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THE REVIEW

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The Review is a public policy journal publication by the **Roosevelt Institute @ Yale-NUS College**. A registered student organisation of Yale-NUS, Roosevelt@YNC is a student-run, non-partisan public policy think tank which provides a platform for Yale-NUS students to be exposed to and to engage in local issues through the generation and implementation of progressive policy ideas. This journal is a compilation of our policy memos, opinion pieces, essays and other research in the past academic year.

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Special thanks to Kate Lim and Sallie Bestul for serving as part of the founding team in Semester 1.

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ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INCLUSION POLICY CENTRE

We explore economic policies that simultaneously strengthen Singapore's economy whilst ensuring that every citizen reaps the rewards of economic progress. Such issues include addressing socio-economic inequality, promoting citizen innovation, entrepreneurship and productivity through constant upgrading, and fostering better foreign direct investment to create new opportunities for economic growth and personal development for Singaporeans.



EQUAL JUSTICE & HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY CENTRE

We are committed to reforming policy failures that deprive any member of society of their fundamental human rights or life opportunities. Our policy proposals seek to address policy challenges faced by the most vulnerable and marginalised constituents of Singapore. This academic year, we advocated for the legal rights of domestic migrant workers to fair employment. We also championed for equal opportunities for students on the autism spectrum in Singapore.



ENERGY, TECHNOLOGY & THE ENVIRONMENT POLICY CENTRE

We are dedicated to brainstorming, analysing, and advocating for effective policies related to recent developments in energy, technology, and the environment in Singapore. This academic year, we have published an Op-Ed and hosting a dialogue with prominent stakeholders on clean meat and its implications for Singapore.



HEALTHCARE POLICY CENTRE

Our centre is focused on tackling issues of inequity in Singapore's healthcare system. This academic year, we conducted research on discriminatory HIV long-term visa laws against non-Singaporeans and how the policy might actually perpetuate misconceptions of HIV.

Foreword

The *Roosevelt Institute at Yale-NUS College* started off as the brainchild of passing conversations with my big sib during my freshman year. I had, at the time, heard from a friend about the organization, whose vision closely aligned with what I wanted to bring to Yale-NUS. Coincidentally, during a campus life exchange trip, I learned that Yale University actually runs its own student chapter of the *Roosevelt Institute*, and I had the opportunity then to talk with the students running the program in New Haven about the work that they do. Upon return to Singapore, I met with other interested individuals on campus and put together a team of ten, who worked tirelessly with me throughout the summer to establish *Roosevelt@Yale-NUS*.

In this past year, this brainchild of mine has grown to an official student organization with committed members, who held several successful events and established ourselves as a reputable group on campus. Notably, we hosted our inaugural *Singapore Policy Deep-Dive*, exploring policy focuses in Singapore including migrant domestic workers, lab-grown meat and food sustainability, as well as educational inequality. Our Economic Development and Inclusion center, whose essay proposing a DreamFund for low-income students in Singapore, was published in *TODAY* and presented their proposal at the *NUS U@live forum* to the Minister of Education Ong Ye Kung. Although our first year was a learning experience, and there are definitely many things I would have done differently, I am certain that the Institute can only grow and move forward from here. It is with great excitement that I pass on the mantle to the next generation of leaders of *Roosevelt@Yale-NUS*.

The Review, our policy journal, is a tribute to our first year. In this inaugural edition, we are honored to present a series of policy memos and opinion articles developed and written by our members within their policy centers. Thank you and congratulations to the many individuals who played a part in turning *Roosevelt@Yale-NUS* into a reality. The credit is all yours.

Vivien Su '2021

President and Founder of Roosevelt @ Yale-NUS



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & INCLUSION

Lifting the bottom: How about a S'pore DreamFund to help students from low-income families?

This essay, by Ng Yi Ming, Ng Qi Siang and Heather Cheng Hoi Yeuk from our Economic Development and Inclusion Policy Centre, was published in TODAY newspaper on 28 March 2019. This was also the winning entry of an essay competition held in conjunction with NUS' U@live forum on the topic "Education – Still a Social Leveller?". The forum was held on 27 March 2019, with Education Minister Ong Ye Kung, Professor Tan Tai Yong, and Ng Qi Siang on the panel. Ng Yi Ming gave an address on their DreamFund proposal before the panel discussion.

Meritocracy lies at the heart of the Singapore Dream - anyone who works hard will have equal opportunity to succeed regardless of background. Yet this cherished aspiration is increasingly under threat from parentocracy, where affluent parents draw on superior financial resources to purchase child developmental advantages. To "lift the bottom", as Education Minister Ong Ye Kung puts it,¹ we propose DreamFund - a new credit scheme for low-income students in pre-tertiary schooling - preserving meritocracy through financial empowerment for low-income students to compete with affluent peers on a more equal footing.

Socio-economic stratification is a core issue today. Despite existing governmental intervention, Singapore's GINI-coefficient (after taxes and transfers) has persisted at around 0.402 for the past 3 years. In 2018, the lower 50% of incomes grew at a slower rate than the upper half.² Almost 50% of Singaporeans surveyed in 2018 considered the growing class divide the greatest social issue,³ suggesting weakening national faith in the meritocratic principles that underpins Singaporean society.

