



“Inspiring Giving”

Striving for Better, Always

Insights from the Temasek Trust –
Stewardship Asia Conversation on
Corporate Giving 2018

Developed by Stewardship Asia Centre CLG

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The Temasek Trust – Stewardship Asia Conversation on Corporate Giving was held on 18 September 2018 at the Four Seasons Hotel, Singapore. Themed “Striving for better, always”, the conversation brought together 166 local and international participants to discuss how we can continuously and collectively advance philanthropy to build people and uplift communities. The conversation featured a lively panel discussion and an engaging dialogue, involving panellists from the government, academic, corporate and non-profit sectors.

Programme:

Keynote Address

Ms Euleen Goh, Board Director, Temasek Trust

Panel Discussion

- Lord Wei of Shoreditch, Member of the House of Lords
- Mr Ruel Maranan, President, Ayala Foundation, Inc.
- Dr Tan Lai Yong, Director of Outreach & Community Engagement/Resident Fellow, College of Alice & Peter Tan, NUS
- Mr Benedict Cheong, Chief Executive, Temasek Foundation International
- Moderated by Ms Melissa Kwee, CEO, National Volunteer & Philanthropy Centre

A Dialogue with

- Mr Vikrom Kromadit, Chairman, Amata Foundation
- Mr Hsieh Fu Hua, Chairman, Stewardship Asia Centre

Summary and Closing Remarks

Mr Ong Boon Hwee, CEO, Stewardship Asia Centre

Striving for Better, Always: Taking a Concerted Approach

Highlights from the Keynote Speech by Ms. Euleen Goh, Board Director, Temasek Trust

“Always striving for better is not a skill, but an attitude of humility within us to continuously question how we can do better, and do better?”

Ms Euleen Goh, Board Director, Temasek Trust

In her keynote speech, Ms Euleen Goh, Board Director of Temasek Trust, spoke on the importance of making concerted strides towards augmenting the capacities of the social service sector for meaningful philanthropic giving.

The spirit of striving for better

The word “always” denotes an unrelenting pursuit of excellence. Always striving for better is not a skill, but an attitude of humility within us to continuously question how we can become better, and do better. Some pertinent questions that we can ask ourselves are: How can we give and facilitate giving in ways that empower? How can we give with dignity? How can we create lasting impact through the act of giving? The art of giving is intricate and the act of giving should eventually result in rebuilding communities, fostering interdependence, developing capacity and transforming the lives of the beneficiaries.

Collaboration as a key enabler to meaningful giving

Given limited resources, the skilful orchestration of strategies across the ecosystem of giving is of paramount importance; and collaboration is the key enabler to understand the inherent capabilities that are present in the landscape. Whether as corporate or individual philanthropic givers, front-line volunteers, service providers or the board and management of non-profit organisations, everyone can play a part along the spectrum of doing good.

Gleaning from the exemplary illustrations of corporate giving, one can gather that such acts often go beyond individual effort and monetary contributions. To rally people together to engender a nationwide movement of giving, organisations can work with like-minded corporates to support social interventions that aim to improve the welfare of beneficiaries. Through partnership, different entities can do a part in encouraging a culture of giving and volunteerism in Singapore. Beyond doubt, no single party can do the heavy lifting alone. It does take a village as well as multi-pronged approaches to make meaningful giving happen.

Professionalising the sector

At the heart of pursuit for excellence is the question of how we can continuously professionalise the social service sector. How can we honour professionalism and excellence in charitable practices despite resource constraints? As front-line service providers, how can we encourage innovation and quality of services? As board and management, how can we attract and nurture passionate and skilled talent?

Part of the eco-system, therefore, is to provide the much-needed skills for those in the social sector to continue professionalising and growing as the world changes. One way to augment professionalism is to foster thoughtful governance by serving as a convener of philanthropic ideas and best practices, thereby acting as a catalyst for enhancing capabilities during the levelling-up process. Such sharing also enables practitioners to sharpen their craft and to use the learnings to codify good practices and tinker issues related to the measurement of social impact.

