matrix), endorsement of the proposed social protection scenarios and validation of the parameters and assumptions used in the cost calculations. The technical validation process can be quite lengthy and time consuming, given the number of actors involved—particularly the number of relevant ministries: health, education, labour, social affairs, planning, finance and so on. In Thailand, a national coordination mechanism was helpful in speeding up the process; the National Commission on Social Welfare—which includes representatives of all relevant line ministries—coordinated and compiled all technical comments on the draft report.

While stakeholders involved in the technical validation process may have some influence, they may not be in a position to make final decisions on future or additional social protection provisions. As such, political endorsement was also necessary to ensure that ministerial level stakeholders would endorse major policy changes. Furthermore, as the recommendations included in the ABND reports relate to more than one guarantee of the social protection floor, decisions on the most relevant or priority scenarios for a country cannot be made by one ministry alone, but require the approval of several line ministries. Therefore in addition to specific line ministries (health, education, social affairs, labour), it was necessary to secure the support of the respective prime ministers’ offices, ministries of finance and ministries of planning.

The endorsement process may involve:

- Bilateral meetings with high level policy-makers to explain the recommendations and seek their support;
- Inviting high level policy-makers to write an acknowledgement of the report;
- Organising a high-level launch event for the report with press coverage;
- Developing a number of tools (videos, leaflets) to explain the main recommendations of the report;
- Involving civil society networks, workers’ and employers’ representatives to advocate for some of the recommendations.

### Step 3: Finalisation and Endorsement of the ABND Reports

Subsequent to formulation of the social protection recommendations and their costing using the RAP model, proposals were shared with government representatives, workers, employers, and civil society organisations with a view to technically validating the report and receiving political endorsement.

In Thailand, for example, the ILO presented the report to the Prime Minister’s Office and relevant permanent commissions or the National Commission on Social Welfare for endorsement and political support. The endorsement process included high-level political meetings with ministers, cabinet secretaries, and other stakeholders, who provided their support and recommendations for future policies.
launch and their agreement to write an acknowledgement for the report. The report was launched at Government House by the Minister attached to the Office of the Prime Minister, together with the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Social Development and Human Security. More than 300 participants representing the Royal Thai Government, Thai workers’ and employers’ organisations, civil society, academia, embassies and international organisations attended the event. This major event lent high visibility to ILO’s work in Thailand, and paved the way for future collaboration between the UN Country Team in Thailand and the Royal Thai Government in further supporting the recommendations of the ABND report.

In Indonesia, the ILO presented the final report to the Vice Minister of National Development (Bappenas) and gained support from Bappenas for a joint launch of the assessment report on 6 December 2012. The recommendations and cost projections contained in the report were recognised by the government as useful tools to inform ongoing policy discussions in the framework of the implementation of the new social security law (Sistem Jaminan Sosial Nasional, SJN) as well as the further extension of social protection in Indonesia. It has consequently become the first ILO member state to pursue concrete follow-up action immediately after the adoption of the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) at the 101st International Labour Conference. The ILO together with the relevant members of the United Nations Partnership for Development Framework (UNPDF) sub-working group on social protection are now using the assessment report to advocate for government endorsement of some of the recommendations. Some progress has already been achieved with the inclusion of the ABND report’s recommendations on HIV-sensitive social protection in the Health Ministry’s strategy to combat HIV and AIDS. In addition, Bappenas requested the publication of 500 additional copies of the report for wide dissemination across line ministries and provincial governments.

CONCLUSION

The ABND exercises carried out in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam produced useful baseline surveys of the social protection situation in each country, in turn enabling identification of policy and implementation gaps in line with the four guarantees of the social protection floor, as set out in ILO Recommendation 202. The assessment matrices informed the development of both policy proposals and costing models for implementing measures to close social protection gaps in each country. While these products – the ABND matrix, list of implementation/policy gaps, policy proposals, costing exercises and fiscal space analyses – are important and useful within each country for governments and other stakeholders as they pursue national social protection priorities and policy planning, the ABND model has broader relevance for other countries seeking to improve their social protection environments.

The use of a national dialogue with representatives from government, non-government, workers’ and employers’ organisations to produce the ABND matrix allows the social protection situation to be captured from a range of perspectives and enables progressive consensus-building on key social protection ideas in line with the four SPF guarantees. This facilitates a holistic definition of a national SPF that aligns with the visions of different segments of society – and thus will vary from one country to another.

The ABND approach, combined with the RAP costing tool, additionally acknowledges that any policy options proposed to close the social protection gaps identified must be translated into policy scenarios that the country can afford, while allowing flexibility for schemes to be progressively extended as resources become available. As such, the ABND model is suitable for and adaptable to a range of country contexts both within and beyond the Southeast Asian region.

The ILO is continuing to promote the ABND approach and methodology through:

- Provision of technical and policy guidance to stakeholders involving similar social protection assessment exercises in other countries;
- Development of a Good Practices Guide for conducting ABNDs to be used as a training resource for policy-makers and to inform the conduct of social protection assessments at country level; and
- Organisation of hands-on training workshops on the SPF at country and regional levels.

The Good Practices Guide will be part of a global effort by the ILO to develop good practices on social security - one of the key goals of the ILO’s Social Security for All strategy.11

These efforts will contribute to the development of a comprehensive knowledge base on the social protection situation in Asia and consequently, to the further development of national SPFs in all Asian countries (and beyond) in the coming years. ■

Endnotes

The endnotes in this article are published in its original format as requested by the authors.

1 The authors wish to acknowledge the authors of the SPF assessment reports upon which this paper is based, namely Michele Arnot, Orawan Prasitsiriphol, Marcia Mazerikate, Jean-Claude Hennirott, Wolfgang Schola, Sinta Satriana, Dr Thaworn Sukaphanbut, Oswan Prasitsiriphol, and the many others who contributed to the compilation and production of each respective report.

2 The ABND exercises were supported by the ILO-Korea partnership programme, Government of the Netherlands, Government of Finland, UN Office for South-South Cooperation, Grand Duchy of Luxembourg and ILO-European Union project.


5 The Initiative supports countries to plan and implement sustainable social protection schemes and essential social services. A global coalition was built to work on SPF-I, comprising UN agencies, the IMF and World Bank, development partners and leading NGOs. For further information on the SPF coalition and advisory group, see ‘About the Social Protection Floor’, Social Protection Floor Gateway website (undated) www.socialprotectionfloor-gateway.org [accessed 22 July 2013] and ‘The Social Protection Floor’. Global Extension of Social Security (GES) website, 2013, www.socialsecurityextension.org/gimi/gesShowTheme.do?tid=1121 [accessed 22 July 2013].

6 The final communique of the G20 meeting in November 2011 acknowledged ‘the importance of social protection floors in each of our countries, adopted to national situations’, G20 Heads of State Meeting in Cannes, 3-4 November 2011; Final Communiqué, para 6 (G20, 2011), available at: www.g20.org/documents/ [accessed 22 July 2013].


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11 The ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection was adopted at the Eighth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development held in Siem Reap, Cambodia on 6 September 2013. The declaration will be submitted to Leaders at the 3rd ASEAN Summit in October 2013 in Brunei Darussalam. The Declaration affirms that everyone, especially those who are poor, at risk, persons with disabilities, older persons, out-of-school youth, children, migrant workers and other vulnerable groups are entitled to equitable access to social protection that is a basic human right. See: Joint Statement of the Eight ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (8th AMMSWD), 6 September 2013, available at: http://www.asean.org/news/asean-statement-communique/item/joint-statement-of-the-eighth-asean-ministerial-meeting-on-social-welfare-and-development-8th-ammswd

12 The RAP uses a simple methodology that builds on single age population projections, single age estimates of labour force participation rates, along with a relatively crude economic scenario determined by assumptions about overall GDP growth, productivity, inflation, wages and poverty rates. The model uses these variables as drivers of expenditure and revenues starting from initial statistical values given for the last observation years.

13 This following section summarises some of the key findings from the ABND exercises carried out in Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand and Viet Nam. Please see the full ABND reports as referenced in Endnote 3 for the full assessment matrices and findings.

14 There is no single accepted definition of what constitutes a public works programme, however for the purposes of this paper and the ILOs approach, the following definition is appropriate: ‘Public Works Programmes (PWP) refer to the more common and traditional public employment programmes; although these may be a temporary response to specific shocks and crises, public works programmes can also have a longer-term horizon. Cash and food for work programmes are included in this term’. See Lieu-Kim-Song, M. and Philip, K., Mitigating a Jobs Crisis: Innovation in Targeted Employment Programmes, Employment Sector Employment Report No. 6 (ILO, Geneva, 2010) Available at www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/documents/publication/wcms_144973.pdf

15 Indexation refers to the adjustment of benefits according to measures such as the Consumer Price Index (CPI), a statistical estimate constructed using the prices of a sample of consumer goods and services purchases by households and used as a measure of inflation. Thus to index social security benefits allows for the adjustment of benefit levels in response to the impact of inflation has on their real value.