We hold that educational inequality is rooted in socio-economic inequality. As the government extensively funds public education, one way the educational 'arms race' manifests itself is through private tuition.⁴ Singaporeans rank 3rd in the world for annual spending on tuition - nearly double the global average.⁵ In 2015, parents with a monthly income above US\$4500 spent double on tuition than parents earning below US\$2250.⁶

Beyond academics, non-academic aptitudes like in music, sports, or even coding, are becoming increasingly relevant given the recent broadening of the Direct School Admission (DSA) scheme to recognise "raw talent potential" outside formal grades or achievements.⁷ Affluent parents thus maintain another avenue to purchase extracurricular developmental opportunities for their children to scale the education ladder. Furthermore, income-related environmental factors such as longer travel time to school or other 'negative factors' associated with the home have been shown to negatively affect learning and grades.⁸ This is how socioeconomic inequality undermines child developmental equity outside of and long before formal education.

Weighed down by such disadvantages, only 10% of low-income (bottom 25%) students enter the top 25% of academic performers.⁹ A 30-year New Zealand study found that, after controls, a top quintile family income engendered 1.5x higher degree attainment than the bottom quintile.¹⁰ Academic qualifications in turn strongly determine future income: Singaporean degree holders earn 1.7 times more monthly income than diploma holders (2017).⁹ Education thus ceases to be a social leveler, instead enabling elites to monopolize educational resources and socioeconomic capital across generations.⁴ Indeed, Minister Ong has acknowledged that meritocracy has spawned systemic unfairness: with children having different starting points, low-income families face greater difficulty breaking free of the low income trap.¹¹

Existing income supplementary schemes do not adequately provide for low-income students. The Workfare

Income Supplement does not consider the number of dependents in a worker's family. Moreover, informally employed and unemployed individuals are not covered, penalising children for their parents' circumstances.¹² Educational funding schemes like Edusave only apply to in-school activities.¹³ Such gaps in existing policies mean that more must be done to close the educational achievement gap in Singapore.

To tackle unequal private resources available to underprivileged school-goers, we propose DreamFund, a new credit scheme for low-income students in pre-tertiary schooling. Implemented by the Ministry of Social & Family Development and applying to students in the bottom quartile of national income, monthly credits will be allocated to a new DreamFund child development account, which can be used at approved enrichment centres and bookstores for private academic tuition, extra-curricular enrichment programs, and learning support resources. This amount will be costed based on a basket of enrichment programs and products commonly purchased by Singaporean students. As DreamFund is not tied to parental employment, it will cover children of unemployed and informally employed workers.

DreamFund will equalize out-of-school growth opportunities and resources for children in the bottom 25% through boosting family income. This ties in with an ongoing MOE-led task force led by Second Minister for Education Indranee Rajah which seeks strengthen such support, "possibly extending to those in the bottom 40%".¹⁴ A 2016 U.S. study indicated that such direct income support yields positive impacts on academic performance and eventual adult employment rates for low-income children.¹⁵

Beyond the financial boost itself, a 2018 Chinese study highlighted that "Child Development Accounts" like DreamFund simultaneously shift parental and children

attitudes.¹⁶ Significantly, such schemes cultivated conscious parental asset-building for children's long-term development, with positive spillover effects to student motivation. These are two key focus areas of the MOE task-force.¹⁴

Furthermore, extra-curricular opportunities enabled by DreamFund encourages the development of non-academic skill-sets and soft skills.¹⁷ Such skills will be essential within an Industry 4.0 economy, where technological disruption increases demand for an intellectually-versatile workforce.¹⁸ DreamFund is thus a social investment in Singapore's human capital, boosting economic growth whilst reducing inequality.¹⁹

This policy is both feasible and affordable. Online-based credit schemes (e.g. SkillsFuture) exist today.²⁰ Regarding cost concerns, the targeted nature of DreamFund makes it a financially sustainable endeavour relative to existing social policies. Assuming a S\$100 monthly payout to children aged 7-18 from the bottom income quartile, DreamFund will cost S\$150 million annually - a fraction of WorkFare, which offers low-income workers \$125-300 monthly and cost S\$667 million in 2016.²¹ Credit schemes also prevent welfare fraud by releasing funds only to reimburse legitimate expenditure. Dream Fund is thus a value-for-money social investment that will improve equality of opportunity and human resource development.

Going beyond, while DreamFund can alleviate educational inequality in the short to medium term, deeper reforms are required to tackle the root cause of this problem - wider socio-economic inequality. While new redistributive policies to narrow the income gap may require increases in government spending, it is money worth spending to preserve the meritocratic nature of our society. To give Singaporeans a sense of national identity and a stake in Singapore's progress, we must keep the Singapore Dream alive.

Acknowledgements

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EQUAL JUSTICE
& HUMAN RIGHTS



Murugan, 33, is a dutiful family man from Tamil Nadu, India. Toiling in the construction business, he tries his best to make ends meet for his mother, wife, and daughter back home. But earlier last month, Murugan sustained a severe hand injury that has left him in limbo.



Although Murugan's medical fees are being covered by his company, his injury is likely to be permanent. Unable to regain full mobility of his right hand, Murugan cannot carry on with his job. He will be put on light duty and continue to draw a salary until his contract ends, after which he will have to return to India.

The Octant Explains: Migrant Labour in Singapore

This article, written by Harrison Linder, Bilge Arslan, Claire Phua and Moni Uzunova, was published in The Octant on 25 March 2019. Arslan, Phua and Uzunova are members of the Equal Justice & Human Rights Policy Centre of Roosevelt Institute. The Octant Explains is a series that aims to provide a basic context around issues in Singapore so that international students can better engage with them.