To sustain the momentum of giving, it is essential to have many more conversations with diverse parties across the ecosystem. Such cross-pollination of ideas can lead to deeper understanding of problems and co-creation of effective solutions to multi-faceted social issues.

The Pillars of Philanthropic Giving: Attitude, Action and Impact

A call for action

Mr Ong Boon Hwee, CEO of Stewardship Asia Centre, set the stage and outlined the overarching emphasis of the forum: corporate philanthropic givers should give in the spirit of uplifting the needy and building the capacity to do better. He also highlighted the philosophy of giving, which is to learn along with the beneficiaries, without being patronising and condescending towards them. Additionally, the quality of services provided should not be compromised in the name of charitable services. At the organisational level, the board and management of non-profit organisations should not neglect good governance and care.

Based upon these premises, an engaging discussion ensued during the panel and dialogue sessions that followed. The following insights were distilled from the exchanges:

- **Philanthropy is about connecting humanity**

Restoring dignity and cementing relationships are the cornerstones of philanthropic work. Givers should plug into the communities they served, listen intently to their needs and take ownership to provide help that acknowledge the nuances of localised contexts. Not to be prescriptive, givers must communicate sincerely and be people-centric in their outlook. They have to feel the pulse and understand the pressing needs of their beneficiaries. At

times, it means creating common and spontaneous spaces for celebration as well as to share hopes, fears and resources. It is about *journeying along*, rather than *working for* the beneficiaries. Akin to peer-to-peer relationship, all parties co-define what success will look like and learn from one another along the way. Such a model of giving can potentially address the engagement gap between policymakers, givers and grassroots entities on the ground.

- **Givers draw insights from diverse barometers of impact**

Shifting mindset is one of the most challenging aspects of giving. It is not uncommon for the populace to be apathetic towards philanthropic work. Moreover, as both the global and local landscape evolve rapidly, keeping up and staying relevant to the needs of diverse stakeholders can be exigent. There is thus a need to demonstrate the benefits of giving, and perhaps even to incentivise people to do good before real shifts in motivation can take place. Adopting the same meticulous approach used in businesses, there ought to be a careful evaluation of gaps to identify areas where philanthropic giving can make a difference. In other words, the social service sector will need to embed market discipline, identify value proposition and harness market feedback loops to gauge the impact of their contribution.

In addition to market barometer, there are also social barometers that we can take cue from with regard to the value of philanthropic contribution. One good proxy indicator of impact would be the collective desire and commitment of the giving community (including beneficiaries) to see through the delivery of intervention programmes. Such social actions speak volume about the efficacy of the services provided.

The discussion also brought forth another perspective: Givers, especially passionate individuals, do not just rely on external yardsticks to decide their next course of giving. They draw upon their internal barometer and give without expecting returns and without demanding stringent accountability. They are driven by altruistic motivations such as leaving a rich legacy for the future generations and inspiring others to give selflessly.

- **We have to be mindful of the pitfalls of philanthropy**

Whilst we have earlier established that it may be necessary to evaluate the impact of giving, we have to be cognisant that inappropriate means of measurement can go awry. A myopic focus on short-term performance can result in misleading outcomes that fail to capture intangible values. More disconcertedly, there is the opportunity cost of channelling time and resources away from real work to devise, administer and comply with the requirements of the various evaluative instruments. The essence of giving may eventually be lost amid the waves of evaluation fatigue. This begs the question of how then do we balance accountability, transparency, efficiency and trust? What should we actually measure, to what extent, and who should be measuring them?