16 For the full list of policy options costed and details of calculations/combined benefit scenarios, see pp. 13-27 of Hennicot, J-C (2012), op. cit.

17 For the full list of policy options costed and details of calculations/combined benefit scenarios, see pp. 59-73 of Satitana, S. and Schmitt, V. (2012), op. cit.

18 For the full list of policy options costed and details of calculations/combined benefit scenarios, see pp. 52-70 of Schmitt, V., Sakunphanit, Dr. T. and Prasitsiriphol, O. (2013), op. cit.

19 For the full list of policy options costed and details of calculations/combined benefit scenarios, see pp. 25-31 of Cichon, M.; Bonnet, F.; Schmitt, V.; Galian, C.; Mazeikaite, G. (2012), op. cit.


21 Point (i) of ‘The role of the ILO and follow up states that the ILO will develop in cooperation with ILO constitutes a social security good practices guide that provides member States with practical guidance and benchmarks to evaluate and enhance their national social protection provisions, including general and financial social security management, benefit design and good governance’. See: ILO, Social security for all: Building social protection floors and comprehensive social security systems, The strategy of the International Labour Organization, p. 25 (ILO Social Security Department, Geneva, 2012), available at: www.ilo.org/sectsoc/information-resources/publications-and-tools/books-and-reports/WCMS_SECSOC_34188/lang--en/index.htm [accessed 21 August 2013]

22 Preliminary social protection assessment activities have been initiated or are planned for Laos, Myanmar, Mongolia, the Solomon Islands, and Vanuatu.
UNMET NEEDS IN PORTUGAL

TRADITION AND EMERGING TRENDS

An in-depth study on the unmet needs in Portugal was conducted by Tecnologia, Educação, Saúde e Engenharia (TESE) with Dinamia-CET from the Lisbon University Institute from 2008 to 2010. Helena Gata and Sara Almeida offer us the first English translation on its findings and update us on the programmes created in response to the needs and vulnerable groups identified.

In TESE since 2006, Helena Gata is currently the national area director. She has extensive experience in managing and coordinating projects, in education and health areas. Helena has a degree in Sociology, a Master’s degree in Development and International Cooperation and she participated in INSEAD Social Entrepreneurship Programme, INSEAD (Singapore). (email: h.gata@tese.org.pt)

In TESE since 2007, Sara Almeida is currently Project Coordinator of ORIENTA-TV—a project that promotes social and professional inclusion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Sara participated in the study “Needs in Portugal—Tradition and Emerging Trends”. She has a Bachelor or Arts degree in Sociology and PG degree in Economics and Public Policy. (email: s.almeida@tese.org.pt)

In 2008, Tecnologia, Educação, Saúde e Engenharia (TESE) developed the study “Unmet Needs in Portugal—Tradition and emerging trends.” The purpose of this study was to identify opportunities for investment in creative and socially innovative responses to unmet needs in the country.

In the last five decades, Portugal underwent social changes at a frantic pace never before recorded. Between 1960 and 2000, several social structuring systems became national; and the State Social Protection Programme which ensured minimum rights for the most vulnerable.4 However, despite the unquestionable occurrence of quantitative social progress, Portugal continues to be a country marked by strong social inequalities. Her full economic potential is also not being recognised, and this is especially apparent when compared to the other countries in the European Union (EU). It is common to hear from different authors that Portugal is a country of contrasts, and it is in the heart of the paradoxes and tensions that new challenges and needs arise.

The current economic crisis is shaping a new Portuguese society, changing the future of generations to come. The universally legitimised Structural Adjustment Programme imposed by the International Monetary Fund during the last three years seems to have pinned her down to her incorrigible past rather than assisted her in moving forward into the future.

Contrary to what one might expect, the public social policies, mainly because of their tendency to be less dynamic, have not succeeded in anticipating emerging social trends. The approach has been reactive; like a sedative, it is merely a temporary measure in treating problems in a context of never-ending emergencies.

Indeed, it is the capacity to anticipate future needs that will ensure societal prosperity, life quality and social cohesion in the country.

NEEDS – AN OPERATIVE NOTION

The notion of need is a broad one, especially when considering the complexity of the term “human need”. This study adopts an operative notion of needs: something reporting to a multidimensional set of elements (not simply associated with the physical survival of individuals). The poor or unsatisfactory provision of this set of elements can cause harm to people, families and society—physical, psychological or social damage. It also hampers the full social integration of individuals, and disrupts and harms the optimisation of individual and collective life opportunities.

This study assumes that needs are generated by the non-achievement of individual aspirations/expectations, through a mismatch between opportunities and capabilities, in a dynamic process between the social context of action and the individual. (See Figure 1)

On one hand, there are needs that can be recognised, and with regard to these needs, there is a “perception of absence” by the individual or society. On the other hand, there are needs that cannot be recognised, and these assume a “latent absence.” In the case where needs are recognised, there can be further conformation/adaptation to the manifested absence by the individual, allowing these needs to later also assume a latent absence.

The “non-satisfaction” of either recognised needs or latent ones can cause harm (physical, psychological and social), and this is the practical expression of needs. Based on a plural and non-hierarchical typology of needs, we identified four major types of needs:

- Physical needs and resources—material conditions associated with guaranteeing survival and avoiding deprivation (economic resources, shelter and housing conditions, access to employment and work conditions, health and environmental safety);
- Needs for skills and capabilities—skills and aptitudes necessary for taking part in society and exercising freedom and the possibility of influencing and managing change(s);
- Social and relationship needs—relationship needs (friendship, work, family, relatives), feelings of belonging, emotional support, advice, understanding—the need for others, participation in the local community, building personal and social identities;
- Personal development and well-being needs—The need for recognition, personal fulfilment, well-being, and happiness.
**UNMET NEEDS**

**NATIONAL SURVEY – A GLIMPSE OF THE KEY FINDINGS**

Despite the rapid economic growth of Portugal in the last quarter of the 20th century, the current financial crisis was reflected in the perceptions of the population in a 2008 survey, where physical needs and resources featured predominantly.

The results of the survey led to the following conclusions:

- A fifth of respondents live below the poverty line and reveal difficulties in paying household bills, purchasing food and providing for schoolchildren. The results show that 57 per cent of households surveyed live on less than €900 per month and 42 per cent admit they cannot afford to enjoy the whole period of sick leave, while 12 per cent acknowledged having no money to buy medicines they needed.

- Despite enjoying their work, respondents are dissatisfied with their salary levels. The survey shows that 41.3 per cent of the Portuguese workers live in a situation of precarious employment, and over 50 per cent consider their payment unfair.

- The life satisfaction reaches, on average, 6.6 on a scale of 1 to 10. The degree of happiness reaches 7.3 on the same scale, revealing a gap between the perception of the objective conditions of life and perception of well-being.

- Family and friends are the main factors for life satisfaction of respondents;

- Trust in others and institutions is very low: trust in others reaches on average 4.5 on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 is assumed to be “I am able to trust in most people.”

Judging by the recent statistics in PORDATA 2013, the global situation is not getting better. Unemployment rate increased by approximately 8 per cent (Portugal is now facing an unemployment rate of 20 per cent, with a youth unemployment rate of 42 per cent), anticipat- ing an aggravation of the demand of resources to satisfy physical needs. As reported in Observatorio Português Dos Sistemas De Saúde, about 30 per cent of respondents said they had stopped taking medication or had increased the spacing between doses, while 69 per cent of the patients replaced the usual drugs with cheaper alternatives due to economic difficulties. Household disposable income fell for the first time in 50 years, according to INE and PORDATA 2013.

**VULNERABLE PROFILES**

In addition to the quantitative mapping of needs in Portugal, TESE’s study sought to deepen our understanding of the relationship between the (dis)satisfaction of needs and the daily lives of vulnerable groups in Portuguese society, through six studies. The various studies allowed us to identify the constraints experienced by respondents and the strategies they pursue to address the constraints. We also highlight the spaces of mismatch between strategies and opportunities for possible future actions of the public, private and third sectors.

1. **Sandwiched Families**

Sandwiched families are characterised by existing at levels of income slightly above the official poverty line, having difficulty meeting their needs and finding themselves in a vacuum of social protection. They are not poor families, but neither do they have enough resources to meet basic needs (i.e., housing, education, food). Respondents perceived themselves as lacking protection in relation to other socio-economically more vulnerable groups, and revealed a dire lack of financial support for their university education plans or those of their child/ren’s education.

2. **Overloaded Workers**

The study focused on the life conditions of individuals who work more than 10 hours a day and find themselves torn between work and family. It also identified low salaries in occupations with lower qualifications as the factor hindering the reduction of working hours and causing work overload for the employee. Furthermore, the pressure to invest time at work and the existence of a “long-working-hour culture” in many work environments hinders the adoption of family-friendly working hours. On the other hand, childcare services rarely coordinate with parents’ long working hours, thereby demonstrating a lack of strategies for reconciliation of work and family life.

