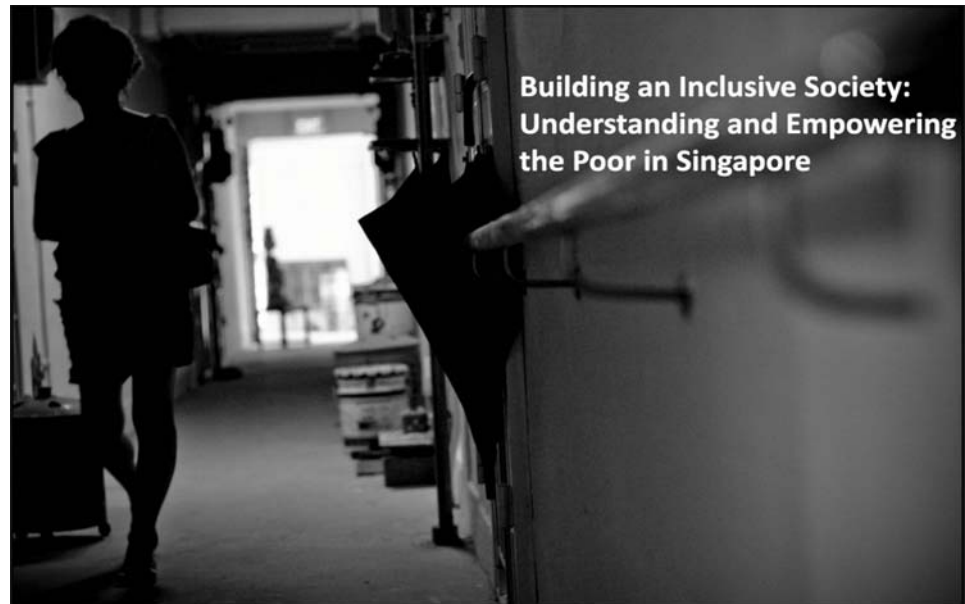


Building an Inclusive Society: Understanding and Empowering the Poor in Singapore

24 September 2013

CENTER FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT (ASIA)



Despite Singapore's economic advancement and increased affluence, there is still a segment of our population who are poor and needy struggling to cope with daily necessities of living. Who are the poor in our society? How is it that they are not able to uplift their situations? What does it take to help them extricate from the vicious cycle of poverty? Issues of the poor and needy are complex and multi-faceted. On Tuesday 24th September 2013, the Singapore Research Nexus in collaboration with the Social Science and Policy Research Cluster and the Centre for Social Development (Asia) brought together the academics, practitioners and policy-makers to discuss the issues and provide insights on the pathways to building life assets of this vulnerable population.

Organizers:

- The Singapore Research Nexus
- The Social Science and Policy Research Cluster
- The Centre for Social Development Asia

Inside this newsletter:

Panel 1: Re- 2
search & Con-
ceptual issues
of poverty

Panel 2: Strat- 3
egies to uplift
the poor

Programme 4

Panel 1: Research and Conceptual Issues of Poverty

“Poverty Attitudes of Singaporeans: A Question of Class, Politics, and Action?”
Assoc. Prof Irene Ng Yue Hoong

The first panel addressed ‘Research and Conceptual Issues of Poverty’ and was chaired by Donald Low, Associate Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, LKYSPP). Irene Ng (Associate Professor, NUS Dept. of Social Work) shared for the first time the results of her survey of 383 Singaporeans on their attitudes towards poverty. The survey covered five domains: definition, severity, causes, characteristics of poor people, and government assistance. Controlled for

gender, ethnicity, age, education, income class, social service status, and political affiliation, the study found that two groups of respondents were more sympathetic towards poor people and wanted more help for them: (i) respondents who worked in social and health care, and (ii) respondents who did not affiliate themselves with the ruling People’s Action Party. The findings have interesting implications for programs and advocacy efforts to uplift the poor.

“Does Poverty Really Exist in the Land of Millionaires?”
Mr Laurence Lien

Next up was Laurence Lien, CEO of the National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre and Nominated Member of Parliament. He presented the different approaches and issues in understanding and addressing poverty in Singapore. Specifically, he argued that poverty does exist, even though measurement issues persist. The measurement adopted will need to reflect the values of the Singapore society. Re-

gardless, there is a critical need to bring greater awareness to and reflection on the realities of poverty on the ground. There is also significant room for developing intervention approaches that are more inclusive and empowering in order to preserve the dignity of the disadvantaged and to involve the target communities in decision-making and actions.