Photos & Captions by Sim Xi Zhe.

Tipu Kanti Nath and Habibur Rahman Muhammad, two Bangladeshi shipyard workers who have been working in Singapore for about four and three years respectively, were on a break from their English class taught at SDI Academy, a local NGO that provides migrant workers with subsidized English courses, when *The Octant* spoke with them.

“The situation for migrant workers in Singapore is worse than I thought it would be. I have family that have come here before, and they were able to earn much more than I am earning now. I am currently looking for positions in other places including New Zealand and Saudi Arabia. If I cannot find a new job within six months, I will have to go back to Bangladesh.” said Muhammed.

“Same for me. The situation here is not very good. I am also looking for jobs in other places, and I also have about six months to find a different job.” said Nath.

While every worker’s situation is different, both Nath and Muhammed reiterated a common sentiment held among many migrant workers: that the reality of being a migrant worker in Singapore is tougher and pays less than what they expected. This is just one of the many issues that migrant workers face in Singapore.

Demographics

According to Transient Workers Count Too, a Singaporean NGO that does a variety of advocacy work for migrant workers in Singapore, there are nearly one million low-wage migrant workers in Singapore, making up about 13 percent of the total population. They most commonly come from India, China, Bangladesh, Indonesia, and the Philippines.

Low-wage migrant workers are most commonly employed in construction, shipyards, sanitation services, manufacturing, and domestic work. These industries touch the everyday lives of everyone Singaporean in one way or another. At Yale-NUS, migrant workers are employed as gardeners, custodians, handymen and pest exterminators.

Incentives to hire migrant workers

Since before Singapore became a nation-state, it has been full of migrants from various backgrounds. As an important maritime port since the 13th century, it has long hosted merchants and laborers from various backgrounds. However, the institutionalization of low-wage migrant labor only began in 1981, when the first indications were made by the government to limit and regulate foreign workers in Singapore.

Legislation was passed in the 1980’s and 1990’s (including the Immigration Act the Employment Act, and the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act) that aimed, in part, to protect foreign workers from abuse by their employers. However, there has been an ongoing debate on whether migrant workers are sufficiently protected.. Dean’s Fellow Jane Zhang, who has volunteered and interned with Health Serve, a local NGO that provides migrant workers with a variety of services including affordable healthcare, said, “Laws regulating the treatment of migrant workers seem to cover all the bases, but many people slip through the cracks. At Health Serve, I saw and heard about many cases where workers were injured on the job and then not provided with the required compensation.”

The rationale provided by many, including the government, for why Singapore needs low-wage migrant labor is that there is a shortage of Singaporean workers in labor-intensive industries such as shipyard work and construction. A 2013 article published by the Ministry of Manpower states, “the overwhelming majority of non-resident foreigners in Singapore [i.e., low-wage migrant workers,] are here to do jobs that Singaporeans do not want to do.”

This labour shortage can be further contextualised by Singapore’s industrialisation which began in the late 1960s. Even in the case of foreign domestic workers (FDWs), the Foreign Domestic Servant Scheme was enacted in 1978 to cope with the influx of homemakers into the workforce.

The industries in which migrant workers are most commonly employed are among the most competitive in Singapore. Employers in these industries have historically relied on foreign workers, who on average work for significantly lower levels of compensation than locals.

Expectations and Reality

Beyond the prospect of high wages, migrant workers who are drawn to Singapore often hear tales from friends and relatives who have worked in Singapore that it is a dream city where the roads were clean, people were friendly, and everyone followed the law. Both Nath and Muhammed, in their interview with *The Octant*, expressed their admiration for Singapore for the same reasons. However, they emphasized how this did not make up for the fact that they were earning less than expected.

According to a 2017 report published by the Humanitarian Organization for Migration Economics (HOME), a migrant worker advocacy NGO based in Singapore, migrant workers in Singapore face many difficulties with regards to wages. Difficulties that may be faced by a migrant worker include wage depression and discrimination, unauthorized wage deductions by employers, deceptive recruitment, contract substitution and unpaid or late payments. Many of these problems stem from the payment of recruitment fees that can range from S\$3,000 to S\$15,000 for the opportunity to work in Singapore. These fees differ based on the worker’s

nationality, occupation and prior work experience in Singapore. For many migrant workers, these fees can amount up to eight months of working without saving.

Considering that the prospect of high wages is the main reason why most migrant workers decide to come to Singapore in the first place, it can be incredibly frustrating for migrant workers when their wage expectations do not accord with reality. Earlier this month, migrant workers contracted with Stargood Construction even took to the streets of the central business district in protest over what they claimed was over 300,000 SGD in back pay even though they risk serious punishments for holding an illegal protest.

Steps Singapore has taken to protect migrant workers

Singapore has made recent effort to improve the welfare of migrant workers. In January 2019, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) introduced a new work permit condition that prevents employers from being allowed to safekeep money belonging to FDWs. Punishments for violation of this law include a maximum penalty of a \$10,000 fine in addition to 12 months of jail time.

MOM claims that they currently receive about 600 complaints per annum from FDWs regarding salary issues, the true extent of the injustice cannot be determined because many victims of salary injustice are likely reluctant to file a report. To enable greater financial autonomy for FDWs, MOM encourages employers to help FDWs set up a bank account, which can give them financial security and freedom.

