4G team to create opportunities at every stage of life for all: Indrananee

It is also trying to make sure the disadvantaged can make the most of diverse paths opened up

Rei Kurohi

To tackle inequality in its current form, Singapore’s fourth-generation (4G) leadership will not just strengthen support for those who have less, but also strive to create opportunities for all citizens at every stage of their life.

Apart from creating diverse and rewarding paths, the 4G team is also seeking to address a critical issue: How to make sure the disadvantaged can make the most of the opportunities that are created?

Second Minister for Education and Finance Indrananee Rajah yesterday set out how the 4G team will address inequality and ensure social mobility, even as she acknowledged that the issue has been around since Singapore became independent.

“Singapore must always be a society of opportunities for all, throughout life, where everyone can progress irrespective of the starting point,” she said at the National University of Singapore’s Social Service Research Centre Conference.

Flagging that society could fracture in the face of widening inequalities, she said: “What is at stake, therefore, is the very nature of our society. This is not just the task of the Government. It is the task of everyone because it affects all of us.”

Inequality and social mobility have been in the spotlight in recent years. In March, Minister for Social and Family Development Desmond Lee said inequality needs to be tackled on multiple fronts.

Yesterday, Ms Indrananee said tackling inequality and social mobility, which have been concerns since 1965, is a “fundamental tenet of achieving a fair and just society”.

The nature of the problem has also changed. In the early years, the base starting point for the majority of Singaporeans was very low. But while the country’s economic progress has created prosperity for many, it has also meant that their children started with even greater advantages over those at the bottom end of the spectrum.

Advancements in technology also threaten to deepen the divide between higher-skilled and lower-skilled workers, who risk being shut off from new opportunities.

These trends and tendencies pose new challenges that did not exist in earlier decades, she noted. “Left unchecked, they will cause less advantaged Singaporeans to be left behind and feel that opportunities available can only be accessed by a privileged few,” she added.

The 4G team’s approach, she said, is not to do away with meritocracy, which some have blamed, or cap the top, but to uplift the bottom by improving access to opportunities among the less advantaged.

She added: “In tandem with this, there must be multiple pathways for achievement, success and careers to ensure continuing social mobility.”

Ms Indrananee detailed various government assistance schemes, such as enhancing subsidies for childcare, and increasing the qualifying cap and raising the annual maximum payout for the Workfare Income Supplement. The 4G leaders will share more in the coming months on strengthening support for the disadvantaged, she said.

But it was important to offer opportunities for all at every stage of life, she added: “The Government will strive to ensure that no one, no matter the conditions of his or her birth, will be denied the opportunities to improve the conditions of their life.”

In the area of education, this entails giving every child a good preschool education, developing children’s strengths during their schooling years and allowing them to succeed through different trajectories.

The opportunities would also be available in the working years to deepen skills and support displaced workers, she added.

The key was to bridge gaps to ensure that those for whom opportunities were created could seize them.

So, to help under-performing students from disadvantaged families and address issues like long-term absenteeism and the environment outside schools, there was a need to involve multiple agencies, ministries, self-help groups and even rope in families and community, she said.

“When the community is involved, it works two ways: It strengthens the ecosystem of care and support for disadvantaged students and, at the same time, offers people an avenue to give back.”

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Reducing inequality, ensuring social mobility

Economic progress has created prosperity, but has also resulted in inequality over time. Second Minister for Education Indranee Rajah outlines Singaporeans’ approach to the problem.

FINDING THE SOLUTIONS

FOR YOUNG FAMILIES

- Enhanced Additional and Basic Govt Housing Grants for first-time HDB flat buyers.
- Subsidies for childcare and kindergarten fees extended to middle-income families.
- Pre-school education is being made more accessible and affordable. Quality is also being improved through qualifying preschool and training educators.
- There is targeted early intervention for children from low-income families and families living on 1SAD.
- Schools are providing freehold study space to all students to realise their potential.
- Secondary school after-school care will receive additional funding to focus on strengthening students’ strengths.

FOR WORKERS

- Progressive Wage Model, which sets a minimum wage based on the skills needed and ease of incomes for low-wage workers.
- Opportunities for certification of skills and training at any stage of a person’s career.
- Employment support for Singaporean workers aged 55 and older with duration up to 6 months to encourage hiring of older workers.

FOR SENIORS

- The Special Employment Credit scheme subsidises wages for Singaporean workers aged 55 and older with duration up to 6 months.
- The Pension Generation and Medida Generation packages help seniors with their healthcare costs.