3. **Individuals with Small-scale Economic Activities**

This study refers to individuals who develop small-scale economic activities at risk of extinction (e.g., subsistence agriculture and handicrafts). These individuals attempt to reconcile work and family life. Respondents complained about the excessive bureaucratic burden associated with the economic regulatory system, difficulty in accessing EU funds, insufficient support given to the economic activity (mostly during start-up and early developmental phases) and the lack of technical support in bureaucratic processes for new business initiatives.

4. **Adults in Training Transition**

The study analysed the impact that the upgrade on skill levels had on graduates from areas with low employability, and adults who participate in additional training programmes (namely those adults from the extension school programme “New Opportunities”). The individual’s goals and opportunities reflect scepticism with regard to their perception of opportunities available (e.g., constant complaints on the lack of job opportunities for recent graduates or a sceptical view of the New Opportunities Programme).”

5. **Adults in Transition to Retirement**

This group is characterised by individuals who recently retired (for a period of six to twelve months). Included here are individuals forced into retirement (situations such as unemployment, contract ending, company closures, etc.) and individuals who voluntarily opted for early retirement. Respondents recognised that the older generations and their pensions represented a heavy burden for future generations and that they feared being affected by a general worsening of living conditions in society.

6. **Isolated Elderly**

This study attempted to unveil the reality of individuals aged over 75 years old who live in social and/or geographical isolation. It identified a lack of public policies supporting informal caregivers. There is inadequate infrastructure across the country for the third age (elderly) and this is a reflection of policies that assume a standard provision for all groups of people.
PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PORTUGAL

Fulfilling the coveted goal, the study “Unmet Needs in Portugal” identified four areas of action that incorporate a set of recommendations in order to inform and influence the intervention of the public, private and third sector.

- Axis 1 – Support and reinforce the role of the labour market not only as a prime factor in the satisfaction of physical needs and resources, but also as a source of space for the exercise of social rights, mobilising the construction of a personal and social identity.

- Axis 2 – Customise and innovate public policies affecting the vulnerable groups identified.

- Axis 3 – Promote resilience and empowerment of vulnerable populations in order to trigger change in power relations.

- Axis 4 – Promote trust as the basis for social cohesion and ingredient of an active and sound citizenship.

In light of the recommendations and the need to take into account the specific nature of needs of the most vulnerable groups, TESE created new answers in tandem with some of the recommendations in the four axes, thus contributing to sustainable development in Portugal.

In Axis 1 and 3, we developed solutions aimed at creating equity, social cohesion, employment and quality of life with a special focus on youth, promoting resilience and triggering capacity. Having predicted in 2008 a rampant growth in youth unemployment (from 20 per cent in 2008 to 42 per cent in 2013), TESE developed projects to better prepare youngsters for the labour market which has become increasingly competitive. Between 2008 and 2010, TESE created two projects called ORIENTA-TE and Faz-te Forward in response to the need for social cohesion and competitiveness of Portuguese society. These projects offer support to young people who have limited opportunities, and attempt to counter the phenomenon of local disintegration.

Another interesting example that has resulted from Axis 2—Customise, innovate and integrate public policies, takes into account the dimension of public policies and the steering-up of civil society. The Unmet Needs Study made reference to the importance of empowering third sector organisations through the implementation of tools and training programmes, new processes and innovative skills for increasing efficiency and social impact of organisations when answering needs. They also aim at facilitating the emergence and dissemination of good practices that work to address social goals, strengthening organisational culture, developing operational efficiency and establishing transparency in practice. These organisations will develop into accountable agents and have a say in the discussion, development, and implementation of solutions for social problems.

In 2012, several organisations from the public, private and third sector decided to create a new project to fulfill needs from the third sector, improve performance and deliver better services. The Melhor Ação e Inovação Social (MAIS Project) or Better Action and Social Innovation (shown, for example, by the high rate of economic inequality). Simultaneously, according to the European Commission Portugal 2008, she has one of the lowest levels of competitiveness and creativity compared to other European countries. As such, a commitment to develop and nurture talent in disadvantaged youth will increase social cohesion by enhancing equal access to opportunities in these groups. This will strengthen the competitiveness of the country, to the extent that “the promotion of equal opportunities propels economic growth by mobilising resources that were previously blocked due to discrimination and social exclusion.” Both projects (ORIENTA-TE and Faz-te Forward) aim to support the potential of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, providing them with the skills, knowledge and social networks, to enable them to develop their talent and act as agents of change in their lives and that of their communities. These projects involve coaching, mentoring, job shadowing and other interactive programmes. The results obtained by both projects have been encouraging: among those who attended Faz-te Forward, the success rate in employment exceeds 60 per cent, while those attending ORIENTA-TE have seen the success rate surpassing 50 per cent.

There are multiple complex problems, but it has been recognised that the lack of equal access to opportunities triggers and aggravates those problems. As stated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Solidarity or MTSS in the official document of the National Strategy for Social Protection and Inclusion, “a society with greater social cohesion and less exclusion may... contribute to improve the competitiveness, create better conditions for the economy to strengthen and grow more and in a sustainable way.”

Reflecting on this link between social cohesion and competitiveness, Portugal is one of the countries in the EU with comparatively lower levels of social cohesion in response to Axis 4—promote trust as the basis for social cohesion and ingredient of an active and sound citizenship, and was the creation of the Francisco Manuel dos Santos Foundation in 2009. Its main objective is to “encourage the study of the Portuguese reality, in order to contribute to the development of society, the strengthening of citizens’ rights and the improvement of public institutions.” Under the motto, that access to information promotes independence and freedom of choice, numerous studies on all sorts of subjects have already developed, and this institution provides public data and develops debates and discussion on current problems of Portuguese society.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study “Needs in Portugal: tradition and emerging trends” serves as a useful technical support to the planning of answers aimed at responding in innovative ways to emerging needs and new contours assumed by traditional needs (e.g., health, employment, housing, etc.) in the context of profound change and instability.

It has been three years since the completion of the study, and the economic and financial situation of the country has improved increasingly fragile, given the stringent pressure from financial markets. In April 2011, the country negotiated for a financial bailout with Troika (The European Commission, International Monetary Fund and European Central Bank) aimed at “restoring confidence in the banking and public sectors, as well as supporting growth and employment.”

The tensions generated by the ongoing economic downturn, as well as the results of the fiscal readjustments imposed upon the country, have clearlyaggravated the needs already identified—either related to areas of physical needs or resources, skills or ability, the socioeconomic affective aspect, personal development or well-being.

In the last three years, other highly vulnerable groups may have arisen or we may have witnessed a sharpening of the needs of previously targeted groups, such as sandwiched families and small-scale economic activities entrepreneurs. However, the study’s recommendations remain relevant and pertinent.

Today, even after three years, Portugal requires concerted responses to its citizens’ growing and stringent needs—we want and need innovative and integrated answers stemming from coordinated efforts involving the public, private and third sectors.

Change is happening. •

Endnotes

1 In English, TESE stands for Technology, Education, Health and Engineering.


4 Ibid, 72.


6 PORDATA is the database source for official and certified statistics about Portugal and Europe. See PORDATA (2013) – Base de Dados de Portugal, www.pordata.pt/Portugal.


9 New Opportunities Programme was a national initiative of the Portuguese government to facilitate access to education in order to increase rates of education in Portugal.

10 The concept encompasses the erosion of resources, under- or over-utilisation of local resources, socio-political and communicative disintegration (i.e., it can also be understood as the absence of forms of collective action aimed at solving local problems, namely, the promotion of access to employment). http://opac.ifbf.pt:8080/images/winlibimg. enx?key&dco=73286&img=426.


16 UDFFS-Porto is the name of the District Union of Charitable Institutions: There are a few in the main cities in Portugal. UDFFS-Porto is in Oporto and represents more than 300 charities from the north of Portugal.


18 European Commission, 2013.
In June 2013, a High Level Panel appointed by the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon called on UN member states to adopt a sustainable development agenda that will “Leave No One Behind.” Michael Switow shares civil society’s analysis of this report, taking a look at what it got right, what was wrong and where it missed out altogether.

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A global conversation is underway—from rural villages and capital cities across Africa, Asia and Latin America to the UN headquarters in New York City—to create a new development framework: one which should encompass issues that are intricately linked. A range of environmental and social problems—from war, poverty, economic and financial crises—are known that the major crises facing our planet—climate change, poverty, war, economic and financial crises—are intricately linked. “It is man-made and can be overcome and eradicated by the actions of human beings.”

The Millennium Development Goals

At the end of the last century, UN members tried to address these issues with the adoption of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), a set of eight interlinked concrete time-bound targets to halve extreme poverty, improve access to education, promote gender equality, address serious diseases and more.