Although MOM has taken action against the problem of employers withholding money, no legislation exists to prevent employers of migrant workers from withholding passports and other identification documents. FDWs, who preferred to remain anonymous, interviewed by *The Octant* at Lucky Plaza said that employers often take away the passports of their FDWs in order to prevent them from escaping. “A Land Imagined”, a movie about foreign workers in Singapore, illustrates how construction workers have been trapped in Singapore when their employers held onto their passports.

Views on migrant workers in greater Singapore society

Low-waged migrant workers are placed in stark contrast with their highly paid counterparts (including Yale-NUS graduates) who are usually termed 'expats' or 'foreign talent' instead. Although both groups face criticism, the former tends to be at the receiving end of Singaporeans' condescension. The Straits Times Forum pages have historically been a rich source of letters complaining that "Sunday enclaves"— areas that have been adopted by both work permit holders as places to meet and socialize on their days off—have become "crowded", "noisy" and "dirty". At the same time, these pages include criticisms of the snobbery of those complaining about Sunday enclaves.

Online forums often explode with outrage over high-profile "maid abuse" cases as well as cases of ill-treatment meted out to other work permit holders. However, empathetic sentiments expressed in the press and on social media are still contradicted by the existence of explicitly discriminatory rules in semi-public places: bans on FDWs entering country clubs, using condominium swimming pools, or taking the same elevators as their employers, for example, display the demand, or at the very least indifference, of such rules. Even though FDWs constitute a big part of lots of families in Singapore, it remains to be discussed how successful is Singapore in integrating them into the society.

Migrant workers globally

According to the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, there are currently 173 million migrant workers globally and this population continues to grow. Of which, there are around 80 million migrant workers in Asia and 78 million in Europe.

Even though migration provides new opportunities, there are also risks associated with it. In particular, the work position of migrant workers are the most precarious ones in the case of an economic downturn. Migrant workers around the world face different challenges in regards to payment, work hours and work conditions. Migrant workers worldwide are vulnerable to human rights violation.

According to professor of Sociology and Public Policy at Yale-NUS College Anju Paul , Singapore is considered to have relatively better working conditions compared to countries in the Middle East. She supports her claim by comparing criteria such as the average monthly wages and the track record of the treatment of foreign domestic workers. Aside from establishing regulations, MOM institutes checks to ensure the existing policies are implemented - more than 6,500 inspections are conducted on companies each year. Nevertheless, she also remarks that Singapore still has room for development taking into account that Hong Kong can be considered to be a better working place for domestic workers. One of the examples Paul gives is that FDWs receive a long-service payment after spending five years with the same employer.

The internationally precarious situation does not bode well for Nath and Muhammed. There is a chance that even if they manage to find a job in another country as a migrant worker, their situation will be no easier than it currently is. However, their situations are not all bad. Having taken the initiative to learn English, they are opening up new opportunities for themselves. In the worst case scenario, they said that they will try to find employment in the relatively high paying outsourcing industry back home in Bangladesh.

2019 10 Ideas Submission – Reformation of Singapore’s Special Education

Memo proposal submitted to the Roosevelt 10 Ideas Journal. Written by the Equal Justice & Human Rights Policy Centre, Roosevelt Institute @ Yale-NUS College. This memo was prepared by Annabelle Ho, Oh Yeonhee, Bilge Arslan, Claire Chua Ying Xuan, Aaliyah Shiraz Longden, Rachel Lim Rui Qi, & Sophia Elalamy.

Reform of Singapore’s Special Education

To alleviate workplace segregation of the intellectually disabled in Singapore, the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) and Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF) should increase the standards and accessibility of supplementary vocational opportunities offered to the intellectually disabled, such as internships, specialised trainings and mentorships.

Key Facts

- Persons with disabilities (PWDs) form only 0.1% of the private sector workforce.
- Over 60% of PWDs surveyed in 2016 by the NCSS reported that they were not included in the workplace or that they were not given opportunities for professional development.
- In 2016, 62% of PWDs surveyed report that they do not feel included, accepted, or given opportunities to contribute or reach their potential by society.

Background and Analysis

The PWD community is a highly marginalised group within Singapore’s employment procedure. A survey conducted in 2016 revealed that over 60% of PWDs felt that they were not assimilated into the workplace and that there were no opportunities to develop professionally in a manner that would allow them to effectively contribute to society. Currently, intellectually disabled people are limited to school-to-work vocational programmes that cater to the service sector, usually in the food, beverage, or hospitality industry. Consequently, PWDs form merely 0.1% of the private sector workforce.

For the state, a lack of diversified employment opportunities signifies a loss of human resources and potential. In a study, 250 Australian corporations surveyed found a net positive value in hiring PWDs. 32.2% of the corporations stated that creative and different skills had been brought to the workplace on account of hiring PWDs and 23.7% declared that the process improved workplace morale. Notably, none of the corporations surveyed stated that PWDs decreased their overall productivity and financial success.

This demonstrates how better efforts to integrate PWDs within Singaporean society will unlock human resources and capital in various sectors, allowing Singapore to reach greater economic and productive potential. Currently, initiatives that directly target employers through incentives have proven to be ineffectual. This necessitates a bottom-up approach that involves targeting students in special education (SPED) by reforming the current vocational program. Through this policy change, the state will normalise inclusive hiring policies, de-stigmatise the engagement of PWDs in society, and ultimately promote social cohesion. Most importantly, the state no longer neglects the fundamental rights of PWDs to thrive within all sectors of our society.