Another pitfall concerns the issue of dignity, where individuals from vulnerable communities may not want to accept help because they are afraid of being looked down upon or being stigmatised – a social-cultural baggage that is prevalent in Asia. It takes societal efforts to change societal norms, especially in terms of removing the stigma associated with receiving help. The root of the problem may also stem from the deep-seated dejection experienced by the disenchanted community. Due to their prolonged period of hardship, many have given up hope on a better tomorrow. Imbuing optimism and dispelling despair can pave way for these beneficiaries to express volition to alleviate their dire circumstances - both for themselves and their future generations.

- **We can leverage systemic resources to sustain philanthropic work**

Despite the multi-faceted challenges, everyone can take baby or incremental steps towards giving, starting from embarking small prototype projects before scaling up efforts to embark on more intensive endeavours. To adopt a more systematic approach, relevant bodies can devise a broad social investment and returns framework that is linked to widely accepted agendas such as the United Nation's Sustainability Development Goals. Recognition can also be given to givers who have sustained their philanthropic efforts.

Another area of concern is to unify complementary competencies and integrate giving efficiently and effectively in this meaningful but seemingly disparate endeavour of giving. This necessitates the need for bringing people from different walks of life to come together to collaborate and create creative tensions as well as solutions. The sector can benefit from the presence of “deviants” who are passionate about social reforms and are prepared to challenge norms and do things differently – a welcome move that can inject cognitive diversity in the social service sector.

A change of ethos to see at-risk communities as part of the solution instead of part of the problem will encourage everyone, especially the members of at-risk communities to speak with veracity. By “listening to the margins, but earning the trust of the mainstream”, we can earn reciprocal trust in order to sustain giving. We also need patient nurturing to build up the competency of people.

Aligned with the theme of the conversation, giving is an ongoing journey to make the world a better place. With the *attitude* of humility, *action* of collective accountability and understanding of *impact* validity, we can build a resilient network of giving that connects the dots across the spectrum of giving.

Moving Forward

At the conclusion of the event, participants were asked to give their views on key areas that corporate givers could look into. The key points raised in the responses are summarised here:

- An overwhelming number of participants listed impact measurement as their top concern. They would like to explore the measurement of social impact; as well understand the art of impact reporting. Related to the discussion of collective impact, participants also raised pertinent questions on collective accountability: What should the role of government, businesses and community be when it comes to impact measurement? How do we balance top-down and bottom-up perspectives? How can we make tri-sector collaboration work in this area of impact measurement? There is suggestion to look into the triple bottom lines of performance, people and planet to integrate both the financial and non-financial indicators of growth, thereby providing givers with a more holistic measure of impact.
- Another intriguing line of inquiry is on innovative models of giving. Ingenious examples of giving may spark refreshing approaches. Creative social financing, such as the use arts and culture to effect societal change for greater good can re-invigorate existing practices and contribute towards building human and social capital to embrace new ways of giving.
- For giving to be sustainable across time, one would need to look into inter-generational stewardship. Inscribing the value of giving is important and it is therefore essential to discuss the various modes of communication and engagement that can facilitate such embodiment of value across generations.

In a Nutshell: People, Programme, Partnership

The theme, “Striving for better, always” symbolises the dynamic quest for regeneration and betterment. Admittedly, it will be difficult to talk about “better” in terms of real improvement or sustainable impact if there is no concerted effort on corporate giving at the level of the ecosystem. In addition, one has to be mindful that what is perceived as “better” from the donor’s viewpoint may not necessarily be “better” for the beneficiaries in reality. Giving entails wisdom. In terms of attitude, we want to give with dignity – to empower self-reliance, build capacity and foster relationship. This has to be accompanied by mindset change and active sense making of what really matters to the beneficiaries. Such understandings will have bearings on the relevancy, suitability and sustainability of practices and actions. To be discerning, we have to think critically about what kind of impact we should be creating. We have to build confidence in evaluating current reality and close the gaps between actual and espoused outcomes by working with like-minded partners. Essentially, giving is about developing people and making the world a better place over time – concepts that are central to stewardship’s foci of long-term value creation and capacity building for responsible growth.