While the Millennium Declaration was well-received, the MDGs themselves were derided by many observers at the time as the “Minimalist Development Goals,” because even if the targets were met, half of the people living in extreme poverty would still be impoverished. Focusing on specific diseases and health issues like malaria and HIV/AIDS could be at the expense of social safety nets and other social services. The decision to focus on wealthier countries, the “Global Partnership for Development,” lacks binding commitments.

Despite these and other shortcomings, the MDGs have made an impact. The goals provide a basis for mobilizing resources, such as the US$23 billion Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria—which has provided AIDS and tuberculosis treatments to some 14 million people and delivered over 300 million insecticide-treated mosquito nets—or the G8’s Muskoka Initiative on Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and the UN Every Woman Every Child initiative which have mobilized more than US$20 billion for maternal and child health. The UN reports that the under-five mortality rate has dropped by more than 40 per cent from 1990 to 2011 (which means 14,000 fewer child deaths per day), and that maternal deaths have declined by 47 per cent over a similar period.

More children are in school and nearly two billion people have gained access to basic sanitation. The MDGs also encourage data collection to assess progress, and they are a useful vehicle for civil society to hold governments to account.

Yet, by focusing on national and global metrics, the MDGs also mask inequalities between and within communities and countries. The daughter of a farmer from a marginalized caste in rural India, for example, is unlikely to have access to the same education, health care and opportunities of a boy growing up in New Delhi. We must also not get lost in the percentage reductions or lose sight of the reality that we can and must do better. We live in a time of sharply rising inequality in which planetary boundaries are not respected, and the human rights of billions of people living in poverty are denied on a daily basis.

In July 2012, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon appointed a High Level Panel on Post-2015 (HLP) to hold consultations and develop recommendations on a post-2015 development framework. The HLP—consisting not only of 27 members chosen largely from governments, but also including a few prominent activists like Nobel Peace Prize winner, Tawakkol Karman and The Elders’ Graça Machel—was chaired by Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono, Liberian President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and British Prime Minister David Cameron.

For nine months, the HLP received inputs from the private sector, civil society, youth, parliamentarians and others at regional stakeholder meetings, national consultations, thematic consultations, online discussions, plenaries and more. The panel’s report, authored by Homi Kharas of the Brookings Institution, provides a vision to “end extreme poverty” by 2030 and establish “building blocks of sustained prosperity for all.”

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The report, entitled “A New Global Partnership: Eradicate Poverty and Transform Economies Through Sustainable Development,” proposes five “transformative shifts” and 12 post-2015 goals. It has also informed the UN Secretary-General’s recommendations to the General Assembly in September 2013. The biggest proposed shift is a promise to “leave no one behind.” According to the authors of the report, “this is a major new commitment to everyone on the planet who feels marginalised or excluded, and to the neediest and most vulnerable people, to make sure their concerns are addressed and that they can enjoy their human rights.”

The post-2015 development agenda “must ensure that … neither income nor gender, nor ethnicity, nor disability, nor geography, will determine whether people live or die, whether a mother can give birth safely, or whether her child has a fair chance in life.”

The HLP Report has received mixed reviews though, from activists, people’s movements and development organisations. While the report does include a number of long-standing civil society recommendations, it fails to provide the transformative agenda that it promises and neglects key issues that perpetuate poverty and inequality.

**THE POVERTY LINE**

Let’s start with the measure of extreme poverty. The HLP is using a baseline of US$1.25 per day. This is the same as the figure used in the MDGs. (When the MDGs were first adopted, the measure was US$1 per day, but this was updated in 2005.) The panel hopes this global poverty line may rise to US$2 by 2030, but it continues to base its measurements on the current figure. Taking inflation and real prices into account, US$1.25 obviously buys a lot less in 17 years than it does now. In addition, as people migrate from rural to urban areas, an ongoing trend, basic expenses do rise.

Even today, how much can US$1.25 actually buy? Photographer Stefens Chow and economist Lin Hui-Yi in their project, The Poverty Line, provide an interesting visual representation of the poverty line in 20 countries, including the choices that someone with this income level may face. In China, for example, US$1 buys four bananas or one egg tart. In Switzerland, the poverty line is much higher at more than US$10 per day. But this still only buys two sausages or one bunch of romaine lettuce. ($1.25 per day) is not a poverty line but a starvation line, notes the Post-2015 Women’s Coalition, a grouping of nearly 100 women’s networks from Afghanistan to the US, in its response to the HLP Report. “It measures how many people are likely to soon die of malnutrition, exposure, etc., rather than a measurement of living with dignity, which is what eradication of poverty should indicate.”

According to the UN and the World Bank, the global community has actually already met the first MDG, halving extreme poverty, two years ahead of schedule, based on the US$1.25 line. But, to most observers, it does not feel as if poverty is on the decline. “Why are the bells not ringing? Where are the fireworks celebrating that humanity is (or will soon be) finally free from want?” asks Roberto Bissio, the director of Social Watch, an NGO network that monitors government commitments. “(The) optimistic statistical conclusion (that the first MDG has been met) in fact hides much more complex realities.”

Not only does the basic basket of consumer goods continually change over time (think about the importance of mobile phones, school supplies or being able to afford quality health care), poverty is also relative. It’s relative to where you live and to those around you. “Poverty under a fixed line is not the poverty that the public perceives,” notes Bissio, bringing us back again to the issue of inequality.
Attendees were particularly concerned about the roles one be left behind? UN as the new global development framework, would no inequality. If the HLP report were to be adopted by the Let’s begin with the overarching theme and concern of “continue to be a strong point of reference in their work.” important input by the panel” which would hopefully account for less than one per cent of consumption. To provide a forum for people living in impoverished and marginalised communities to share their stories and concerns, three civil society networks—the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), Beyond 2015 and the International Forum of National NGO Platforms—facilitated a series of national and local consultations in nearly 40 countries across four continents. (Other networks and organisations like CIVICUS and the United Nations Development Programme funded additional consultations.) This vast and growing gap was clearly reflected from the participants, whose comments were quoted in the Civil Society Demands for the Post-2015 Agenda from 39 Countries.”

Initial reaction from the Panel to this “Red Flag” was positive, both in a town hall meeting and by a HLP staff member who wrote that the letter was recognised as “an important input” by the panel” which would hopefully “continue to be a strong point of reference in their work.”

So how did the HLP report actually measure up?

Let’s begin with the overarching theme and concern of inequality. If the HLP report were to be adopted by the UN as the new global development framework, would no one be left behind?

The HLP notes that inequality is a cross-cutting issue, and in its promise to “leave no one behind,” it argues that the root causes of inequality must be addressed. However, the HLP report emphasises equality of opportunity, leaving the trickier issue of redistribution to national governments. Inequality is also largely absent from the HLP’s 12 proposed goals and 56 indicators.

Civil society campaigners have been unified in calling for a top-level post-2015 goal to address inequality and have proposed that indicators could be linked to a nation's Gini Index or Palma Ratio. Furthermore, a key to ensuring that no one is left behind—that marginalised, excluded and disadvantaged individuals and communities have access to social services and opportunities—is that development be grounded in human rights.

Every individual on our planet has a right to live in dignity. The rights to food, education, housing, social security and decent work are enshrined in international law. Yet human rights violations are "both a cause and consequence of poverty.”

Without a rights-based approach to development, people are left out. The interests of powerful groups can trump the needs of people living in poverty, just as the supporters of a government may benefit more than its opponents.

A rights-based approach ensures that people living in poverty are empowered and recognised to be “key actors in their own development, rather than passive recipients of commodities and services.”

"The Post-2015 agenda must be rooted in the existing international human rights architecture, which has been developed over six decades,” notes the Red Flag statement. “Human rights law provides a universal-ly-recognised framework that clearly delineates the common but differentiated responsibilities of all actors to respect, protect and fulfill human rights, both within and between countries.”

At first glance, the HLP acknowledges and accepts this point of view. Their report states that “new goals and targets need to be grounded in respect for universal human rights” and that we must “achieve a pattern of development where dignity and human rights become a reality for all.” It also says that human rights are a key principle for global partnership.

Yet, the HLP does not make any direct mention of economic, cultural or social rights. Instead, it narrowly frames its recommendations in terms of civil and political rights. It also fails to address the need for access to justice and remedy when rights are denied.

**PEACE AND HUMAN SECURITY**

Freedom from fear is another basic right. But violent conflict affects people and communities in nearly one out of every three countries. Famines are torn apart, livelihoods disrupted, communities decimated. The story is all too familiar, whether it be in a Burmese town devastated by religious violence, the Mexican countryside where fighting between drug cartels and the government has claimed 86,000 lives or the Central African Republic where a total breakdown in law and order has left 1.6 million people in need of assistance of basic necessities.

Development is impossible without peace, just as enduring peace is impossible without development. "We need to sit and honestly reflect on what we are telling the children and mothers and fathers living in conflict-affected areas," writes Paul Okumu of the Africa Civil Society Platform on Principled Partnership. “We should aim to make justice and prosperity a reality for everyone, not because they are fundamental—they are—but because we respect life and decency.”

