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Introduction

1 Thank you to Alex and the North West CDC team for inviting me to join you this evening, to thank and honour all the good work of our volunteers, partners and colleagues.

Our unique system of building a cohesive society

2 Having all of you here this evening is a strong reminder to us of the uniqueness of our system and the priceless work that our people, private and public sectors, do together to build a cohesive society.

3 Often, foreign visitors and commentators have wondered:

- a. how do we operate our social service delivery system;
- b. how do we build a cohesive society; and
- c. how do we run a responsible and responsive government, taking care of both the long- and short-term interests of our country and people.

4. I will reflect on 3 aspects of our system:
 - a. First, why do we mobilise volunteers to contribute their time, talent and treasures, when the government is able to do all that, perhaps with a bit more tax and more public officials?
 - b. Why do we run a system with national, regional and local initiatives?
 - c. How do we assess our success?

Why mobilise volunteers?

5. In some places, the roles of social service delivery and policy execution are largely left to the government and public sector agencies. These may also include environmental and health, as well as other causes.
 - a. Many schemes are “nationalised”.
 - b. Indeed, I have had foreign visitors who, having seen our system, and understood the major role played by the government in funding and execution of policies, wondered why we did not institutionalise everything?
 - c. Why do we insist on co-funding and spending time and effort to mobilise volunteers, when the bulk already come from public resources?
 - d. Won't it be simpler to just use public resources?

e. Indeed, some visitors, having seen our system, decided to replicate it back in their own countries with paid, full-time staff, without the need for volunteers.

f. But the results that they achieved, did not always match ours.

6. The reason we insist on the public-private-people partnership is because we believe in a shared sense of responsibility towards each other.

a. Our individual success is premised on the opportunities given to us by our society.

b. Our responsibility must be to chip in and pay it forward to allow the next generation to similarly enjoy the conditions that enable them to be as successful, if not more, than our generation.

c. This sense of camaraderie and collective social responsibility cannot be outsourced, monetised, nor discharged just by paying taxes alone.

d. All of us, regardless of our stations in life, have a shared responsibility towards the rest in society.

e. Of course, to those who are more successful and more privileged, the greater the responsibility.

7. Your presence here tonight, and your contributions over the years, bear testimony to this philosophy.

- a. You are here not because you were promised any perks or benefits.
- b. We are here because of our collective sense of responsibility towards each other.
- c. This is something that cannot be monetised.
- d. Thank you all!

National, Regional, Local

8. Next, why do we run a system with national, regional and local schemes?
Is it not overlapping and confusing?

- a. All national schemes are broad-based. They achieve economies of scale and are efficient in execution.
- b. However, we know that such schemes may not easily cater to the unique needs of individuals and families in need.
- c. On the other hand, local schemes can often be effective in meeting the needs that cannot be catered to by the broad-based schemes.
- d. Local schemes allow us to narrowcast and they can be customised to be more effective.
- e. However, it is not easy to achieve economies of scale.

9. The existence of local schemes is not a reflection of the inadequacies of national schemes.

- a. Neither does it mean that a comprehensive national scheme can do away with local schemes.

10. Within the spectrum of national and local schemes, we also have regional efforts led by agencies like the CDCs.

- a. They too have unique roles in our eco-system of social service assistance.

- b. They seek to customise solutions at the regional or sectoral levels, while achieving economies of scale.

c. Examples include:

- . Central CDC – Bless Our City Grant
- . NE CDC – Project Refresh
- . NW CDC – Club 100
- . SE CDC – Share a Pot
- . SW CDC – Love-in-a-Bento

- d. From these examples, we can see that it is not just about the mobilisation of “treasures”, or money.

11. Perhaps, “treasures” is the most straightforward of the 3 T’s – time, talent and treasures – to mobilise.

- a. For the various schemes to work, what is even more difficult to mobilise are time and talent.
 - b. People who are prepared to commit time and effort to understand the issues, develop the ideas, test out the solutions, execute the plans and continuously refine the plans.
12. Given the diversity of needs and scale needed for different operating service models, it should not surprise us to see a diversity of models, practices and experimentation.
13. The picture is also never static.
- a. Some ideas, having been found useful, can scale up from local to regional; or regional to national.
 - b. Other ideas, when matured, can also be decentralised from national to regional, or regional to local with further customisation.
 - c. This spirit of experimentation and dynamism in execution must guide us in all we do.

Measure of Success

14. Which brings me now to the final reflection – our measure of success.
15. Some people may ask: how much money did we raise, how many volunteers did we mobilise, or how much time did we commit? These are but input indicators.

- a. Others may ask: how many beneficiaries did we serve? These are but output indicators.

16. Having been in then-MCYS and MSF for some years, I have learnt that the true outcome KPIs are really:

- a. How many problems have we pre-empted; and
- b. How many lives have we touched - so that once-vulnerable families, once-needy people can one day stand tall and say that I can take care of myself, my family and even reach out and help others in need.

17. But we may never fully know how many problems we are going to pre-empt ex-ante; nor will we necessarily be able to know how many problems we have pre-empted ex-post.

- a. But we can certainly agree that how many problems we have pre-empted is even more important than how many problems we have solved.
- b. This is why I thank all of you for working quietly behind the scene to achieve what we have today.
- c. Mr Lim Siong Guan taught me that the greatest joy or success for a leader is that when the team achieves success, the people involved feel that they have done it themselves together, instead of having success delivered upon them.

d. Perhaps, this is also the goal that we seek to achieve. That for every individual and family helped, they can stand tall and say that we have done it together.

18. The other KPI is even harder to measure because it takes time.

a. True success comes from the once-vulnerable family and once-needy individual standing tall and confident that they can contribute back to society.

b. That takes years.

c. True success for environmental and health causes may also take many years, before we see results.

d. All these suggest that we are involved in work for the long-term.

e. The child and family that we are helping now may only see the light at the end of the tunnel many years later.

f. This is why we should not be too fast to claim credit, nor should we be too discouraged by any short-term setback.

19. I stand before you as a living example of someone who has benefitted from this system of ours – from national schemes affording me the chance for an education, to local schemes helping me with school fees and the purchase of books and stationeries.

- a. Many like myself who have benefitted, will never be able to repay all those who have helped us in our life's journey. We may never even know them all.
- b. All we can hope is that we can pay it forward to the next generation.
- c. Hence, I always encourage fellow Singaporeans to never define success by just how well we do for ourselves, or in this generation.
- d. Instead, we should always define our success by how well we enable the future generations of Singaporeans to do even better than us.
- e. Only so will Singapore continue to grow from strength to strength, emerging stronger together from every setback and success.

Conclusion

- 20. The quality of life for our people has improved.
 - a. Our resources to help our people have expanded.
 - b. The needs of our people – absolutely and relatively – have also become more diversified.
 - c. That we desire, and can do more to help more people, is not a reflection of the inadequacies of our system.

- d. Instead, it is a positive testimony of our society's collective determination to leave no one behind.
- e. This is the spirit that binds us together as a nation – regardless of race, language, religion, ancestry, and economic means.
- f. This is why we are never defined by our past alone, but more importantly, always as a forward-looking set of ideals, including a shared sense of responsibility towards one another.
- g. Always acknowledging our success as the result of opportunities afforded to us collectively by our society.
- h. Always remembering to pay it forward because we can never pay it enough backwards.

21. Thank you for all that you do and have done for Singapore and the Singapore spirit.