TWO KEY MINISTRIES ARE ALSO DOING MORE

MINISTRY OF SOCIAL AND FAMILY DEVELOPMENT

- Social service officers (SSOs) have been set up near CPF offices to help coordinate social aid.
- Video-conferencing is used so residents do not have to go to a public service building to get help.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

- The Lifelong Education in Life and Inspiring Families (LEIF) programme was set up to support and help under-performing students from disadvantaged families.
- It will focus on four key areas:
  - Long-term absenteeism
  - Lack of structured and meaningful environment outside school
  - Lack of self-confidence, motivation and resilience
  - Lack of strong family support

Drive to improve coordination in tapping volunteers, resources

Than Yuen-C, Director, Social Policy Correspondent

An effort is under way to coordinate resources and community leaders to improve the coordination of the Singapore Social Service Agency (SSA) with other agencies.

Also, training is being conducted for those who want to work in education so that they can prepare for the move to Common Early Childhood Curriculum (CECC) when implemented in August.

As the ministry was conducting an audit of existing social service agencies, it was found that these agencies are veteran in the field of social work but some do not have the skills and resources to respond to the needs of the community.

The SSA has put in place a system to coordinate resources and volunteers, resources and to provide support to those who need help.

The SSA has also launched a new programme called LEIF to support families and schools to support children with special needs.

The SSA is also working on a new programme called EYE (Engaging and Yielding Emotions) to help families who have children with special needs.

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Dismantle meritocracy. No, create opportunities for all, for every stage of life

This is an edited excerpt from a speech by Minister for Education and Finance Indranee Rajah at the NUS Social Service Research Conference yesterday. The conference was on low-income families. In her speech, she laid out the vision of the new generation of political leaders – dubbed the 4G – to create a society of opportunities for every stage in life.

Today, we would like to speak about the importance of creating opportunities throughout life – one in which we will have opportunities to fulfill their potential,involve our children in initiatives that will lead them to a society in which each is not only caring for the immediate family but also for the community.

The conference theme, "Opportunity for All" reflects the theme of the Singapore Social Service Awards which was launched last year.

In the 1990s, the National Policy of Affordability and Equity was launched and dedicated to not only to "学前 and social housing, among others, to

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Tackling inequality and maintaining social mobility are becoming challenges. They take different forms in different times, and such generations will have to address them as they manifest. The aspiration of the 4G leaders, said Second Minister for Education and Finance Indranee Rajah, is that they will tackle inequality and social mobility, in this time and in this world.

Getting the community involved in helping students

The challenge for community involvement is significant. At NUS, for example, Tan Sri Tan Sin Eng, president of the University of Singapore, has been looking into this area. NUS Vice-Chancellor Prof Tan Sin Eng has identified a problem that is particularly relevant to students. In the past, students have been more focused on their studies and less on social issues. However, today, students are more aware of the social issues and are more likely to get involved in community service.

The community involvement in helping students is a critical component of the NUS’s approach to education. The university is committed to creating a culture of service and giving back to the community. This is achieved through a variety of programs and initiatives, such as volunteering opportunities, community service projects, and service-learning courses.

However, the need for community involvement extends beyond the university. The community also has a role to play in supporting students. This can be done through funding, mentoring, and providing resources and opportunities for students to give back. By working together, the university and the community can create a supportive environment for students to succeed.

REASONS FOR INEQUALITY

Why is it that inequality and social mobility are significant issues in our society? Why is it that we need to address these issues? There are several reasons why we need to consider these issues:

1. Economic inequality:

The economic inequality in Singapore is significant. While there are some affluent individuals, there are also many who struggle to make ends meet. This economic inequality can be seen in the discrepancies in income, wealth, and access to resources.

2. Educational inequality:

There are also significant disparities in educational opportunities. Children from wealthier families have access to better schools and more resources, which gives them an advantage over children from poorer families. This advantage can be seen in terms of higher achievement and better future prospects.

3. Housing inequality:

Housing inequality is also a significant issue in Singapore. Some families have access to better housing, while others struggle to make ends meet. This can be seen in the disparities in living conditions, access to amenities, and safety.

4. Health inequality:

Health inequality is another significant issue. Children from wealthier families have better access to healthcare and have an advantage over children from poorer families in terms of health outcomes.

5. Social inequality:

Social inequality is also significant in Singapore. Children from wealthier families have better access to social opportunities, while children from poorer families struggle to make ends meet.

6. Political inequality:

Political inequality is also a significant issue. Some families have access to better political opportunities, while others struggle to make ends meet.

These inequalities have a significant impact on the lives of children and young adults. They can lead to a lifetime of disadvantage, with many children struggling to overcome these disadvantages throughout their lives.

As a result, it is crucial that we address these issues and work towards creating a more equal society. This can be done through policies that promote equality and social mobility, and by creating opportunities for children to succeed in life.