Fortunately, on this issue, the HLP seems to agree. It notes that peace is “a core element of well-being, not an optional extra” and is suggesting a post-2015 goal to “ensure stable and peaceful societies.” Proposed indicators include reducing violent deaths; eliminating all

**INEQUALITY**

Across the planet, income inequality is rising sharply. We’ve felt this in Singapore where the monthly wages of the top 10 per cent have risen three times faster than the wages of the bottom 10 per cent. Globally, the top 0.5 per cent of the population holds over 35 per cent of the wealth and the billion richest people account for 72 per cent of world consumption. What about the bottom billion? They account for less than one per cent of consumption.

The economy is growing, but poverty is increasing. Clearly we need to change the way we define progress.” – Nigeria

The most disadvantaged have seen few or no improvements and the disparities between them and others have only increased.” – Finland

Poverty continues to exist in our society because of unequal access to resources and services such as land, education, health and opportunities such as employment.” – Nepal

"We need to continue to be a strong point of reference in our work.” – Nigeria

The unmet needs consumption patterns and exacerbates inequality which is rooted in unsustainable production and transformative changes required to address issues that must be addressed for civil society to support

We caution against developing a set of reductive goals, targets and indicators that ignore the transformative changes required to address the failure of the current development model, which is rooted in unsustainable production and consumption patterns and exacerbates inequality as well as gender, race and class inequities.

Attendees were particularly concerned about the roles and relationships being staked out involving government, business and multilateral institutions.

"It is not enough to talk about respect, protect and fulfill human rights, both within and between countries.” – Nigeria

The red flag

To provide a forum for people living in impoverished and marginalised communities to share their stories and concerns, three civil society networks—the Global Call to Action Against Poverty (GCAP), Beyond 2015 and the International Forum of National NGO Platforms—facilitated a series of national and local consultations in nearly 40 countries across four continents. (Other networks and organisations like CIVICUS and the United Nations Development Programme funded additional consultations.)

This vast and growing gap was clearly reflected from the participants, whose comments were quoted in the Civil Society Demands for the Post-2015 Agenda from 39 Countries.”
forms of violence against children; ensuring that justice institutions are accessible, independent, well-respect-
ed and follow due process; and enhancing the capacity, professionalism and accountability of the security forces, police and judiciary.

However, there is nothing about budgeting for peace rather than war (curbing military expenditure, which often comes at the expense of social programmes). The HLP report also ignores the reality that most contempo-
rary conflicts are caused by greed and competition for natural resources, as GCAP points out in its critique.19 The proposed indicators and targets currently focus
solely on domestic governments, but do not mention global and regional actors who fuel conflicts.

GENDER JUSTICE
I still have a T-shirt from my Peace Corps days. There’s an outline of a woman’s profile, drawn in gold against a black backdrop, with the slogan “Instruire une femme, c’est instruire une nation,” translated as “If you educate a woman, you educate a nation.”

The benefits of investing in women and girls, and the perils of ignoring half a nation’s population, were as clear then as they are now. In addition, gender equality
and access to education are issues of basic justice and enshrined in international law as human rights. At the
time, though, there were few girls in the schools where I taught, perhaps only six in a class of 50.

The MDGs, which were adopted more than half a decade ago, have not even begun to address this imbalance by making gender equality a top-line goal. The MDG framework, though, actually has very limited
gender targets and indicators. The MDGs seek parity in primary school education for boys and girls, fewer women dying in childbirth and more women in parlia-
ment and the wage economy.

Yet the reality for too many women and girls, who constitu-
tate the majority of the world’s poor, is that if there is not enough food in the rice bowl, they eat last after their husbands and sons. Women are most affected by violence, war and climate change (which can eliminate their income and independence as gardens and grazing lands dry up) and they are paid less than men for the same work.

The HLP addresses many of these gaps—and several long-
standing civil society demands—by proposing indicators for:

• Zero violence against women
• An end to child marriage
• Universal sexual and reproductive health and rights
• The elimination of gender discrimination, and
• Equal rights to own and inherit property, sign a contract, register a business and pen a bank account

The report also calls for women to have an equal voice in decision-making, with “full and equal rights in political, economic and public spheres.”

Significantly, the HLP calls for governments to gather disag-
gregated data (by gender, social group, age, income, disabil-
ity and location) for every post-2015 target and indicator, and says that a goal will only be considered “achieved” if it is met for all relevant income and social groups.

“A statistical discussion may seem academic,” notes GCAP’s response to the HLP report, “but we know that if we are to eradicate poverty and inequality, it is essential to track a government’s performance across different communities and not just at a national level.”

While this inclusive approach marks a significant improvement over the MDGs, it still falls short. There are no references to the care economy, the growing feminiza-
tion of poverty or the rights of people with different sexual orientations and gender identities. Yet it is only when people can get a job and a voice that they can take control of their own destiny and build a future free from poverty.” He further adds:

Here in Britain we believe that the way out of poverty is to help people stand on their own two feet, incentivise
and reward hard work, and make aspiration the engine of
growth. Developing countries are no different. Spending
money on the symptoms of poverty will never be enough
when the failure of institutions in developing countries
actually causes poverty, by crushing any hope people have
for a livelihood and a fair say over how their country is run.

Cameron and the HLP see the private sector playing an
important role here, from being a source of capital for
new infrastructure projects to institutions that create jobs
and fuel economic growth. The HLP argues for “simple
regulatory frameworks” so that businesses can function
best, though the report states that “this is not a call for
total deregulation” as social and environmental standards
are important. The HLP goes on to ask companies to
voluntarily adopt good practices and pay fair taxes.

It’s as if the 2008 financial crisis or 2007-2008 specula-
tion-driven food crisis never happened!

And while Cameron’s “golden threads” are important, so
too must we acknowledge and address the large negative
impact of some businesses. Amitabh Behar, a co-chair of
GCAP and convener of one of India’s largest anti-poverty
campaigns, Wada Na Todo Abhiyan, has coined the term “poison threads”22 to describe this issue.

*Corporate land grabs, mega-mines, unjust global trade
rules, financial speculation, corruption and the priva-
tisation of essential social services are heightening
inequalities, ruining our environment and impoverish-
ing communities across the globe,” Behar argues. “We
need to urgently address the poison threads in society.”

“These poison threads often fuel violence and conflict as
well,” adds Behar’s colleague Marta Benavides, a GCAP
co-chair who was also once nominated for the Nobel
Peace Prize. “Greed, struggles for resources and a lack
of decent work are behind so many of the world’s wars.”

Extraction, mega-mines, land and water grabs which displace people and communities are on the top of the
Red Flag list of issues that must be addressed if we are to truly eradicate poverty. Unfortunately, the HLP is largely
silent when it comes to the poison threads.

CREATING THE WORLD WE WANT

While Ban Ki-moon has already forwarded the HLP report to the UN General Assembly, we are only at the
beginning of this process. Over the next one to two years,
UN member states will debate development both in the
context of post-2015 as well as in something called the
“Open Working Group,” which is tasked with producing
a set of Sustainable Development Goals. At some point, these two processes will likely come together, just as
the issues discussed above—inequality, the poverty line,
human rights, gender justice, peace and human security,
the role of the private sector—are all interconnected
with other issues that we have not discussed in detail in this article like financing for development (it’s time to
adopt a small universal Financial Transactions Tax), the
international trade regime, climate change and planetary
boundaries. From now until 2015, UN members also
need to double-down to achieve the MDGs.

But let’s not get bogged down in the process. This is a
time to dream and to dream big, a time to envision a world where our economies create prosperity
for all and not a select few, where we respect and treasure
our planet so that it will be habitable, not just for us but
for generations to come.

Together, we can make this dream a reality. ■
unmet needs


2 See Switow’s note in the GCAP Newsletter, 1 April 2013, http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=31164818b477e5512187e8c9605a7e073d76e3a6c&id=9067345c3e.

3 The transcript of the speech on poverty by Nelson Mandela (2005) can be found in http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/politics/4233631.stm.


10 At the time of writing this article, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has just released his synthesis report: A life of dignity for all : accelerating progress towards the Millennium Development Goals and advancing the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015. See http://daccess-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N13/409/32/PDF/N1340932.pdf?OpenElement.


12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.


21 Ibid., 4.

22 Ibid., 9.

23 Ibid., 7.

24 The Gini coefficient or Gini Index, the most frequently cited metric for inequality, is a function of income distribution. The Palma Ratio compares the upper and lower strata of society by dividing the richest 10 per cent’s share of national income by the share of the bottom 40 per cent.


26 Ibid., 37.

27 This text is based on a paragraph from a GCAP newsletter by Switow, http://us1.campaign-archive1.com/?u=31164818b477b3512f87feebe&id=ea5029cb1a&e.