Talking points

Problem: Structural segregation of intellectually disabled individuals results in employment opportunities being limited largely to the service sector. This represents a loss of potential human resources in other sectors and a failure of the state to provide equal opportunities to the disadvantaged.

Solutions: Revising the current vocational programme to match the standards of mainstream tertiary education will increase opportunities for special education (SPED) students to explore work in various sectors. These standards can be met through implementing opportunities such as local exchange programs, workshops, internships and networking opportunities with employers.

Impact: A systemic increase in training and workplace exposure in various industries will have a two-fold effect; allowing for greater workforce participation of persons with disabilities (PWDs) and de-stigmatising the engagement of PWDs in society. Consequently, this will prompt the normalisation of inclusive hiring policies. This will unlock human capital in various sectors, strengthening Singapore's economic productivity.

Policy Idea:

In order to reform the vocational school-to-work programmes offered in Special Education (SPED) schools for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, the Ministry of Education (MOE) should (1) coordinate with other tertiary education institutes such as Polytechnics and Institutes of Technical Education (ITE) to create an adapted exchange programme, (2) collaborate with businesses in various industries to produce specialised internship programmes, and (3) organise networking sessions to create a space for interactions between employers and SPED students.

Policy Analysis:

Given that SPED students are pigeon-holed into the hospitality sectors upon completion of their education, this policy aims at optimising the abilities of SPED students and creating more diverse career options. By establishing direct links with other sectors, this policy creates equal opportunities for SPED students to be exposed to different fields of interest.

The programme prepares PWDs to work across various sectors by equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience. Exchange programmes with a local polytechnic or Institute of Technical Education

will educate SPED students in the foundations of a specific field of interest. After knowledge acquisition in the local exchange programmes, internships and networking opportunities will offer SPED students the opportunity to employ their knowledge and gain relevant work experience and skills.

To adapt to the learning curves and needs of SPED students, the academic rigour of local exchange programs can be lowered, with fewer standardised tests and gentler assessment rubrics. These adjustments place more emphasis on learning catered to the individual pace of SPED students. Internships can also be modified; the initial month can be dedicated to job-shadowing to ease the transition from school to work. Following this, SPED students can report to a manager daily on their progress at work.

The educational reform will strengthen the competitiveness of SPED students' job applications. Employers will be more inclined to change their hiring policies when SPED students gain the capabilities to match the job. Furthermore, cross interactions between SPED students, mainstream students and employees will reassure employers that PWDs can integrate smoothly into the workplace. This complements current efforts made by the Government to incentivise employers to adopt inclusive hiring policies and create an inclusive workplace environment.

Since the school is a microcosm of the larger society, the inclusion of SPED students will normalise the participation of PWDs in the workforce. When the government treats SPED students with the same integrity as they do for students in mainstream education, the private sector will reciprocate and place their trust in the abilities of PWDs. Education reform is the start of a change in societal mindset that will ultimately sway employers to employ inclusive hiring policies.

Possible Objections:

Our policy may face objections from parents/guardians of PWDs as well as the educators. One may challenge the purpose of making special need education more

mainstream since it exists to serve the different needs of PWDS. There may also be doubts on the receptiveness of SPED students to the educational reform.

Next Steps

The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with SPED Schools and tertiary educational institutes, should work on drafting a reformed curriculum to replace the current school-to-work vocational program that will better serve the diverse interests of SPED Students. Both businesses and PWDS will benefit from an educational reform that includes local exchange programmes, internships and networking opportunities. A limited education pathway must be reformed to provide equal opportunities to PWDS to achieve their full potential.



ENERGY,
TECHNOLOGY
& ENVIRONMENT

Clean Meat, And Why Singapore Should Embrace It

Written by: Cedric Choo, Tamara Barsova, Benjamin Pei-Wei Yang & Vivien Su

Meat is a highly embedded element within culinary culture. From chicken rice to chilli crab, the ubiquity of meat in local cuisine is symptomatic of a larger global reality: the high amounts of meat in our diets. However, this comes with an environmental cost, as producing meat is resource-intensive. For example, a life cycle analysis conducted by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) found that red meat such as beef and lamb is accountable for 10 to 40 times as many greenhouse gas emissions as common vegetables and grains. To address climate change, the consumption of conventional meat has to fall drastically. But how can this be done if meat already occupies a position of such cultural importance in society? Lab-grown meat, or clean meat, seems to offer a developing panacea.

What is clean meat?

Clean meat differs from meat analogues like mock meat, which are made from processed vegetarian ingredients to mimic meat. It is artificially grown in laboratories, using stem cells derived from the muscle and fat tissues of a living animal. The stem cells are multiplied under lab conditions, eventually forming clean meat that tastes exactly like conventional meat.

The benefits of clean meat

Clean meat does not require the resource-intensive inputs that characterizes conventional meat, and is hence better for the environment. As awareness has grown about the environmental impacts of conventional meat, there is growing demand from consumers for such protein alternatives. In 2018, the market for plant-based “meat” (or plant-based products designed to imitate the look and taste of conventional meat) grew by 23%, exceeding \$760 million, and is set to grow even further. Though no clean meat company has yet brought their products to mass market, there is significant potential

for the clean meat industry to disrupt the multi-trillion dollar global meat market, as the plant-based meat industry has shown.

