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Volunteerism rate needs to be 70 per cent with ageing population: Grace Fu



Singapore hopes to double its volunteerism rate from one in three currently to 70 per cent in five years' time. PHOTO: ST FILE

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SINGAPORE - In an effort to create a caring and empowering environment for its rapidly ageing population, Singapore hopes to double its volunteerism rate from one in three currently to 70 per cent in five years' time.

"We hope for Singapore to grow as a giving nation with a volunteer in every household," Minister for Culture, Community and Youth Grace Fu said in a keynote address on Tuesday (June 5) at the Asian Venture Philanthropy Network's (AVPN) conference.

"We believe technology can empower and enable citizens to do good by providing time, money and resources to meet the needs of their neighbours and build stronger social bonds," she added.

The conference at Suntec Singapore, which began on Monday, is the largest gathering of social investors in Asia, bringing together 1,000 delegates from 40 countries to address critical issues related to climate action, education and wealth disparity, among other things.

In her speech, Ms Fu noted the challenge faced by many countries: "In the face of technological advances that disrupt our businesses, our jobs, the way we communicate with one another; in the face of an ageing population that will change the societal structure and dramatically increase the need for social services; in the face of globalisation that may result in uneven economic progress for segments of society; our challenge is to activate and strengthen the social compact in the face of increasing social and technological divides."

To that end, the National Volunteer and Philanthropy Centre's (NVPC) Giving.SG portal has grown over the past few years to more than 150,000 members who use the platform to find opportunities to volunteer and make donations.

More than S\$100 million has been directed to charities through the portal, with over S\$50 million distributed in the past 2½ years alone.

She said collaboration across the private and public sectors is key to achieving impact in the social sector.

"Corporations could step up and partner government and non-profit organisations to do more for the community. Recognising that there are important stakeholders other than shareholders, corporations should place social responsibility clearly as part of their score card."

"Business leaders should move beyond conducting ad hoc, one-off sponsorship or events to incorporating sustained giving programmes as an integral part of their corporate strategy and identity. Companies benefit from the shared public assets of the societies in which they operate and should therefore in return deliver benefit to all these constituencies," Ms Fu added.

She said social enterprises can play a critical role to achieve inclusive growth.

She said: "Social enterprises play an integral role in the ecosystem, by achieving social impact in an economically sustainable way. They bridge the people and private sectors, and deliver on both purpose and profit."

"Corporates can help grow the capacity of this important sector, by providing strategic counsel and business mentorship to social entrepreneurs."

The NVPC and the Community Foundation of Singapore recently started Colabs, an initiative that brings together the public, private and social sectors to tackle complex social issues together at the same forum.

It provides a platform for philanthropists, businesses, foundations, non-profits and sector experts to focus on co-creating solutions for specific social needs.

The first Colabs series on children and youth catalysed two foundations, a multinational company and local non-profits to form a collective venture to help disadvantaged youth transit from school life to work life, with an initial pledge of more than \$500,000.

Ms Fu said: "It is a targeted phase in youth and education, which needs very targeted outcomes to plug gaps, that sometimes impact the effectiveness of our programmes.

"So we know that there is a gap, the gap needs more than just financial resources; you will need expertise, networks and opportunities and that's where the collaboration of various sectors make impactful interventions.

"Two other areas are also being explored - one on the engagement and employment of persons with disabilities; and another on seniors."

By bringing resources and expertise together, the platform allows for better coordination, clearer focus and customised solutions that the beneficiaries require, she added.

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