29 GCAP response to HLP, see www.whiteband.org/sites/default/files/GCAP-HLP-Response_130610.pdf.

30 The Post 2015 Women’s Coalition also discusses budgeting for peace in its critique. See http://ftfgcap.files.wordpress.com/2013/06/hlp_rpt_wc_review-final-final.pdf.


33 Ibid.
FORESIGHT
AND POLICY
THINKING ABOUT SINGAPORE’S FUTURE(S)

The last three decades have seen the Singapore government’s strategic foresight enterprise shift from the area of defence and security to the socio-aspirational space. Lead Strategist, Dr Adrian W. J. Kuah discusses how strategic planning in the governing of Singapore has evolved over the years.

Clearly, the foresight enterprise is fraught with many difficulties. Ought we then to be doing it at all? The fact of the matter is that we, as a human species, cannot not think about the future (although different people will think about the future in varying degrees and ability). As Wendell Bell puts it:

In every known society, people have conceptions of time and the future, even though some of their conceptions appear diverse, with different emphases on past and future and different degrees of elaboration and detail. 

To the extent that we are aware that actions have consequences (intended or otherwise), we already implicitly consider the future. The rationale for the government’s strategic foresight enterprise is based on the argument articulated above – the future is inextricably linked to present action.

While most of the methods and tools — chief of which being “scenario planning” based on the Royal Dutch Shell’s own practice — were developed in the 1980s, the philosophical justification for developing Singapore’s strategic foresight capability can be traced to a 1979 speech, titled *Singapore into the 21st Century*, by the then Minister for Foreign Affairs, S. Rajaratnam. With typical elegance and persuasiveness, Rajaratnam argued that futures thinking is integral to Singapore’s long-term prospects:

There are practical men who maintain that such speculations are a waste of time and they have no bearing at all on solutions to immediate day-to-day problems. This may have been so in earlier periods of history when changes were few and minute and were spread over decades and centuries... [Because] we are not only living in a world of accelerating changes but also of changes which are global in scope and which permeate almost all aspects of human activity... [and since] change is about the future then only a future-oriented society can cope with the problems of the 21st century. 

There in 1979 lay the philosophical (but overlooked) foundations of Singapore’s foresight enterprise.

What is of interest is not so much why the strategic foresight enterprise had found, and certainly continues to find, such traction in the Singapore government, but rather how it has evolved over time. This evolution can best be understood in two ways. The first is an ontological shift in focus, expanding beyond defence and security to include issues in the socio-aspirational space, such as quality of life, definitions of success, national myths, questions of identity and so forth. The second is an epistemological shift in approach, expanding from a largely positivist worldview (that is, taking the world as given) to a more eclectic and normative perspective that views the world in terms of how it can be shaped.

The diffusion of futures thinking throughout the broader establishment signalled strongly the primacy of strategic foresight in underpinning all manner of policies.

The decision in 1991 for the scenario planning tool and techniques to be adopted in the broader government beyond MINDEF signalled two important shifts. First, there was a belief that other ministries and agencies could greatly augment their own futures thinking through these systematic techniques and formal tools. It would, of course, be naïve to conclude that, prior to “scenario planning,” Singapore’s policy-makers went about their work without what Rajaratnam called the “future-oriented” perspective. After all, as has been pointed out by many commentators, planning is an integral and inseparable element of Singapore’s policy-making DNA, brought particularly into sharp relief by a sense of acute vulnerability (in both geopolitical and economic terms).

However, the formalisation of the foresight enterprise throughout the establishment signalled strongly the primacy of strategic foresight in underpinning all manner of policies.
in the socio-cultural domain: demographic changes, social resilience, the politics of identity (or identities), housing, education, and so forth.

The inaugural National Scenarios, widely regarded as SPO’s flagship product, were rolled out in 1997, and the two principal scenarios reflected and cemented the ontological shift beyond the security domain to incorporate the myriad complexities of the social, cultural and political dimensions. Still considered the most memorable and influential set of scenarios, the 1997 iteration (titled “In 20 years’ perspective”) postulated two possible futures: “Harmonious Singapore” on the one hand, in which the economic imperative will reign supreme and where the price of commercial success and global cosmo-politanism was paid in terms of increased atomism and a sense of anomie and dislocation. The second scenario, “A Home Divided,” painted a future in which the singular national narrative would splinter, giving way to a plethora of irreconcilable stories that are centred on different loci of identities—ethnic, religious, special interests, ideology, all of which potentially challenging the national identity.

Given the social, economic and political developments of the last five years, the 1997 scenarios turned out to be extremely prescient. The process of generating the scenarios also turned out to be as instructive as the outcome, if not more so:

In the course of working on these scenarios, we discovered that while geopolitical and economic issues were well on the decision-makers’ radar screens, softer “social” issues like national identity, rootedness to Singapore and community ties received less attention. That aspirational and identity issues unexpectedly came to the fore in the course of researching and interviewing for the 1997 scenarios completed the shift not only in terms of focus but more crucially in the underlying ontological assumptions: from security threats assumed to be ontologically objective, to social hopes and fears which are intersubjectively constituted but experienced as no less than “real.” In 2001, the Scenario Planning Office was renamed the Strategic Policy Office, an acknowledgement of the increasingly holistic, complex and subjective manner in which Singapore’s future(s) was being defined.

In a sense, we have come full circle, albeit having done things back-to-front: Singapore’s strategic foresight enterprise had its roots in the military-security milieu, grappling with the question of “How do we secure ‘us’?” It is only belatedly that we have begun to address the more fundamental question of “Who is ‘us’?” And yet Bell reminds us that, fundamentally, members of collectivities—societies, organisations, and nations—find meaning and purpose in their charter or founding myths, where such myths form the basis for their societal identity and values. He further argues that the “charter myths of a particular group or society [is] a standard by which to evaluate the desirability of alternative images of the future...” 11

Fast forward to the present from the 1997 scenarios, and there is an irony in realising that charting the way(s) ahead for Singapore rests on revisiting our charter myths. The “Our Singapore Conversation” (OSC), a nation-wide “town hall meeting,” was launched by Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong at the 2012 National Day Rally to get people to articulate their “desirable futures” for Singapore. 12 In one sense, therefore, the OSC has been seen as an exercise in strategic foresight.

To a large extent, the OSC has turned out to be an attempt to address “where we are going” by way of “who we are and where we come from.” This is clearly demonstrated in how participants reminisced about the “kampung spirit” (real or imagined) of yesteryear:

The road to the future appears to run through the past. 13

THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL SHIFT: FROM UNCOVERING FUTURES TO SHAPING THEM

In articulating what might be termed the French school of strategic foresight, la prospective, Hughes de Jouvénel argues:

As neither prophecy nor prediction, la prospective (foresight) does not aim to predict the future—to unveil it as if it were pre-fabricated—but to help us to build it. It invites us to consider the future as something that we create or build, rather than something already decided, like a mystery that simply needs to be unravelled. 14

De Jouvénel provides a useful analytical point of departure to understand the changing epistemology of the strategic foresight enterprise in Singapore. Because of the fact that the matter is that, despite many protestations to the contrary, strategic foresight, in many places and at various times, has almost always begun as if it were prophecy and prediction, where the sole purpose of the exercise was to “unveil a pre-fabricated future”. Singapore has been no exception.

Given the importance of the national defence imperative, the language of military strategy and operations lends itself naturally to explaining how futures work was initially conducted. The Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, in his treatise On War, continually reminds us of the uncertainties of war, stating in one memorable passage:

War is the realm of uncertainty. Three quarters of the factors on which action in war is based are wrapped in a fog of greater or lesser uncertainty. A sensitive and discriminating judgment is called for; a skilled intelligence to scent out the truth. 15

Understood in Clausewitzian terms, scenario planning in MINDEF sought to lift the temporal “fog of war”: developing net assessments of the current state and future trajectory of Singapore’s military capabilities in relation to other countries, identifying and analysing “the enemy’s likely courses of actions, and anticipating political, socio-economic and technological shocks that could alter the military and geopolitical status quo.”

Singapore’s pioneering attempts at strategic foresight consisted mainly in the application of tools and techniques that allowed the foresight practitioner to “see a thing” ahead of his rivals and competitors, be it a nascent social trend, a developing political pattern, an economic point of inflexion, or an emerging technology. This epistemological approach can best be described as positivist, which assumes, in the main, that through the use of scientific methods and the application of rational analysis, it is possible to discover the “truth” of things. 16 For all the sophistication of other foresight tools that were subsequently adopted—the Risk Assessment Horizon Scanning (RAHS) programme under the National Security Coordination Secretariat, the tools centred on the Cynefin framework17—to supplement scenario planning, strategic foresight remains largely informed by a positivist worldview. Needless to say, there remains a natural fit between a positivist epistemology—manifested most clearly in the application of tools—and aspects of the future that are deemed to be ontologically objectively “real” (such as geopolitical risks and military threats), out there waiting to be uncovered.