With such potential for disruption, Singapore should embrace clean meat. Not only would this bring about huge economic benefits, it can also alleviate several other food-related problems affecting Singapore. For one, it could bring about better food security. According to the UN World Food Programme, food insecurity is projected to increase globally due to climate change, as more common extreme weather events affect crop production. A domestic sector that produces clean meat could help decrease Singapore’s reliance on food imports and hence increase food security. Also, clean meat can bring public health benefits. As it is produced in sterile facilities, the use of antibiotics becomes redundant, unlike in conventional meat where large amounts of antibiotics are used, increasing the risk of creating antibiotic-resistant superbugs that could potentially kill up to 10 million people and cost \$100 trillion annually by 2050.

Why Singapore should embrace clean meat

Singapore has the necessary research capabilities for clean meat. The National University of Singapore is ranked among the top ten universities in the world by the Good Food Institute in clean meat development potential. Recent developments in Singapore suggest that the government is indeed interested in such alternative proteins. Temasek Holdings recently led a US\$75 million investment round in Impossible Foods, a plant-based meat company based in California. On July 26, the government announced the formation of the Singapore Food Agency (SFA), tasked with dealing with global food supply challenges caused by climate change, and seizing opportunities in the global food industry.

What should Singapore do?

For lab-grown meat to flourish, the government has a big role to play. For starters, a legal framework must be set in place to support the growth of clean meat companies. At the moment, there are no mentions of lab-grown meat in the legislative texts of either the Agri-Food and Veterinary Authority or the National Environment Agency. Amending the legal definitions of meat will lay the necessary legal and regulatory frameworks, so that existing provisions on meat products now can also be applied to clean meat products in the future.

Additionally, the government can set up investment funds to support and encourage private startups and companies to invest in clean meat technology. The Japanese government has successfully done so with their A-FIVE (Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Fund Corporation for Innovation, Value-chain and Expansion Japan) Fund and its investment in startups like Integriculture, which seeks to commercialise clean meat in Japan by 2021.

Conclusively speaking, clean meat is a new kind of meat product that need not trigger any behavioural and dietary changes, while drastically helping us reduce greenhouse gas emissions, build Singapore's food security, and mitigate the effects of climate change. For that to occur, legal and regulatory frameworks must first be set up for the new industry to develop, while government investments through means such as public-private funds further facilitate technological advancement.

2019 10 Ideas Submission – Bird Safe Certification

Memo proposal submitted to the Roosevelt 10 Ideas Journal. Written by the Energy, Technology and Environment Policy Centre, Roosevelt Institute @ Yale-NUS College. Memo prepared by Cedric Choo, Sallie Bestul, Gawain Pek, & Benjamin Pei-Wei Yang.

Bird Safe Certification: Addressing Avian Mortality and Biodiversity Loss in Urbanized Singapore

Bird mortality in Singapore is largely due to reflective windows and night lighting in high-rises. The Singaporean government should launch a campaign to inform residents of the importance of Singapore's birds and create an incentives scheme to encourage bird-safe measures in construction and management.

Background & Analysis

Singapore's rapid urbanization has created a life-threatening urban environment for birds. The proximity of reflective surfaces to bird habitats and migratory entrance points, as well as bright lights in buildings at night, pose a serious threat to the island's avian biodiversity. In the past five years alone, at least 700 birds have been found dead as a result of bird-building collisions. Such collisions are particularly prevalent in the areas surrounding the two largest nature reserves and the Central Business District (CBD). Large reflective surfaces on low-rise buildings near reserves and the West coast – where migratory populations enter Singapore – confuse birds who perceive the reflection as a continuation of the nearby natural environment.

Furthermore, nocturnally migrating birds follow points of light in times of low visibility, leading them to collide at high migration-speeds with high-rise buildings in the CBD.

Singapore is home to a diverse number of bird species and hosts many more as a stopover for migratory birds on the East-Asian Australasian Flyway. Of these many species, the country hosts 16 globally threatened and 30 near-threatened avian species. Singapore is also a refuge for many regional birds which have been extirpated from other countries in Southeast Asia due to

illegal hunting and habitat destruction. Biodiversity in Singapore will be near impossible to restore once lost, and this issue, if left unaddressed, will result in negative ramifications on local and global environments and ecology, as well as the national heritage of Singapore.

Talking Points

- In the past five years alone, at least 700 birds have been found dead as a result of bird-building collisions in Singapore.
- Singapore hosts more than 400 avian species, including both resident and migratory birds and about 2,000 arctic migratory birds, many of whom are rare or endangered, make winter stopovers in Singapore's Sungei Buloh Wetland Reserve each year.
- Due to illegal hunting and natural habitat destruction in other Southeast Asian countries, Singapore is a refuge for many rare regional species, including the Straw-headed Bulbul.
- Birds and avian biodiversity are integral to the local ecosystem as well as to Singapore's natural heritage which should be conserved for future generations.

The Policy Idea

We propose a two-part solution, which includes both a public campaign by the National Parks Board to inform residents of the environmental and cultural importance of Singapore's bird populations, as well as the creation of a Bird-Safe Certification (BSC) scheme to encourage bird-safe principles in building construction and management, administered by the Building and Construction Authority. The campaign will strengthen public perceived value of bird-safe buildings, thus leading BSC buildings to have improved corporate

image and greater leasing and resale value of buildings, and incentivizing developers to build bird-safe buildings.

Policy Analysis

This two-part approach of a public campaign and the Bird Safe Certification (BSC) scheme is the best solution to bird mortality caused by the Singaporean urban environment. The BSC will directly reduce bird mortality by incentivizing building developers and managers to implement measures which are shown to decrease bird collisions in Singapore and abroad, while the public campaign will strengthen the value of BSC through public opinion.