“The working poor in Singapore”

By Assoc. Prof Hui Weng Tat

The final speaker for this panel, Associate Professor Hui Weng Tat (LKYSPP) brought his expertise on labour markets to bear on the ‘working poor’ in Singapore. His presentation provided some observations concerning the income and expenditure patterns of low income households and the trend of low-pay

work in Singapore. The contributing factors to these trends were examined. As low-pay work increases the risk of entering into poverty, Prof Hui commented the need for existing policy measures to weaken this link as well as the prospects for inclusive growth in Singapore.



Panel 2: Strategies to uplift the Poor

Invited by Professor in Social Policy and Analytics Paul Cheung (Dept. of Social Work) the first speaker, Ms Seah Yang Hee, Director of the Com-Care and Social Support Division in the Ministry of Social and Family Development presented on Singapore's social security system. Singapore's social security system comprises a mix of universal and targeted assistance, with ComCare providing social assistance

for the most vulnerable individuals and families. Social assistance in Singapore is premised on a balance of roles of the individual, family, community and government. In a climate of economic volatility and changing social demographics and trends, there are challenges to the balance of roles. Participants were invited to discuss the recalibration of roles to ensure a sustainable social safety net.

***“Singapore’s
Social Security
System: A
balance of
responsibilities”***

***Ms Seah Yang
Hee***

The second speaker of the panel was Mr. Teo Tee Loon, Executive Director of Lakeside Family Services who shared his experiences of running a homeless shelter. Lakeside's Families in Transition (FiT) Shelter was started in 2009 as the second national Transitional Shelter in Singapore, to meet the growing need of homeless people here. The presentation gave an introduction to the programmes and services of the Shelter, and addressed

some of the main reasons for homelessness in Singapore, as well as the profile of the families who come to the FiT Shelter. The speaker also covered some of the interventions that had been found to be helpful for families in the short and medium term, and stories of how the families who came to the FiT Shelter had found hope and refreshment in the midst of their homelessness.

***“Hope for the
Homeless”***

***Mr Teo Tee
Loon***

Rounding out the second session, Associate Professorial Fellow S. Vasoo (Dept. of Social Work) shared his experienced thoughts on Low Income Families and the challenges they face today. There is a lack of appreciation for the issues facing low income families. More often than not, they are labeled as a minority problem and therefore tend to be seen as an ethnic

issue rather than a problem that cuts across social and economic groups who are less endowed to compete at any time of their life course. He identified some of the contemporary issues facing Low Income Families (LIFs) and ways that community groups dealing with LIFs could enable them to become more versatile in enhancing their livelihood.

***“Working with
Low Income
Families (LIFs):
Issues and
Challenges”***

***Assoc. Prof S.
Vasoo***



Time	Programme
9.00 - 9.30 am	Registration and Refreshment
9.30 - 9.40 am	Introduction Opening Remarks by Ho Kong Chong (Associate Professor and Vice Dean, FASS-NUS)
9.40 - 9.50 am	In-house NUS video presentation
9.50 – 11.10 am	Panel 1 : Research and Conceptual Issues of Poverty Moderator: Donald Low (Associate Dean, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS) Presenters: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Irene Ng (Associate Professor, Dept. of Social Work, NUS) 2. Laurence Lien (Chief Executive Officer, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre) 3. Hui Weng Tat (Associate Professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, NUS)
11.10 – 11.25 am	Break
11.25 – 11.45am	Video and presentation by NTU students
11.45 am – 1.00pm	Panel 2: Policies and Strategies to Uplift the Poor Moderator: Paul Cheung (Professor, Dept. of Social Work, NUS) Presenters: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seah Yang Hee (Director, ComCare and Social Support Division, Ministry of Social and Family Development) 2. Teo Tee Loon (Executive Director, Lakeside Family Service) 3. S. Vasoo (Associate Professor, Dept. of Social Work, NUS)
1.00 pm	End of Forum Lunch is served

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This Forum was co-organized by the NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences':



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