Despite many limitations of the positivist worldview—the chief of which being the privileging of the scientific, rational method above all else to get at “the truth”—the fact is that a positivist epistemology, along with the many tools and techniques that go with it, remains very useful... to a point. That point occurs when objective risks which can be assessed and mitigated give way to aspirations that are subjective and dynamically articulated. The process of producing the 1997 National Scenarios had given some hint of the growing salience of the more ephemeral, abstract and subjective socio-political and cultural issues, which were confirmed in the subsequent iterations of the scenarios.

The growing importance of aspirations, identities, values and reinterpretations of charter myths in charting Singapore’s possible futures necessitated an expansion of the epistemological toolkit to incorporate post-positivist perspectives. The setting up of the Centre for Strategic Futures (CSF)18 within the SPO in 2009, whose mandate of challenging the dogmas, orthodoxies and “groupthink” that might have permeated the foresight establishment through the use of eclectic and experimental approaches, was endorsed at the highest levels. It was, above all, an acknowledgement that, to borrow from De Jouvénel: [The] future is a realm of freedom, of power and of will. It is at once a land to be explored, hence the utility of vigilance and anticipation... and a land...
to be built on, hence the utility of the approach to prospective sometimes described as “normative,” which refers to the investigation not of possible futures but of desirable futures...”

The notion that strategic foresight, and public policy more broadly, would have to take into account the aspirations, interests, hopes and fears of Singaporeans has manifested itself most resoundingly in the OSC.

Of course, history will ultimately judge the usefulness and ultimate impact of the OSC. Nevertheless, the OSC has been an intriguing and welcome evolution of Singapore’s strategic foresight enterprise for three reasons. First, the OSC concept is driven by the idea of “co-creation,” of a partnership between those who govern and those who are governed. Strategic foresight, in this instance, becomes very much more of a collective enterprise, and less so the elite-driven phenomenon it typically is. Second, insofar as it is a dialogue, an often messy and dynamic process of articulations, negotiations, compromises, persuasions and concessions, it suggests that the strategic foresight enterprise may be valued more as a process, rather than the outcomes that it generates. Indeed, the OSC was deliberately unstructured “with no specific preset topics or areas for discussion...to provide as much open space as possible for Singaporeans to voice their opinions.”

Compared to previous dialogues such as 1991’s “The Next Lap,” 1999’s “Singapore 21,” and 2002’s “Remaking Singapore,” the OSC is novel in how the power to set the agenda lay almost exclusively with the participants.

Finally, and most importantly, the very term ‘conversation’ is extremely apt and highly instructive: it suggests the power of speech acts, of “talking” the future into existence. Furthermore, as the conversation has unfolded, the shift in focus from threats to aspirations has been so stark as to bring a new vocabulary built on terms like ‘narrative,’ ‘myth,’ ‘values’ and ‘identity’ to the forefront of Singapore’s public consciousness.21 The ability to understand and engage with this new vocabulary of strategic foresight lies beyond traditional positivist foresight tools; rather, it is through the eclectic suite of post-positivist, phenomenological approaches, such as the Causal Layered Analysis methodology,22 that are part of the CSF’s toolkit that this new inter-subjectively constituted vocabulary can be apprehended and made sense of.

CONCLUSION

The past, present, and the future are inextricably intertwined. The past continues to cast its shadow on an ephemeral present. Furthermore, far from being immutable, the ever-present past is subject to constant revisions and reinterpretations; the past, in a sense, can be changed. Similarly, our present assumptions and images of the future shape our current actions, which in turn produce the future “present.”

Singapore in the early 21st century finds itself buffeted by dramatic and escalating changes, whether they are framed in terms of Alvin Toffler’s “Third Wave,” Karl Polanyi’s “Great Transformation,” Manuel Castell’s “Network Society,” Francis Fukuyama’s “Great Disruption,” or Douglas Rushkoff’s “Present Shock.” Amidst these complexities and accelerations, the strategic foresight enterprise becomes ever more salient, even if increasingly difficult. We are acting in a continually shifting and extended present into which the future is assimilated.

Furthermore, the growing importance of aspirations and the new modality of co-creating desirable futures by both the state and society jointly suggest that Singapore’s foresight policies, far from being the straightforward application of tools and techniques, will have to be guided by the Aristotelian trinity of logos (the “how” of things), ethos (the questions of values and ethics), and pathos (how well we identify with each other). After all, what is strategic foresight but an attempt to articulate and attain “the good life”?

Clearly, the future ain’t what it used to be.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of, and should not be attributed to, the Centre for Strategic Futures.
DEFINING AN ASIAN SOCIAL ECONOMY

THE NEED FOR A DEFINITION

The term “social economy” is less well-known in Asia, but has been widely discussed worldwide and introduced into economic and social policies in countries in Western Europe and North America. It is also variously known as the third sector (in the United Kingdom), civil economy, or solidarity economy (from the French économie sociale et solidaire).

Beyond being an esoteric term, the concept of social economy represents an attempt at a wider definition of the non-profit sector, beyond registered charities, to incorporate other parts of the social change ecosystem, such as the social enterprise and cooperative sectors, which are by default excluded from definitions of the non-profit sector.

The question of definition is a critical one, because the varying usages of this term has led to a general lack of clarity globally on just where its boundaries lie. Definitional clarity is necessary to help establish its value beyond a loose conceptual framework.

The value of a social economy

A definition would help to firmly recognise the sometimes nebulous contribution of the sector towards national measures of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This definition is especially key in Asia, where there is perhaps a stronger need for governments to demonstrate how the investment of public funds into a sector can translate into actual economic impact for a country, and not just social impact.

It is for this reason that certain Asian governments have set up initiatives to support the growth of the social enterprise sector, which is understood as a structure which achieves both social outcomes and contributes to economic growth, even if without the scale that most corporates are able to achieve. Examples of this include the Thai Social Enterprise Office, the Seoul Social Economy Network, as well as the ComCare Enterprise Fund in Singapore.

DEFINING THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

The European Commission in their process of defining social economies and hence social innovation, has arrived at a typology for the four types of a social economy:

- Tax-exempted status
- Mission driven legal forms
- Inherent legal characteristics
- For-Profit Social Goal Organisations

It is for this reason that certain Asian governments have set up initiatives to support the growth of the social enterprise sector, which is understood as a structure which achieves both social outcomes and contributes to economic growth, even if without the scale that most corporates are able to achieve. Examples of this include the Thai Social Enterprise Office, as well as the ComCare Enterprise Fund in Singapore.

The Asian definition

In the Asian context, there is great overlap in the examples that are being described, although the exact typology may differ. For example, CICs and L3Cs are distinctly UK and US inventions, respectively. And what is termed as For-Profit Social Goal Organisations, are also broadly known as “social enterprises.”

For the purposes of this article, the Asian social economy broadly comprises the community and social enterprise sectors, which themselves encompass various entities within:

- Tax-exempted status: Organisations active on a local or community level, usually small to medium in size and modestly funded.
- Mission driven legal forms: Organisations which are mission driven due to a legal form that is only accessible for organisations fulfilling or aiming at a social and/or ecological purpose.
- Inherent legal characteristics: Organisations which are mission driven due to a legal form that is accessible for organisations fulfilling or aiming at a social and/or ecological purpose.
- For-Profit Social Goal Organisations: Organisations with primarily social objectives.

Table 1: Four types of social economy in Europe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TYPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>EXAMPLES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tax-exempted status</td>
<td>Organisation is proven to be mission driven due to the tax-exempted status which is given for organisations fulfilling or aiming at a social and/or ecological purpose.</td>
<td>Non-profit organization, charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mission driven legal forms</td>
<td>Organisation is proven to be mission driven due to a legal form which is only accessible for organisations fulfilling or aiming at a social and/or ecological purpose.</td>
<td>Community Interest Company (CIC), Low-profit limited liability company (LLC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherent legal characteristics</td>
<td>Organisation is proven to be mission driven due to a legal form that is only accessible for organisations fulfilling or aiming at a social and/or ecological purpose.</td>
<td>Co-operatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For-Profit Social Goal Organisations</td>
<td>Organisation has a for-profit legal status, but is strongly committed to a social mission. Often a tax-exempt status is not possible due to legal constraints.</td>
<td>GEPs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Asian forms of social economy

Some definitions are wider, and include elements of the public sector, whose values and goals have much in common with those of the non-profit sector (through socially-focused activities), market economy (through corporate social responsibility, to give an example) as well as the informal economy of the household.

It is therefore useful to make a distinction between the social economy, and the public and private sectors, because such an approach provides legitimacy to this sector as a significant sphere of economic activity.
THE DIFFICULTY WITH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES
It is for this reason that the social enterprise sector presents some definitional issues, since it strictly belongs to the private sector, although it seeks to create social change. Even if there is agreement that social enterprises are part of the private sector, defining whether an enterprise is really a social enterprise as defined by its mission presents further definitional issues. Non-profit organisations do not present such issues, since they are generally registered as non-profits or as charities.