Although there may be concern that BCS is not enough motivation for developers and managers to implement bird-safe measures, this is not the case. This is supported by the success of the similar existing Green Mark certification, which has certified nearly 2,000 buildings since its launch in 2009. In the case of BCS, measures rewarded by the scheme are relatively low cost, while the benefits – improved corporate image and greater leasing and resale value – will be significant. Some examples of low-cost BSC measures include the pasting of matte or opaque decals on low-rise windows, and night lights-out policies in high-rise buildings. Furthermore, the proposed public campaign will also strengthen the publicly perceived value of Bird Safe Certified buildings and the benefits to BSC building owners and managers. Furthermore, the efficacy of the government-run campaign is supported by the legacy of similar campaigns as key Singaporean governance tools which have a significant impact on Singaporean views and behavior. This solution brings together the public, the government, and building developers and managers to improve the safety of the urban environment to Singapore's birds.

Next Steps

Policymakers will likely be open to our solutions since biodiversity conservation is a focus of the Singaporean government. Ultimately, the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) and the National Parks Board (NParks) must be on board with these solutions. Since they are

government bodies housed within the Ministry of National Development (MND), it would be beneficial to first reach out to the Ministry. To do this, we will collaborate with the Nature Society (Singapore) which has researched bird-building collision mortality and established connections with NParks and the MND. We will also work with allies in the government, such as Louis Ng, a Member of Parliament who focuses on animal rights and environmental issues. To more specifically identify the mitigation measures to include in the Bird-Safe Certification, we will also work researchers at the National University of Singapore who are already researching this issue.

Key Facts

- Between 1998 and 2016, there were at least 237 recorded bird-building collisions in Singapore, with around 157 of these collisions resulting in bird fatalities.
- About 73% of Singapore's bird-building collisions take place in the central and western parts of Singapore – which include the high rises of the central business district, heavy industrial areas, and areas surrounding large green spaces which are bird habitats.
- A reduction in reflected vegetation by way of a 10% decrease in the height of greeneries leads to at least a 30% decrease in the risk of bird-building strikes.

Action Plan Snapshot

This proposal requires the support and initiative of the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) and the National Parks Board (NParks), two Singaporean national government bodies housed within the Ministry of National Development (MND). Thus, it will be beneficial to establish a relationship with not only with the BCA and NParks, but also the Ministry of National Development in order for coordination of the solution.

To build agency and a coalition, we will meet with the Nature Society (Singapore) (NSS) and the NSS Bird Group (BG). We will interview them to learn about their experience affecting environmental policy change and get their advice. We will also inquire about their own

research regarding avian mortality due to bird-building collisions in Singapore. We will also reach out to researchers at the National University of Singapore who are already researching this issue. We will work with them on identifying the best architectural design and management process to mitigate avian mortality resulting from bird-building collisions, as well as drafting a comprehensive list of qualifications for the Bird Safe Certification (BSC) to propose to the Building and Construction Authority.

To build political power, we will meet with Louis Ng, a Member of Parliament who works on legislation specifically addressing animal rights and wellbeing, as well as environmental policy and regulations. Through him, we will pose Parliamentary Questions to the Ministry of National Development asking how the ministry views the role of avian biodiversity in Singapore and what measures the ministry is currently taking to

protect this biodiversity. With his assistance, we will also aim to directly make contact with NParks and BCA to begin building a relationship of collaboration.

In order to gain public support for our policy solutions and to put pressure on the MND, we will also run a social media campaign. This October, a Jambu Fruit Dove died after a collision and his image was shared on Facebook, receiving more than 6,000 reactions, shares, and comments, with many calling upon government and ministers to enact measures to prevent such future occurrences. This campaign will mobilize this public concern through a Facebook social media campaign which will both spread awareness of the issue as well as call upon citizens to lobby their own Members of Parliament. The campaign focus on Singapore's many endangered species and the frequency in which they die due to collisions.



HEALTHCARE

2019 10 Ideas Submission – Discrimination Against HIV+ Non-Singaporeans

Memo proposal submitted to the Roosevelt 10 Ideas Journal. Written by the Healthcare Policy Centre, Roosevelt Institute @ Yale-NUS College. Memo prepared by Damon Lim Weida, Jacinta Speer, & Giulia De Benedictis.

Reforming Discrimination Against HIV-positive non-Singaporeans

Currently, HIV-positive foreigners are denied long-term visas to Singapore. This policy contributes to: (1) family separations, (2) loss of economic opportunities both for individuals and Singapore, and (3) institutional stigma and a climate of fear which prevents HIV-positive individuals from seeking treatment. As such, Singapore's Parliament should modify its archaic law of denying long-term visas to HIV-positive foreigners if they can prove that they are on antiretroviral medication.

Background and Analysis

In 1998, at the peak of global fear and hysteria surrounding the HIV and AIDS epidemic, Singapore passed legislation 8(3)(ba) of the Immigration Act prohibiting foreigners with HIV or AIDS from entering Singapore.[1] At that time, Singapore was experiencing dramatic rises in new HIV infections, from 61 instances in 1985 to 200 instances in 1990.[2] Furthermore, the government found that an alarming 2813 foreigners residing in Singapore then were HIV-positive[3] at a time where there were no cure or medication for HIV. Thus, this law was implemented due to the fear generated by the HIV epidemic.

