

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MR ERIC CHUA
SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY, MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY
DEVELOPMENT
REACH ALLIANCE CONFERENCE 2025

Professor Lily Kong, President of the Singapore Management University

Professor Joseph Wong, Founder of the Reach Alliance and Vice-President,
International of the University of Toronto

Leaders, faculty members, alumni and student researchers of the Reach Alliance

Industry and sectoral champions

Ladies and gentlemen

1. Good morning and welcome to Singapore, for those who came from overseas.
2. “Leave No One Behind.” This is the central promise of the UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. That represents commitment to address societal challenges that undermine human potential.
3. For the past ten years, the Reach Alliance has sought to fulfil this promise.
4. Since 2015, you have empowered the next generation of global leaders to solve problems through research and innovation, and inspiring action through awareness and discourse. Over the last decade, the Reach Alliance has demonstrated how universities can help to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs.
5. The consortium of nine leading global universities has nurtured some 500 student researchers and published 88 research cases spanning 25 countries, showing how actionable insights can move the needle.
6. But as Professor Lily Kong mentioned earlier, against the backdrop of today’s complex global landscape, there continues to be issues standing in the way of achieving the SDGs for all.

7. Consider the growing challenge of social mobility – a field that I am personally invested in and passionate about. In any society, assuming no active interventions, inequalities tend to deepen. Those that have done well will endeavour to pass on what they accrue – wealth, power, social capital, onto the next generation – natural human tendencies. But over time, some of society will find it harder to progress and give their children a better future. The current volatile and uncertain global environment with global tensions, technological advancements, fast evolving landscape of work exacerbates this phenomenon. If left unchecked, there develops a forever underclass. Disillusioned, disgruntled, disenfranchised. Convinced that in the contracting of bartering of individual liberties, with the larger group of society, they have the short end of the stick.
8. In Singapore, we believe that building strong and resilient families and shaping a robust social compact is key to ensuring that social mobility is not just capitalised, but continues to thrive.
9. During the Forward Singapore consultation exercise in 2022, Singaporeans expressed the need and the shared aspiration for a society where families are supported to grow and thrive and one with a strong culture of community and solidarity - where individuals and communities care for those in need while maintaining dignity and agency.
10. To nurture strong and resilient families, MSF's approach to providing social support has evolved beyond social assistance to social empowerment. Take for example, ComLink+, a programme that is aimed at uplifting families and children and youth living in public rental flats. Family coaches from our Social Service Offices or case workers from our Family Service Centres proactively reach out to and partner lower-income families in their journey to achieve the 3Ses - stability, self-reliance, and eventually social mobility.
 - Our family coaches proactively visit the families to understand their needs, strengths, and aspirations; and co-develop action plans to achieve their long-term goals.

- Financial support in the form of ComLink+ Progress Packages recognises and supplements ComLink+ families that take active concrete steps to improve their circumstances in specific areas such as preschool education, employment and home ownership as part of their action plan. This bolsters the efforts that families put forth into their respective long-term goals.
 - ComLink+ also embraces a partnership approach to encourage societal-wide involvement — where families are also supported by not just the family coaches and case workers, but volunteer befrienders, community organisations and corporates.
11. The ComLink+ approach and ethos reflects our broader vision of a ‘We First’ society, where each of us as we tend to strive in service of our individual priorities, we do not forget the collective. By collective, this means various communities and affiliations that comprise of individual identities. Where I live for instance, I would tell my residents oftentimes that where we study, have very strong spirit or camaraderie, or what we believe in spiritually. It means we have a care for fellow Singaporeans, contributing to the various causes that continually shapes who we are as one people. To strengthen this part of our social compact, our National Council of Social Service, or NCSS, has developed the Sustainable Philanthropy Framework. With the aim of empowering corporates to align their philanthropic activities with their strategic business goals and through the framework’s Social Impact Metrics, draw clear connections between business and social outcomes.
 12. Universities too are key to this ‘We First’ effort. Through active volunteerism you are developing empathetic and inspiring young changemakers. Through research, you are informing policies, programmes, and innovations to address complex societal challenges. And through cross-regional collaborations, you are nurturing globally responsible citizens.
 13. This precious human capital is – in fact – right here in this room today. It is your points of view and your expertise that will drive social progress and power the next wave of sustainable development around the world.

14. The challenges we see in the world and Singapore today require exactly this kind of collaboration where universities, governments, and communities work hand in glove to ensure that no one is left behind. I'm eager to explore these questions with you in our fireside chat – on how we can strengthen these partnerships and how we ensure our approaches truly reach those facing the greatest challenges.
15. Thank you.