John Pearce provides a useful diagram to help us understand where the remit of the social economy lies (see Figure 1):

Organisations that Interact with the Market
There is also a line drawn between two types of voluntary organisations and charities, depending on whether they trade. This differentiation is useful, because it distinguishes between these organisations, depending on whether they “trade”, i.e., interact with the market economy. Those which do trade are considered part of the market economy.

After all, voluntary organisations and charities do contribute to a country’s GDP in three ways, apart from the inherent social value that they create:
- Employment of staff, who pay taxes to the government.
- Employment of staff, who then use their salaries to purchase goods and services from the market.
- The running of an organisation, which in the process of achieving their goals, utilises their budget to purchase goods and services from the market.

These three elements make it possible to calculate the social economy’s contribution to GDP. The Center for Civil Society Studies provides a guide for this, which should be the sum of compensation paid to employees, the profits generated (if any), as well as the taxes paid (less subsidies).

Conversely, voluntary organisations and charities that do not “trade” as a significant part of their activities are excluded from this definition of the social economy, since there is likely no employment of staff (being manned by volunteers) and likely very little interaction with the market economy. Such groups could likely comprise self-funded religious groups, sports affinity groups and small art collectives.

While volunteerism contributes significantly to the effectiveness and efficiency of the non-profit sector, it is also a sphere of activity that is notoriously difficult to calculate and put into monetary terms, even on the organisational level, and therefore translate into contribution to GDP.

This specific focus on contribution to GDP may well be the defining feature of social economies in the Asian context, due to the increased need to quantify and compare the social sector’s importance relative to other sectors in the country, and correspondingly, how it should be budgeted for.

Figure 1: Diagram by John Pearce
THE SIZE OF THE SOCIAL ECONOMY

While there are no comprehensive studies that measure the size of the social economy in various countries (government agencies rarely categorise data on the non-profit sector separately), there are reference points from which we can draw some conclusions about the relative size of the social economies in various countries.

The main source for this kind of data remains the seminal Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, a research project carried out by John Hopkins University’s Center for Civil Society Studies. This is the largest systematic effort ever undertaken to analyse the scope, structure, financing, and impact of nonprofit activity around the world.

A survey of the project’s comparative data tables yields some interesting results about the relative size of civil society organisation workforce compared to the economically active population in 36 countries:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Paid Staff %</th>
<th>Average Development/Transitional Country Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>8.00</td>
<td>4.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>5.90</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>6.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Korea</td>
<td>1.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

These comparisons are not merely academic, they are indicative of the size of the respective social economies in their countries. The percentages for the civil society workforce in Asian countries may seem small compared to the rest of their economies, but it is perhaps useful to note that they may someday reach the size of a country like the Netherlands (the overall best performer with 9.21 per cent), with close to a full tenth of its workforce making their living in civil society.

Also, while in relative terms, a civil society workforce of 0.6 per cent for India may seem meagre, in absolute terms (and assuming the size of India’s current population), this translates to a staggering 745 million individuals who could be actively employed in this sector.

Looking solely at the paid staff figures for the five Asian countries which have been surveyed (India, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, South Korea), we can see that the developing/transitional country average (1.18 per cent), although less so compared to the developed country average (4.65 per cent).

Table 5

Civil society sector sources of support, with and without volunteers, 34 countries, 1995–2000.


Country-specific data, including data published after 2004 can be found in the Center for Civil Society Studies publications database.

Once again, if we exclude volunteers from our calculations, we will see that for the five Asian countries, that there is great variance.

Table 6

While Japan is an outlier ( eclipsed only by the U.S., whose civil society support is more than twice its size), and South Korea lies somewhere in size between Western Europe and Eastern Europe, Pakistan ranks fifth from the bottom in this ranking of 34 countries.

The Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project also yields relevant data about the income streams of civil society as a whole in 36 countries:

A more recent study also illuminates that these findings may have in fact been underestimated, because of the choice of data collection systems. This is so because in the standard national accounts data system, many of the largest non-profit institutions (NPIs) are grouped together with for-profit businesses or government agencies due to the fact that they receive substantial portions of their revenue from fees and charges or government payments, respectively.

As such, they disappear from view as NPIs. Reflecting this, the full NPI sector seen through the UN NPI Handbook lens is, on average, twice as large as that visible through standard official statistics. The changes are significant, with the size of Japan’s NPI contribution to GDP growing at an average rate of 5.8 per cent per year over the period from the late 1990s to the mid-2000s compared to 5.2 per cent for the economies as a whole in eight countries which were surveyed.  

CHALLENGES

The critical issue is that the social economy, while it comprises many of the stakeholders which would comprise a social ecosystem, does not operate in the true sense of an economy, as the market economy does, with its twin drivers of competition and innovation which spur the constant creation of better products and services.

While in the social economy the constant competition for donations and grants compel organisations to continue to innovate the programmes and services that they provide, these mechanisms still lack the scale and complexity with which the private sector operates. As a result, the contribution of the social economy will continue to be under-valued, at least until we are better able to define and measure its size, and better articulate how it contributes to a country’s GDP.

Endnotes


2 Social Enterprise Thailand, www.tseo.or.th.


6 Community Interest Companies Association, www.cicassociation.org.uk/about/what-is-a-cic.


8 GEPA is Europe’s largest alternative trading organisation. The abbreviation stands for “Gesellschaft zur Förderung der Partnerschaft mit der Dritten Welt mbH”, literally meaning “Society for the Promotion of Partnership with the Third World.”


11 In European countries, the term “family economy” can be used to describe the family as an economic unit.

12 This refers to workers being informally employed, without paying income taxes, also referred to as the underground economy or “hidden economy.”


18 Volunteers are excluded for the purposes of this article, since they do not directly contribute to the Gross Domestic Product of a country, although it is possible to monetise the economic value that they bring to an organisation.

19 1.241 billion, according to the World Bank’s World Development Indicators, as of 5 June 2013.


21 When the System of National Accounts was originally conceived, nonprofit institutions were considered to be part of the “household” sector. To uncover these “hidden” NPIs, the United Nations Statistical Commission approved a Handbook on Nonprofit Institutions in the System of National Accounts, known as the UN NPI Handbook. The UN NPI Handbook encourages countries to produce regular “satellite accounts” on nonprofit institutions, and to include measures of the value of volunteer work within them.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

Dusty roads, inching traffic, and an incessant belting of horns—this is an everyday affair during peak hours in Mumbai. Well, not for poor Singaporean me for whom being caught in slow-moving traffic for 20 minutes is a daily occurrence, but even in their own minds. Credit has to be given to the system that has rewarded quiet acquiescence. This has inadvertently led to a protocol that defines as constructive, ideas and suggestions that are easily as they are seen to be contributing to an unimpeded and efficient process that leads to the achievement of key performance indicators.

Secondly, a “caste” system of sorts has evolved where the anointed leaders (mainly chosen from the ranks of the elite) are licensed to question and even recommend radical ideas, whereas the rest are to simply “follow” by giving of their best in their respective vocations (professional, clerical, skilled and unskilled). Indeed, this arrangement was the basis of the “social contract” between the leadership (political and civil service) and the people, and it has contributed to “progress and prosperity” for Singapore since the 1960s.

Unfortunately, this also means that a vast majority of the people tacitly accept their station in life and voluntarily disqualify themselves from questioning—not just verbally but even in their own minds. Credit has to be given to the government for identifying this as an area that needs to be addressed, and the relationship between the government and civil society are poised for significant shifts that promise radical thinking. However, the results of these changes will take time to manifest. In the meantime, we do our best to manage the fallout from decades of strict adherence to efficiency.

Being unquestioning and playing it safe has left us with no experience of doing things that are sufficiently challenging, not to mention pushing the boundaries. And this in turn has meant less experience in failing, and thereby not having the instinct to manage and recover when we trip or fall. Over time, this has led to a pathological loss of confidence in dealing with adversity, which has perpetuated risk-averseness and lowered our propensity to rise above the din or achieve greatness.

This has not been a significant impediment to our growth thus far. However, the equation has changed, especially in the past decade. Look at the sheer magnitude and complexity of the challenges we have had to face, and the radical shifts in the relationship between the rulers and the ruled where knowledge flows and power has become increasingly asymmetrical. Governments are no longer in a position to credibly guarantee delivery on promises. And in Singapore’s case, the government can no longer act on the assumption that it has a monopoly on wisdom. This means that we need the people to not only emerge from the woodwork and be an active part of the solutions, but also demonstrate the ability to deal with the increasing number of situations where things don’t happen as promised and planned, or where they simply crash.

In an environment where increasingly, what’s predictable is unpredictability, more than efficiency, we need resilience. We should have started rebuilding a deep capacity for this yesterday!
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SCOPE