Developments since the inception of the law has rendered the legislation archaic. Firstly, extensive medical research has improved knowledge of how HIV is spread. Since we now know that HIV cannot be transmitted through casual contact,[4] laws on travel restrictions point to a misunderstanding of the communicability of the disease. Secondly, the development of antiretroviral medication prevents the growth and spread of the HIV virus.[5] Antiviral medication can reduce the virus to undetectable levels in the blood, enabling the immune system to recover and function

almost normally.[6] More importantly, this medication prevents the transmission of the virus, enabling HIV-positive individuals to live life normally.

Singapore recently lifted the ban on short term visas for HIV-positive foreigners in 2015.[7] We believe that due to the reasons outlined above, Singapore should also allow HIV-positive foreigners on antiretroviral medication to obtain long-term visas to enter Singapore for employment or family.

Talking Points

- This archaic law reinforces institutional stigma towards HIV and thus contributes to a misunderstanding of HIV, which might discourage people from getting tested or seeking treatment for HIV.
- Singapore has already relaxed its laws on issuing short-term visas to HIV-positive foreigners in 2015 and it is principally consistent to remove restrictions on long-term visas for foreigners who can prove that they are on antiretroviral medication.
- Ultimately, changing this law can lead to better health outcomes for Singaporeans, improve Singapore's international image, and create economic opportunities by enabling HIV-positive foreigners to work in Singapore and boosting HIV-related medical tourism.

The Policy Idea

Singapore's Parliament should amend the legislation 8(3) (ba) of the Immigration Act by allowing foreigners on antiretroviral medication (such that they are unable to transmit the virus) to obtain long-term visas. To circumvent Singapore's worry that HIV-positive foreigners might pose a burden on its healthcare system, these HIV-positive foreigners should prove that they have the financial means to afford antiretroviral

medication and undergo monthly tests to ensure their viral load count is acceptable.. Ultimately, amending these restrictions is also a symbolic act by the government and provides extensive public discourse that can help de-stigmatise HIV.

Policy Analysis

The proposed amendment would benefit Singapore's image and interests while costing Singapore very little. Like many modern economies, Singapore is facing a declining population. The sustainability of Singapore's growth depends greatly on the inclusion of international migrants. By excluding internationals who are HIV-positive from entering Singapore, Singapore loses out on potential talents and economic opportunities. Moreover, this legislation means that families would be separated if one member has HIV, resulting in emotional trauma or families avoiding Singapore entirely. This law is thus unfavourable to Singapore's image which might affect its political and economic interests. The proposed amendment is a step forward for equal human rights that might foster greater diplomatic relationships with other developed states. Also, the inclusion of this amendment would de-stigmatize HIV, decreasing the climate of fear around getting tested and seeking treatment for HIV.

This policy would most likely enable high-income, professional expats on antiretroviral medication to obtain long-term visas in Singapore, which means that the risk of Singaporeans contracting HIV is virtually zero and the healthcare burden minimal. As such, these skilled foreigners would likely be perceived favourably by the state, meaning that parliament might be more inclined to enact this policy change.

Next Steps

In the context of Singapore, we recognize that any changes to the policy needs to be approved by parliament. As such, we have highlighted the benefits to Singapore's economy and international image, which might hopefully better convince parliament to enact change.

We plan to work with advocacy groups such as Action for AIDS (AFA) and other community partners in campaigning for a change to the law. By organizing a

petition, we hope to bring parliament's attention to the policy which might enact change. We also understand that Singaporeans might be opposed to such a change, that there might be a push-back against immigration and/or fear of HIV-positive individuals. As such, part of our campaign with AFA would also entail educating the public on how medication can inhibit HIV and its transmissivity.

However, changing this law is only the first step in tackling discrimination against HIV-positive individuals. In the future, when antiretroviral medication becomes readily accessible to all, it would be ideal if the law was abolished.

Key Facts

- In 2010, all restrictions on HIV-positive individuals from entering or migrating to the United States were lifted, and people were no longer be required to undergo HIV testing as part of the required medical examination.[8]
- In 2015, Singapore lifted a ban on issuing short-term visit passes to HIV-positive foreigners.
- In 2017, 434 new cases of HIV infections were reported among Singapore residents, and about 41% had late-stage HIV infection when they were diagnosed, signifying that they were getting tested late.[9]
- The number of new HIV cases among Singaporean residents has remained consistent at about 450 per year since 2008.[10]

Action Plan Snapshot

Firstly, we propose working with HIV advocacy groups such as Action for Aids (AFA) to create awareness regarding this archaic law. This campaign would also entail spreading knowledge of how HIV is transmitted, HIV preventative measures, and the availability of antiretroviral medication. The campaign should emphasize how changing the law can improve knowledge of how HIV is transmitted, leading to better health outcomes for Singapore.

More importantly, we want to collect signatures that support a change to the law which would then be brought to parliament's attention. In the context of

Singapore where there are no political lobbies and very little ways for an individual to enact change, we recognize that we should first work extensively with AFA and their community partners to collect signatures for a petition. Afterwards, we can approach a Member of Parliament (MP) regarding the possibility of raising this issue up in parliament. We also propose contacting the

Ministry of Health (MOH) to formulate a plan on how HIV-positive foreigners can establish a regular check-up plan at government clinics or hospitals and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) regarding how such a change to policy can be made known to Singapore's diplomatic partners.

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