

NGOs FACE MORE COMPLEX CHALLENGES AHEAD

Strengthening civil society in Singapore

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There is sufficient circumstantial evidence to suggest that the Singapore Government is now more prepared to engage and work with civil society than it previously was.

In the environment, the Government has worked with non-government organisations (NGOs) such as the Singapore Environment Council to reach out to the community.

In animal welfare, Animal Concerns Research and Education Society (ACRES) has benefited as new committees to tackle animal welfare

issues have been formed with the help of government agencies.

The Land Transport Authority (LTA) sought input and held multiple dialogue sessions with green groups after it announced the proposed construction of the Cross Island Line across parts of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve.

The LTA has since called for a tender for an environmental impact assessment study to be done with the input from green groups.

These are but just a few examples, but there is still room for further partnerships between the Government and civil society.

Engaging and working with NGOs is a growing trend around the world.

● Jose Raymond is Executive Director of the Singapore Environment Council.

DEALING WITH THE NEW NORM

Academics have stressed the need for tripartite and creative collaborations to seek solutions for many of today's pressing challenges. More than ever, the work of public agencies, NGOs and the corporate sector has become closely connected.

While the Government and the corporate sectors will continue to attract the bulk of top talent, the leadership of civil society must not lag behind in potential, ideas and passion.

This is because NGO leaders must be able to think strategically as never before to translate their insights into effective strategies to cope with changing global circumstances. Build-

ing strong partnerships with government agencies and companies will also be crucial in coping with global megatrends. Singapore's civil society groups must constantly build their internal capabilities to implement strategic changes.

In Singapore and the region, the formation of creative coalitions in public-private partnerships could well be the way forward as we seek solutions to issues such as the haze as well as energy and food security.

BUILDING LEADERSHIP

In trying to build the leadership capabilities of civil society, I would like to offer three simple strategies as follows:



The LTA held dialogue sessions with green groups after it announced the proposed construction of the Cross Island Line across parts of the Central Catchment Nature Reserve, which features attractions such as the TreeTop Walk. TODAY FILE PHOTO

far too few recognised leaders in civil society. When National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre Chief Executive Officer Laurence Lien announced he was stepping down, he also made an appeal on his Facebook page asking friends to "let me know if you know of anyone who can take over!". Mr Lien leaves behind very huge shoes to fill.

Sustainable leadership is a serious issue that all organisations grapple with. If companies and public agencies face difficulties in recruiting and

retaining top talent, imagine how difficult it can be for civil society to groom and keep talent.

One way to promote sustainable leadership is to publicly recognise the efforts of outstanding civil society leaders.

Currently, there are several such outstanding leaders who have done meaningful work for their respective organisations. Mr Louis Lim (ACRES), Ms Corinna Lim (Association of Women for Action and Re-

search) and Dr William Wan (Singapore Kindness Movement) are just a few.

The impact of the work that they do, unfortunately, is hardly recognised at the national level.

This could well be plugged by the Centre for Non-Profit Leadership. Doing so will not only inspire many others to come forward to serve in the sector, it will also underpin the critical role that the non-profit sector plays today and in the foreseeable future.

1. Corporate mentorship

Without casting a broad stroke across the sector, I believe many NGO leaders will agree that they have to fend for themselves in figuring out strategies for effective management, talent retention, fund-raising and in developing brand equity for their organisations or programmes.

In many instances, NGO leaders may not even be aware of how important building brand equity is and how to go about doing it.

Corporate C-suite leaders should adopt an NGO leader as part of their corporate social responsibility to share some of their best commercial practices.

2. Education

If it is critical for civil society leaders to raise their capabilities because of the increasing need for tri-sector collaborations and strategic foresight, then it is only right they be given the opportunities to do so through professional courses.

Two programmes that would be useful for NGO leaders are the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy's Master in Public Administration and the Singapore Management University's Master in Tri-Sector Collaboration.

Such courses could well be worthwhile investment to help our civil society leaders learn how to tackle increasingly complex issues that involve regional and global policies and projects.

If funding is an issue, NGOs should source for scholarships or corporate sponsorships to cover the course fees.

3. Sustainable leadership

While I may not be privy to the leadership strategies of all NGOs in Singapore, it is a concern that there are



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